

FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

Father Joseph Ratzinger

25 December 1969

German radio broadcast. His **concluding remarks**.

<i>English translation</i>	<i>Partly translated into Dutch, StuCom 0448</i>
<p>“The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fullness of their faith. It will not issue from those who accommodate themselves merely to the passing moment or from those who merely criticize others and assume that they themselves are infallible measuring rods; nor will it issue from those who take the easier road, who sidestep the passion of faith, declaring false and obsolete, tyrannous and legalistic, all that makes demands upon men, that hurts them and compels them to sacrifice themselves. To put this more positively: The future of the Church, once again as always, will be reshaped by saints, by men, that is, whose minds probe deeper than the slogans of the day, who see more than others see, because their lives embrace a wider reality. Unselfishness, which makes men free, is attained only through the patience of small daily acts of self-denial. By this daily passion, which alone reveals to a man in how many ways he is enslaved by his own ego, by this daily passion and by it alone, a man’s eyes are slowly opened. He sees only to the extent that he has lived and suffered. If today we are scarcely able any longer to become aware of God, that is because we find it so easy to evade ourselves, to flee from the depths of our being by means of the narcotic of some pleasure or other. Thus our own interior depths remain closed to us. If it is true that a man can see only with his heart, then how blind we are!</p> <p>“How does all this affect the problem we are examining? It means that the big talk of those who prophesy a Church without God and without faith is all empty chatter. We have no need of a Church that celebrates the cult of action in political prayers. It is utterly superfluous. Therefore, it will destroy itself. What will remain is the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church that believes in the God who has become man and promises us life beyond death. The kind of priest who is no more than a social worker can be replaced by the psychotherapist and other specialists; but the priest who is no</p>	

specialist, who does not stand on the [sidelines], watching the game, giving official advice, but in the name of God places himself at the disposal of man, who is beside them in their sorrows, in their joys, in their hope and in their fear, such a priest will certainly be needed in the future.

“Let us go a step farther. From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge — a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so it will lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, it will be seen much more as a voluntary society, entered only by free decision. As a small society, it will make much bigger demands on the initiative of her individual members. Undoubtedly it will discover new forms of ministry and will ordain to the priesthood approved Christians who pursue some profession. In many smaller congregations or in self-contained social groups, pastoral care will normally be provided in this fashion. Along-side this, the full-time ministry of the priesthood will be indispensable as formerly. But in all of the changes at which one might guess, the Church will find her essence afresh and with full conviction in that which was always at her center: faith in the triune God, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, in the presence of the Spirit until the end of the world.

In faith and prayer she will again recognize the sacraments as the worship of God and not as a subject for liturgical scholarship.

“The Church will be a more spiritual Church, not presuming upon a political mandate, flirting as little with the Left as with the Right. It will be hard going for the Church, for the process of crystallization and clarification will cost her much valuable energy. It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. The process will be all the more arduous, for sectarian narrow-mindedness as well as pompous self-will will have to be shed. One may predict that all of this will take time. The process will be long and wearisome as was the road from the false progressivism on the eve of

"Uit de huidige crisis zal een Kerk ontstaan die veel verloren heeft. Ze zal klein worden en zal min of meer helemaal opnieuw moeten beginnen. In veel van de gebouwen die zij in welvaart had gebouwd, zal zij niet meer kunnen wonen. Aangezien het aantal gelovigen zal afnemen, zal ze ook het grootste deel van haar sociale voorrechten verliezen [.....]

Maar ondanks al deze veranderingen die kunnen worden verondersteld, zal de Kerk opnieuw en met al haar energie vinden wat voor haar essentieel is geweest: het geloof in de Ene en de Drie-enige God, in Jezus Christus, de Zoon van God die mens is geworden, in de hulp van de Geest, die zal duren tot het einde der tijden. Ze zal weer vanuit kleine groepjes beginnen, vanuit bewegingen en vanuit een minderheid die geloof en gebed als centrum van de ervaring zal stellen en de sacramenten weer als een goddelijke dienst zal ervaren en niet als een probleem van liturgische structuur.

Het zal een meer spirituele Kerk zijn, die zich niet een politiek mandaat toe-eigent door nu te flirten met links en dan weer met rechts. Het zal heel wat moeite kosten. Het proces van kristallisatie en verduidelijking zal haar arm maken, zal haar een Kerk van de kleinen maken, het proces zal lang en vermoeiend zijn.

the French Revolution — when a bishop might be thought smart if he made fun of dogmas and even insinuated that the existence of God was by no means certain — to the renewal of the nineteenth century. But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.

“And so it seems certain to me that the Church is facing very hard times. The real crisis has scarcely begun. We will have to count on terrific upheavals. But I am equally certain about what will remain at the end: not the Church of the political cult, which is dead already, but the Church of faith. It may well no longer be the dominant social power to the extent that she was until recently; but it will enjoy a fresh blossoming and be seen as man’s home, where he will find life and hope beyond death.

Maar na de beproeving van deze verdeeldheid komt er een grote kracht uit een geïnternaliseerde en vereenvoudigde Kerk.* De mensen die in een totaal geprogrammeerde wereld leven zullen een onuitsprekelijke eenzaamheid ervaren. Als ze het gevoel van God volledig zijn kwijtgeraakt, zullen ze alle gruwelen van hun armoede voelen. En ze zullen dan de kleine gemeenschap van gelovigen ontdekken als iets totaal nieuws: ze zullen die ontdekken als een hoop voor zichzelf, het antwoord dat ze eigenlijk altijd al hadden gezocht [.....]

Ik denk zeker dat er voor de Kerk zeer moeilijke tijden zullen aanbreken. Haar echte crisis is net begonnen. We hebben te maken met grote omwentelingen. Maar ik ben er ook heel zeker van wat er uiteindelijk zal overblijven: niet de Kerk van de politieke eredienst [.....] maar de Kerk van het geloof. Zeker die zal niet langer de dominante sociale kracht zijn zoals ze dat tot kort geleden was. Maar de Kerk zal een nieuwe bloei kennen en zal gezien worden als het huis van de mens, waar leven en de hoop te vinden is over de dood heen".

Source: <https://aleteia.org/2016/06/13/when-cardinal-joseph-ratzinger-predicted-the-future-of-the-church/>

Where is the original German text or sound? [Suggestions to StuCom.](#)

Dutch translation: 0448 on www.stucom.nl

This is document 0448uk on www.stucom.nl