

Theologian Hans Kung says

“Only radical reforms can save the Catholic church”

May 07, 2011

Munich, May 6 (ENInews)--The Catholic Church is seriously, possibly terminally ill and only an honest diagnosis and radical therapy will cure it, one of the sharpest critics of Pope Benedict XVI, the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Kung, has written.

Speaking at a sold-out event in the Literaturhaus (Literary Centre) in Munich on 2 May, Kung who is a former colleague of the pope at the University of Tübingen, introduced his new book, "Ist die Kirche noch zu retten?" ("Can the Church Still Be Saved?").

Kung argues that the malady of the church goes beyond recent sexual abuse scandals. According to him, the church's resistance to reform, its secrecy, lack of transparency and misogyny are at the heart of the problem.

He said that the Catholic church in the United States has lost one-third of its membership. "The American Catholic church never asked why," he said. "Any other institution that has lost a third of its members would want to know why." He also said that eighty percent of German bishops would welcome reforms.

Kung is one of today's most outspoken Roman Catholic theologians. Because he questioned the infallibility of the pope in 1971, he had his "missio canonica," the license needed to teach Roman Catholic theology, withdrawn. Thereafter, he became professor of ecumenical theology in Tübingen. He remains a Catholic priest.

He told the mostly elderly audience in the Diocese of Munich and Freising, the former diocese of Benedict XVI, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "I would have preferred not to write this book. It is not pleasant to dedicate such a critical publication to the church that has remained my church."

He said he had hoped that Benedict would find a way forward in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) which in the early sixties reformed the church in a number of ways, such as the celebration of Mass in local languages instead of Latin.

However, Benedict has distanced himself from Vatican II and "failed in the face of the worldwide sexual abuse by clergy," King said. Benedict is "in essence a person for medieval liturgy, theology and a medieval church constitution."

Referring to the celibacy debate that arose after the sexual abuse cases, Kung said, "the Roman Catholic church survived for the first thousand years without celibacy." He is strongly in favour of allowing priests and bishops to marry.

Kung compared the changes needed in the Catholic church to the democratic changes taking place in the Arab world. "When will in our church the youth take to the street? That is our problem; we have no young people anymore," he said to laughter from the 350 people present.

At the end of the book Kung returns to the question: "Can the church still be saved?" He said he has not lost his vision of a church that would meet the expectations of millions of Christians, but certain conditions have to be met. In their reforms, this Church should show Christian radicalism, constancy and coherency, he said. "I have not given up the hope that it will survive," Kung ended, to applause.