Pope Benedict Two Years in Office:

Press Release
Munich/Rome, April 10, 2007

We are Church on occasion of the 80th birthday of Pope Benedict XVI (April 16) and the 2nd anniversary of his election (April 19): Also two years after the election of Pope Benedict no solution of crucial questions at sight

We Are Church Germany, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, wishes Pope Benedict XVI **good health and God's blessing**, but also visionary courage to finally launch concrete steps in view of the solution of fundamental pastoral problems, long since delayed. The German reform movement sincerely regrets that Pope Benedict, highly appreciated for his intellectual and spiritual qualities, but apparently less experienced on the pastoral and political level, **anxiously adheres to a church model of past times**.

Two years after his election, **disappointment is growing in the People of God** even among those who originally had hoped Ratzinger would act, as pope, more courageously on the field of theology and pastoral, than he did in his position as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. The hope of millions of Christians, based on the Second Vatican Council, that interior reform steps and ecumenical progress would take place, up to now were not realised. Instead, the **standstill in theology and pastoral**, which came about under the 23 year period of Ratzinger's leadership as prime guard of the faith, continues.

Roman promulgations of recent years, indeed, give rise for the supposition that there is an underlying policy of **withdrawal to outdated formulas of teaching** and to an increasing hardening. This holds true e.g. for the Vatican's position regarding homosexuality, abortion, aid for the terminal ill, and gene techniques, as well as for the attitude regarding ecumenism. The old, well known positions on celibacy, the role of women in the church, and the exclusion of remarried divorced from receiving the eucharist were also tightened. The most recent judgment on the teaching of Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino shows that the Vatican's position remains the same. The fact that Ratzinger's numerous books are selling well must not conceal the other truth that only a few people understand Catholic teaching as an orientation to follow, as is shown by polls and research. On the other hand, the Church interferes with state politics, where she feels strong enough to do so, as in Italy.

The Movement KirchenVolksBewegung especially regrets the **continuing lack of modern contemporary theology** e.g. with regard to the quest for God in face of the challenges of modern brain research and evolution, with regard to a renewed expression of the old truths of faith or in the endorsement of results of historical-critical Bible studies. A likewise urgent desire is the **revision of the Declaration "Dominus Jesus"** issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 2000. This document, drawn up by Cardinal Ratzinger, with dogmatic rigidity renewed the claim of the Roman Catholic Church – deemed to be overcome since Vatican II – that she is predominant as well over other Christian denominations as over other religions.

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According to the opinion of the *We are Church* Germany, above all the following **examples** show that Pope Benedict in the first two years of his pontificate has not yet opened and allowed passable ways for the future of Christendom in the 3rd millennium.

1. The **fundamental renewal of the Roman Curia**, announced by Benedict himself, has not yet taken place. Instead, he installed his former collaborators in important Curia ministries: Cardinal William Levada as his follower in the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone as the new Secretary of

State.

2. Following orders from the Vatican, the German bishops in June 2006 reinforced their regulations of 2000, by which it is forbidden for all church personnel to cooperate with the legally prescribed **counselling for women in conflict** because of unwanted pregnancy (“Donum vitae”, etc.). In 2007, Cardinal Levada, with approval by the Pope, made a renewed appeal that all “faithful should restrain from any kind of support for ‘ Donum vitae’”. As prefect of the CDF, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for years had called for such dissociation.

3. From his contested **Regensburg Lecture** (meanwhile amended at 30 instances and published in a 3rd revised edition with 13 footnotes) Benedict may have taken a lesson and has been able to take away irritations from the Muslim during his journey to Turkey. Yet the relationship with the Orthodox Church, originally the main aim of the journey to Turkey in the fall of 2006, has not sensibly been improved.

4. The **Conference on Celibacy** in November 2006 did not bring about a change in the Vatican’s thinking about priesthood and the conditions of access to leadership functions in the Roman Catholic Church. By maintaining compulsory celibacy – which cannot be founded on biblical grounds – the Vatican is co-responsible for the dramatically increasing priest shortage and puts ever more into question the canonical **right of the faithful to have the Sunday Eucharist** guaranteed (can.213 CIC). The Roman Catholic Church will have to face this problem because of mere figures: According to Vatican statistics in the Yearbook (Annuario Pontificio) 2005, today the ratio priest – faithful is 1 : 2.700, in 1978 at the beginning of the pontificate of John Paul II, it was 1 : 1.800. In Africa, in 2002 one priest had to care even for 4.000, in Latin America for 7.000 faithful.

5. During the **German bishops’ visit ad limina** in November 2006, in spite of the standstill in reform issues of the German church and the Catholic church at large, no promising ways have been shown by the Pope. Especially **disappointing was the kind of treatment laypeople serving in an honorary capacity received**. The Pope recalled to the restrictions for laity in liturgical services which in 2004, as prefect of the CDF, he had established, issuing the instruction on liturgy. He even reproached the laity with being pretentious. With approval of the Vatican, lay participation structures in the diocese of Regensburg were dissolved.

6. To **subordinate theological research and teaching under the ecclesiastical magisterium**, as required by the Pope from the German bishops during their visit ad limina in November 2006, fundamentally contradicts the Declaration “The Liberty of Theology and Theologians” co-signed in 1969 by the young theologian Joseph Ratzinger. In this declaration it is said: “The liberty of theologians and theology in the service for the Church, regained through Vatican II, must not again be jeopardized.”

7. The most regrettable to and fro in January 2007 around Bishop Stanislaw Wielgus as follower of the Polish primate, but also other **problematic bishop appointments** in past years, should be an urgent warning for the Vatican that his decisions on personnel in future ought to be taken more carefully and with more intense participation of the local churches.

8. The Postsynodal Letter **“Sacramentum Caritatis”**, issued March 13, 2007, is disappointing – compared with the first Encyclical **“Deus Caritas est”** – both in content and style. In this document, in which Pope Benedict XVI resumes the results of the World Bishops Synod in October 2005, basically only the old well known positions are repeated and inculcated. In **reconsidering the value of the Latin mass**, Pope Benedict above all meets the wishes of traditionalists. It has to be feared that sooner or later also **the preconciliar Tridentrine Rite** will be admitted by the Vatican, and not only as an exception.

9. On March 14, 2007, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, with explicit approval of Pope

Benedict, has censured the writings of world famous l**iberation thgeologian P. Jon Sobrino SJ** in El Salvador, with the reason that his theses he weakens the teaching on Christ's Deity. This is the first censure on theological teaching in this pontificate. It is an open question, if further sanctions will follow.

10. It is also disappointing for Catholics all over the world that **the thinking and acting of Pope Benedict and the Vatican are still euro-centered**. In this context it is not a good feature that Pope Benedict, going to Brazil in May 2007, will visit this continent with the greatest number of Catholics only two years after his election.

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