

As Hans Kung Sees It By John Chuchman

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Pope Benedict has made worse
just about everything that is wrong with the Roman Catholic Church
and is directly responsible
for engineering the global cover-up of child rape
perpetrated by priests.
As a result,

Missed is the opportunity for rapprochement with the Protestant churches:
Instead, they have been denied the status of churches in the proper sense of the
term and, for that reason, their ministries are not recognized and intercommunion
is not possible.

Missed is the opportunity for the long-term reconciliation with the Jews: Instead
the pope has reintroduced into the liturgy a preconciliar prayer for the
enlightenment of the Jews and has taken notoriously anti-Semitic and schismatic
bishops back into communion with the church, actively promoting the beatification
of Pope Pius XII, who has been accused of not offering sufficient protections to
Jews in Nazi Germany.

Benedict sees in Judaism *only* the historic root of Christianity; he does not take it
seriously as an ongoing religious community offering its own path to salvation. The
recent comparison of the current criticism faced by the pope with anti-Semitic
hate campaigns made by Rev Raniero Cantalamessa during an official Good Friday
service at the Vatican has stirred up a storm of indignation among Jews around the
world.

Missed is the opportunity for a dialogue with Muslims in an atmosphere of mutual
trust: Instead, in his ill-advised but symptomatic 2006 Regensburg lecture,
Benedict caricatured Islam as a religion of violence and inhumanity and thus evoked

enduring Muslim mistrust.

Missed is the opportunity for reconciliation with the colonized indigenous peoples of Latin America: Instead, the pope asserted in all seriousness that they had been "longing" for the religion of their European conquerors.

Missed is the opportunity to help the people of Africa by allowing the use of birth control to fight overpopulation and condoms to fight the spread of HIV.

Missed is the opportunity to make peace with modern science by clearly affirming the theory of evolution and accepting stem-cell research.

Missed is the opportunity to make the spirit of the Second Vatican Council the compass for the whole Catholic Church, including the Vatican itself, and thus to promote the needed reforms in the church.

Time and again, this pope has added qualifications to the conciliar texts

and interpreted them against the spirit of the council fathers.

Time and again, he has taken an express stand against the Ecumenical Council, which according to canon law

represents the highest authority in the Catholic Church:

He has taken the bishops of the traditionalist Pius X Society

back into the church without any preconditions

bishops who were illegally consecrated outside the Catholic Church

and who reject central points of the Second Vatican Council

(including liturgical reform, freedom of religion

and the rapprochement with Judaism).

He promotes the medieval Tridentine Mass

by all possible means and occasionally celebrates the Eucharist in Latin

with his back to the congregation.

He refuses to put into effect the rapprochement with the Anglican Church, which was laid out in official ecumenical documents

by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,

and has attempted instead to lure married Anglican clergy

into the Roman Catholic Church by freeing them from the very rule of celibacy

that has forced tens of thousands of Roman Catholic priests out of office.

He has actively reinforced the anti-conciliar forces in the church

by appointing reactionary officials to key offices in the Curia

(including the secretariat of state, and positions in the liturgical commission)

while appointing reactionary bishops around the world.

Pope Benedict XVI seems to be increasingly cut off

from the vast majority of church members

who pay less and less heed to Rome

and, at best, identify themselves only with their local parish and bishop.

In his anti-conciliar policy, the pope receives the full support of the Roman Curia.

The Curia does its best to stifle criticism in the episcopate

and in the church as a whole

and to discredit critics with all the means at its disposal.

With a return to pomp and spectacle catching the attention of the media,

the reactionary forces in Rome

have attempted to present us with a strong church

fronted by an absolutistic "Vicar of Christ"

who combines the church's legislative, executive and judicial powers

in his hands alone.

But Benedict's policy of restoration has failed.

All of his spectacular appearances, demonstrative journeys

and public statements have failed to influence the opinions of most Catholics on controversial issues.

This is especially true regarding matters of sexual morality.

Even the papal youth meetings,

attended above all by conservative-charismatic groups,

have failed to hold back the steady drain of those leaving the church

or to attract more vocations to the priesthood.

Tens of thousands of priests have resigned their office

since the Second Vatican Council,

for the most part because of the celibacy rule.

Vocations to the priesthood,

but also to religious orders, sisterhoods and lay brotherhoods are down

- not just quantitatively but qualitatively.

Resignation and frustration are spreading rapidly

among both the clergy and the active laity.
Many feel that they have been left in the lurch with their personal needs,
and many are in deep distress over the state of the church.

In many of your dioceses, it is the same story:

increasingly empty churches,

empty seminaries

and empty rectories.

In many countries, due to the lack of priests,

more and more parishes are being merged,

often against the will of their members,

into ever larger "pastoral units,"

in which the few surviving pastors are completely overtaxed.

This is church reform in pretense rather than fact!

And now, on top of these many crises

comes a scandal crying out to heaven

the revelation of the clerical abuse of thousands of children and adolescents, first
in the United States,

then in Ireland

and now in Germany and other countries.

And to make matters worse,

the handling of these cases has given rise to an unprecedented leadership crisis and a collapse of trust in church leadership.

