

Perspectives of Church Reform under Pope Benedict XVI

Discussion paper

1 WHAT WE HAVE ACCHIEVED SO FAR – EXPERIENCES OF THE FIRST DECADE

- 1.1 **The five goals of the *We are Church* Referendum of 1995** – together with specific amendments like ecumenism and social justice in several countries – bring a vision of a renewed Church in line with the Second Vatican Council and the theology and pastoral practice arisen from this Council.
- 1.2 ***We are Church* and its Referendum is based on the dogmatic Council Constitution "Lumen Gentium" Art 37 and on Canon 212 §3 of Church Law.** In accordance, the faithful have *"the right and at times even the duty to advise their spiritual leaders of their opinion In what pertains to the good of the church and to inform the other faithful, whilst safeguarding the entirety of faith and morals and the reverence towards their pastors and under consideration of the common good and the dignity of people"*.
- 1.3 ***We are Church* and international religious studies (e.g. Greely/Hout) have proved** that the demands for reform are theologically sound and are almost the same in all parts of the world. The purple stole has become a world wide impressive symbol for women's ordination. The issue of married priests is now seen together with the issue of pastoral care for parishes and their right to receive the sacraments (Can. 213 CIC).
- 1.4 **The *International Movement We are Church* has succeeded to build up a worldwide network** linking different cultural and language groups. For the first time in history, with the help of electronic networking, we have counteracted the vertical hierarchical flow of information. The old Roman principle/standard "divide and rule" is no longer effective. *We are Church* is the only movement that was able to organize a series of seminars "Visions of a New Church" after the death of Pope John Paul II and before the Conclave started.
- 1.5 ***We are Church* has stood its ground for 10 years now** and may take the credit for the fact that some Roman decisions are not as bad/ controversial/ counterproductive as they could have been (e.g. Apostolic Letter "Spiritus et Sponsa" about the Liturgy, withdrawal of the demission of Fr. Tissa Balasuryia) and can't be set into practice (e.g. Instruction on the layity 1997).
- 1.6 ***We are Church* is the most comprehensive, most important and most spread reform movement** within the Roman-Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. *We are Church* is working together with renowned theologians and became known to the international media as "voice of the people in the pews".
- 1.7 **The extensive mentioning of *We are Church* in Ratzinger's book "Salt of the Earth"** and several letters from the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith trying to prohibit the proliferation of *We are Church* show how influential this reform movement is valued even by the Vatican.
- 1.8 **Our goals mustn't be taken from Utopia.** Seeing the Roman Catholic Church as a closed clerical system with 2000 years of experience defending its power we should not see it as our fault that we have not succeeded in bringing concrete changes in Church Law within only 10 years.

2 ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AT A TURNING POINT

- 2.1 **The Second Vatican Council brought so many substantial changes into the Roman Catholic Church** that it is quite natural that many people in the Church – clerics as well as lay people – are trying to stop the implementation of the Council or to restore the pre-council situation.
- 2.2 **The election of Joseph Ratzinger** as Pope has disappointed or even shocked many reform orientated Catholics esp. in Third World countries because of Ratzinger's lack of pastoral experience, his Eurocentric thinking, and his conservative position. But his election should be used as an opportunity because Ratzinger's way of thinking is well known and gives us many good reasons for serious discussion/ arguments.
- 2.3 **With the help of the mass media** Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for more than 23 years, has totally changed his image and is now seen by many people as a mild, smiling and humble Pope. In times of TV emotions seem to be more important than actual facts. Even those who suffer from Ratzinger's decisions seem to have positive reflections on him as Pope.
- 2.4 **More than one year and a half after his election** it becomes clear to the public that Pope Benedict (like his predecessor) is not willing to start reforms concerning the laity, the women in the Church, and sexuality. Benedict rather focuses on structural reforms of the Vatican which makes the Roman Catholic Church even more centralized and the Roman Curia even more powerful in relation to the local churches and bishops).
- 2.5 **In times of political, social, and economic uncertainty** people want the Papacy as a symbol representing security, stability and continuity but they did not want to follow the Papal line when it did not suit them. The institutional Church is far more conservative than 40 years ago, but there is also a deep yearning for change.
- 2.6 **The entire Church is confronted with severe pastoral problems** which are deeply connected with the five demands of the Church Referendum. In the Synods for Asia, Africa and America as well as during the Eucharist Synod in 2005 more and more bishops demonstrated that they are moving in a reform-orientated direction. But until now the Pope and the Roman Curia do not take any action to solve/tackle the pastoral problems.
- 2.7 **The surprising meeting with the critical theologian Professor Dr. Hans Küng** in September 2005 was seen by many as a proof for Joseph Ratzinger's openness and willingness for dialogue. But in fact reform topics were excluded from this talk from the beginning. It should be noted that Hans Küng was inviting the Pope to embark on reform after his first year in office.
- 2.8 **We hope that the dialogue with Islam will be continued** after Benedict's controversial lecture in Regensburg. The dispute about this lecture may draw off the attention of reform issues within the church. But if the Pope demands dialogue with the Islam we have very good arguments to demand dialogue within the church.
- 2.9 **The answer of the German Nuntius in reply to our letter to the Pope** could be seen at least as a first sign of acknowledgement/recognition of the *International Movement We are Church*, even if the Vatican itself denies to dialogue with reform movements like *We are Church*. But the letter of the German Nuntius is an obligation to all Bishops to have dialogue with us.

