

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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REVOLUTION

Recently Hans Küng, the noted Catholic theologian, has called for a revolution from below to force reform on the Church.

"The only way for reform is from the bottom up," said Küng, who is a priest. "The priests and others in positions of responsibility need to stop being so subservient, to organize themselves and say that there are certain things that they simply will not put up with any more."

Küng described the church as an "authoritarian system" with parallels to Germany's Nazi dictatorship. "The unconditional obedience demanded of bishops who swear their allegiance to the pope when they make their holy oath is almost as extreme as that of the German generals who were forced to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler," he said.

Pretty strong stuff! Based on his positions for many decades, his public challenge is no surprise. Since his time as a young priest-expert at the Second Vatican Council 50 years ago, Küng has consistently championed the progressive themes embedded in the documents of that most authoritative teaching of, at least, the past 150 years.

What would a revolution from below look like?

1. Despite Fr. Küng's prestige and the fact that many in the Church immediately agree with him, his call for revolution from below is highly improbable. Unlike other times in history when major reform took place, today's world is different. There are many options for people who are disaffected with the Church hierarchy and teachings. It is easy to leave and attend another denomination or to join the majority of people in the USA who are unaffiliated with any religion. Why stay and fight for reform when there is no social or religious stigma for just quitting? So many people have already chosen this option, that the likelihood of enough people joining the fight for reform is too small to create a revolution. The Vatican wins by default. And they smile all the way to the high altar, with Cappa Magnas trailing royally behind.
2. On the other hand, if enough people stay in the Vatican Catholic Church who not only want reform but are willing to work for it, a few things, in my opinion, have to happen. Key to this reform will be the formation of, what I call, the Coalition of Progressive Catholics. (The acronym works: CPC) Progressive priests, religious, and laity must come together, not necessarily on every issue, but on some key issues, so

that a truly united, worldwide voice can emerge. A few leaders, representing millions of reformers, must speak publicly and courageously to the pope and the Vatican.

- The CPC must include groups like Call to Action, the newly formed National Priest Association, Voice of the Faithful, Network, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Corpus, sympathetic theologians and canon lawyers, a few bishops, liturgical reformers, Southern Illinois Association of Priests, Faithful of Southern Illinois, and other groups I don't know about who have similar progressive agendas. Any group willing to take the lead?
- Contact must be made with similar groups in other countries, like the priests' associations in Austria, Switzerland, and Australia, along with organized groups of laity throughout the world. A CPC organizing committee must reach out to identify and enlist participation from all of these groups and individuals who wish to participate.
- A few key issues must be identified and promoted. Some wording that includes greater collegiality in decision making must be one issue. The process for the selection of bishops is critical. A leadership committee can collect and assess other agenda items. Not too many. Just a few essential ones that millions of people will support.
- A plan must be developed which incorporates consequences for non-acceptance of the key issues. Perhaps something that withdraws financial support from specified church activities while preserving funding for charitable services. Perhaps widespread disregard for the New Missal, for example. The CPC will identify creative approaches to this need for specified consequences.
- Someone needs to articulate the vision of "loyal disobedience" in order to provide the theological underpinning for this revolution.

We need reform but not another Reformation. There are plenty of options already for being Christian in ways other than Catholic. Unless we create this revolution from below, Fr. Küng's challenge will remain rhetoric that we applaud but with no significant impact on the Church.

And the Vatican will get their 1950 Church back again while they continue to pick us off, one organization, one person at a time. Let's revolt before that happens.