Internationale Bewegung Wir sind Kirche

"The needs for reform are still the same"

Press Release on the First Anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI

"The first year of Benedict's pontificate has not changed the problematic situation in the Catholic Church substantially. The needs for reform are still the same", says **Christian Weisner**, Chair of the International Movement We are Church, a world-wide reform movement within the Roman-Catholic Church. "In this first year, we have seen several positive signs, but there are also severe deficits, which are cause for deep concern."

Rea Howarth, co-director of the Quixote Center (Hyattsville, MD) and spokesperson of We are Church in the United States says: "As we reflect upon the past year, the International Movement We Are Church wishes to offer its constructive analysis of the first year of Pope Benedict XVI's papacy. We do so as a community of faithful Catholics, in hopes that these comments will be taken in the spirit of a constructive critique."

Pope Benedict XVI is not asked to follow **the spirit of the times**. But he must be able to listen and, in his pontificate, must give and allow answers on the pressing questions of the Church and society that are keeping with the times - always given on the basis of the Bible and the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which he himself influenced quite considerably as a young theologian.

In view of the current challenges the **Christians in the whole world expect** answers that are humane on questions concerning justice and peace, the inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism, the position of women in Church, sexual ethics and the world-wide lack of priests. Otherwise, the march not only of women out of the church will continue.

We Are Church welcomed the new openness with which the episcopate discussed the pastoral problems of the Holy Eucharist during the **Bishop's Synod** in October 2005. But we regret it deeply that the Bishops only talked about the problems without any actual changes in the Church's rules and practice.

Benedict's **style of leadership** is more consultative and collegial than that of his predecessor. But the continueing fixation on office and person of the Pope as well as on the Church hierarchy does not reflect the teaching of Jesus and cannot be a model for the youth. There is the great danger of a personality cult and a gigantic media show which would overshadow experiencing faith.

It is not forgotten, however, **how rigid Ratzinger was** for more than 23 years as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, banning critical theologians, condemning the liberation theology, formulating a rigid sexual doctrine, limiting women's influence in the Church as well as the ecumenical relations with Protestant churches.

The fact that one of the first documents licensed by Pope Benedict XVI, the **Vatican Instruction on "Homosexuality and Ordained Ministry"**, discriminates against homosexual men entering priesthood is very disappointing to many Catholics, not just to those who are most directly affected.

Benedict's recent comments on the **role of women in the church** are both heartening and disheartening because he decisively rejected reopening of the question of ordination. This surely will exacerbate the **priest shortage**. During the 26 years of John Paul II papacy, the number of Catholics increased by 40% while the number of priests decreased by 4%. Currently, nearly half of the world's Catholic parishes and missions do

not have a resident priest (Data from the Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate at Georgetown University, Washington DC).

The international movement We Are Church welcomed the meeting of Pope Benedict XVI with the critical theologian **Professor Dr. Hans Kueng** in September 2005 in Castel Gandolfo. But the letter of We Are Church asking the new Pope after his election for a personal meeting hasn't even been answered yet.

The world we live in is in danger. The church has the capacity and the responsibility to tap the gifts of all the baptized for working with people of all faith traditions in bringing about a peaceful revolution for the good of all humanity. So far, we do not see any clear indication that Benedict recognizes this great challenge. His **first encyclical "Deus Caritas Est"**, though broadly applauded, was much too general.

The pope has not asked for the resignations of any bishops or cardinals associated with cover up of **sexual crimes against children and adolescents as well as the abuse of wome**n – including nuns – by clergy. This is a world-wide problem. Benedict continues his direct order to the world's bishops to maintain a policy of secrecy and silence. This policy itself is a crime against the weakest and most vulnerable of our church.

The International Movement We Are Church offers **these reflections** in hopes Benedict XVI will see within in them some reflection of the gifts of the Holy Spirit emanating **from the People of God**. We call upon him to begin a new phase of the church, by recognizing that laity is the Church's treasure rather than its "problem" and that those of us who raise our voices for reform and renewal are indeed faithful Catholics, possessing a true capacity for reflection and discernment, and a genuine love for the whole church. Again, we invite him to participate in a true dialogue.

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The International Movement **We Are Church - a grassroots church reform movement of lay persons, priests, and persons in religious orders** - was born in Austria and Germany in 1995 and then spread out in Europe and all continents. We Are Church is in touch with other reform movements all over the world. Its goal is to keep continue the process of reform in the Roman Catholic Church, a process which has been opened with Vatican II Council (1962-1965) and in recent years came to a standstill.

Zuletzt geändert am 11.05.2006