There is no denying the fact that the worldwide system

of covering up cases of sexual crimes committed by clerics

was engineered by the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

under Cardinal Ratzinger (1981-2005).

During the reign of Pope John Paul II,

that congregation had already taken charge of all such cases

under oath of strictest silence.

Ratzinger himself, on May 18th, 2001,

sent a solemn document to all the bishops dealing with severe crimes

(*"epistula de delictis gravioribus"*)

in which cases of abuse were sealed under the *"secretum pontificium"*

the violation of which could entail grave ecclesiastical penalties.

With good reason, therefore,

many people have expected more than a personal mea culpa

on the part of the former prefect and current pope.

Instead, the pope passed up the opportunity afforded by Holy Week:

On Easter Sunday, he had his innocence proclaimed *"urbi et orbi"*

by the dean of the College of Cardinals.

The consequences of all these scandals

for the reputation of the Catholic Church are disastrous.

Important church leaders have already admitted this.

Numerous innocent and committed pastors and educators

are suffering under the stigma of suspicion now blanketing the church.

So,

1. Do not keep silent:

By keeping silent in the face of so many serious grievances,

you taint yourselves with guilt.

When you feel that certain laws, directives and measures

are counterproductive, you should say this in public.

Send Rome not professions of your devotion,

but rather calls for reform!

2. Set about reform:

Too many in the church and in the episcopate complain about Rome,

but do nothing themselves.

When people no longer attend church in a diocese,

when the ministry bears little fruit,

when the public is kept in ignorance about the needs of the world,

when ecumenical co-operation is reduced to a minimum,

then the blame cannot simply be shoved off on Rome.

Whether bishop, priest, layman or laywoman

- everyone can do something for the renewal of the church

within his own sphere of influence,

be it large or small.

Any of the great achievements that have occurred

in the individual parishes and in the church at large

owe their origin to the initiative of an individual or a small group.

Support such initiatives and, especially given the present situation,

respond to the just complaints of the faithful.

3. Act in a collegial way:

After heated debate and against the persistent opposition of the Curia,

the Second Vatican Council decreed

the collegiality of the pope and the bishops.

It did so in the sense of the Acts of the Apostles,

in which Peter did not act alone without the college of the apostles.

In the post-conciliar era, however,

the pope and the Curia have ignored this decree.

Just two years after the council,

Pope Paul VI issued his encyclical defending the controversial celibacy law without the slightest consultation of the bishops.

Since then, papal politics and the papal magisterium

have continued to act in the old, uncollegial fashion.

Even in liturgical matters, the pope rules as an autocrat

over and against the bishops.

He is happy to surround himself with them

as long as they are nothing more than stage extras

with neither voices nor voting rights.

4. Unconditional obedience is owed to God alone:

Know that unconditional obedience can never be paid to any human authority; it is due to God alone.

For this reason, you should not feel impeded to speak the truth

about the current crisis facing the church,

your diocese

and your country.

Your model should be the apostle Paul,

who dared to oppose Peter

“to his face since he was manifestly in the wrong”!

(*Galatians 2:11*).

Pressuring the Roman authorities in the spirit of Christian fraternity

can be permissible and even necessary

when they fail to live up to the spirit of the *Gospel* and its mission.

The use of the vernacular in the liturgy,

the changes in the regulations governing mixed marriages,

the affirmation of tolerance, democracy and human rights,

the opening up of an ecumenical approach,

and the many other reforms of Vatican II were only achieved because of tenacious pressure from below.

5. Work for regional solutions:

The Vatican has frequently turned a deaf ear

to the well-founded demands of the episcopate, the priests and the laity.

This is all the more reason for seeking wise regional solutions.

The rule of celibacy, which was inherited from the Middle Ages,

represents a particularly delicate problem.

In the context of today's clerical abuse scandal,

the practice has been increasingly called into question.

Against the expressed will of Rome,

a change would appear hardly possible;

yet this is no reason for passive resignation.

When a priest, after mature consideration, wishes to marry,

there is no reason why he must automatically resign his office

when his bishop and his parish choose to stand behind him.

Individual episcopal conferences could take the lead with regional solutions.

It would be better, however, to seek a solution for the whole church,

therefore:

6. Call for a council:

Just as the achievement of liturgical reform,

religious freedom, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue

required an ecumenical council,

so now a council is needed

to solve the dramatically escalating problems calling for reform.

In the century before the Reformation,

the Council of Constance decreed that councils should be held

every five years.

Yet the Roman Curia successfully managed to circumvent this ruling.

There is no question that the Curia, fearing a limitation of its power,

would do everything in its power to prevent a council coming together

in the present situation.

Put to use the authority that was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.

In this urgent situation, the eyes of the world turn to you.

Innumerable people have lost their trust in the Catholic Church.

Only by openly and honestly reckoning with these problems

and resolutely carrying out needed reforms

can their trust be regained.

Do your part in apostolic "fearlessness"

(Acts 4:29, 31).

Give all faithful signs of hope and encouragement

and give our church a perspective for the future.