

Press release Madrid / Rome, April 17, 2010

We are Church: "Now is the time to start reforms long overdue: Benedict XVI's fifth pontifical anniversary"

International Movement We are Church asks all the faithful to support Hans Kueng's open letter to the bishops

The *International Movement We are Church* regrets that the fifth anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI's election is so much tarnished by the deep crisis our Church at present is undergoing. We refer to the world-wide disclosure of sexual abuse scandals and their cover up for such a long time.

"It is not growing secularism that has caused the most profound crisis of our Church, but the inability of the Papacy to read the signs of the time", declares **Raquel Mallavibarrena** from the Spanish *Somos Iglesia*, **present Chair of the *International Movement We Are Church***. "The abuse crisis and its concealment are due to an inhumane conception of sexuality and outdated patriarchal power structures. The actual global crisis makes it clear that the clerical hierarchy alone can't serve any longer as the foundation and justification of the Catholic church's institutional structure and authority."

We are Church appreciates the present activities of the Pope combating paedophilia in the Church. **Benedict's tragedy is caused by the fact that he started it too late, too weakly, and that he is not supported enough by all cardinals, bishops, and the Roman Curia.** He is now harvesting the fruits he sowed, when in 2001, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) he ordered all bishops in the universal church to conceal from public authorities any case of sexual crime against minors by members of the clergy and instead to inform his office.

Joseph Ratzinger, who has held over the past three decades the highest institutional responsibility for shaping official Catholic doctrine, is accountable for the failure to respond to the challenges of our time in many fields, ignoring time and again the requests presented to him by some bishops, theologians and many lay faithful from all over the world, who have to face concrete pastoral challenges in their countries. Especially he has opposed with hostility the theology of Liberation. **Now the five years of the pontificate of Benedict reveal more and more the fundamental weakness of the whole system of the Roman Catholic Church - its hierarchical constitution, "two-class society" priests / laity, the Roman centralism.**

Moreover the strong opposition to the war, which characterised John Paul II, was abandoned by Benedict XVI who met very on friendly terms with the former US president George W. Bush, responsible for the attack on Iraq. The Pope must come back to vigorous opposition to heads of the States working for war and must speak very clearly about wars, disarmament and weapons trade.

"The uproar that went through the church all over the world when the Pope, in a solitary move of total disrespect for the principle of collegiality, lifted the excommunication of the four bishops of the SSPX, was a clear manifestation of the distance of Pope Benedict XVI from the Second Vatican Council", states **Pedro Freitas** from *Nos Somos Igreja* in Portugal, who **will soon take the *Chair of International Movement We Are Church***. "The extreme centralization of power and a total disregard of the principle of subsidiarity in the

Church that has characterized Benedict's governance has alarming consequences, and accounts to a great degree for the growing pastoral challenges the local churches have to face, with vocations to an outdated form of priesthood dropping ever more and growing numbers of laity deserting."

The *International Movement We are Church* firmly supports Hans Kueng's open letter to the bishops in which he urges them to push for reforms. ***We are Church* asks all the faithful to send emails and letters to their bishops and nuncios in support of Kung's open letter.** The present crisis and the inadequacy of the response to the crisis by the church authorities show with unprecedented urgency that structural reforms in line with the Second Vatican Council *We Are Church* also has been asking for for 15 years cannot be postponed. **Now is the time to start these reforms:**

1. The **People of God have to be allowed to participate** at all levels of our Church so that innovative ways to meet the pastoral challenges of our time can be started. The faithful should have a say in the appointment of their bishops, otherwise Rome will continue appointing bishops who care more for the institution than for their flock.
2. Ecclesial misogyny should come to an end and **women be admitted to all church ministries**, which need to be ministries of service and not of power.
3. **Celibacy should become optional**, so that marital love is no longer a taboo for clerics.
4. **The results of Human Sciences concerning sexual morals should come to be acknowledged** and the primacy of the individual informed conscience should be respected.
5. The **Gospel should be proclaimed as an invitation to life in fullness** and not a means to discipline people through intimidation.

Pope Benedict should understand the ever louder, world-wide criticism of his pontificate as an expression of deep concern for the welfare of the faithful of the whole Church. The **Code of Canon Law says in Can. 212**: "The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires." (§2.) "According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons." (§3.)

Background Information:

The *International Movement We Are Church*, founded in Rome in 1996, is represented in more than twenty countries on all continents and is networking world-wide with similar-minded reform groups. *We Are Church* is an international movement within the Roman Catholic Church and aims at renewal on the basis of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). *We Are Church* was started in Austria in 1995 with a church referendum, answering the paedophile scandal of the former Cardinal of Vienna/Austria, Hans-Hermann Groer.

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