We Are Church: Will Pope Benedict, the “Pontifex Maximus”, prove to be a “bridge builder”?

Press release Munich, 22 August 2006

Once Joseph Ratzinger was known to be a progressive German theologian of the Second Vatican Council. Will now Pope Benedict XVI put marks of and for hope during his visit in Bavaria, especially for lay people, for women, for the youth, for over-worked priests and, finally, in Germany, the country of the Reformation, for ecumenism? This question is being put on the background of all those numerous disciplinary measures which he had taken when he was in charge of the Roman Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith for so many years, forcing on the Catholic Church in Germany again and again strenuous “breaking tests”.

It is of great importance not only for the future of the Church in Germany if Joseph Ratzinger – having acted for more than 23 years as supreme guardian of faith – now will meet the essential requirements on a pope such as “building bridges” and serving the unity of the Church and conduct frank and sincere dialogues.

The Catholic reform movement "We are church" considers it as most significant which stand the Pope will take concerning the apostolate of lay people in general and concerning the outsider line of Regenburg's Bishop Dr. Gerhard Mueller discriminating against lay people. Benedict XVI must not allow being monopolized by traditionalists and people preventing necessary reforms. The attitude that the Pope will demonstrate in Bavaria will be a clear signal if the Catholic Church is willing not only to ask the lay people to be active in the Church, preferably for free, but also to let them participate in taking responsibility and making decisions, as the “people of God”.

Looking at the Pope’s schedule it is more than doubtful that this visit will really mean a continuous strengthening and deepening of people’s faith. This scepticism has been shown even by the Pope himself during his TV interview. Also social-scientific studies like the alarming "Sinus Study" illustrate that even the mass streams of pilgrims during the change in the episcopate and the "World Youth Day" last year in Cologne/Germany have not produced any long-lasting positive effects.

If the Church does not want to follow the so-called Zeitgeist in its teachings, then she should not adapt its preaching to the modern styles of secular mass events either. The increasing fixation on the Pope's office and person, intensified through their medial staging, does not correspond to Jesus’ teachings.

"We are church" will accompany the Pope’s visit in a critical and constructive way – a visit which is a special event not only for the Catholic Church in Bavaria.
Priorities of our activities will be

- an "Open letter to the Bishop of Rome and to the German bishops" (end of August)
- a public call to write "KirchenVolksBriefe" with questions, requests and prayers to Pope Benedict
- "fact sheets" with information about the Roman-Catholic Church in Germany

Currently updated information is available on: www.wir-sind-kirche.de In the diocese of Regensburg groups of lay people will hold protest vigils and set up information stands against the hard line of Bishop Mueller; see: www.laienverantwortung-regensburg.de

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