3 STRATEGIES AND CONCRETE TASKS FOR THE SECOND DECADE - HOW WE CAN SERVE THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- 3.1 The rapid growth of traditional conservative and pre-council groups** within our Church makes it essential to bring together people, initiatives, and movements in favour of the Second Vatican Council. *We are Church* has to emphasize that we are a legitimate group within the church.
- 3.2 We should use a 'soft' strategy** asking questions, giving positive examples for the future pastoral life of the Church (as we did in the letter of 140 groups "A Pope for the times to come") and keeping in contact with theologians as many are supporting us.
- 3.3 We should emphasize the need for freedom of theological research** by quoting the "Declaration for the freedom of theologians and theology", that was signed in 1969 by some 40 scientific theologians among them Joseph Ratzinger, Walter Kasper and Karl Lehmann.
- 3.4 Pope Benedict's work can be and should be evaluated by**
- his announcements after his election (collegiality, ecumenism etc.)
 - his written documents (encyclicals, speeches etc.)
 - his early writings as young theologian who essentially shaped Vaticanum II.
- As he claims that he "remained identical in all essential points" his current work may be evaluated by his earlier statements.
- 3.5 *We are Church's* activities and statements should not be too much centred on the Pope**, but should focus on the Church as the People of God and should consider how to address it. We should emphasize the importance of lay people since Vaticanum II and that we represent the majority within the Roman Catholic Church.
- 3.6 We should keep faithful to our original aims.** The five demands are *We are Church's* constitution which can be fused with current issues like ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, World Ethos or globalisation. If we agree upon we might focus internationally on just one of the Five Points for a period of time.
- 3.7 We may learn from other international organisations** like *amnesty international / Greenpeace / Transparency International* who also are confronted with international power structures and who use combined actions of information, education, grass-root work, and visible key actions. We should give victims a voice and should make the best use of media.
- 3.8 *We are Church* as a whole or its member groups should speak out** on the occasion of major Episcopal or Papal documents or meetings (as we have done several times successfully in Rome and elsewhere) but on other occasions too. If possible we should not only react but be proactive too. The World Forum on Theology & Liberation in Nairobi, the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly at Sibiu/Hermannstadt, Romania, in September 2007, and the World Youth Day in Sidney in Summer 2008 are some of the events where *We are Church* should be present.
- 3.9 *We are Church* should deepen its spiritual resources** for the long lasting process of reform. Working on an international scale we can encourage each other. *We are Church* should go on reaching out and enlarge the worldwide network of reform movements.
- 3.10 The 50th anniversary of Vaticanum II in 2012** is a very important event that should be prepared carefully. The Council was announced on January 25, 1959 and opened on October 11, 1962. Referring to Can. 212 CIC we should make use of the nice symbolism of the year 2012.