



Press release Rome / Tuebingen

"His perseverance for the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church encourages us"

International Reform Movements celebrate the 90th birthday of the Swiss theologian Hans Kueng (19 March 2018)

**We Are Church International (WAC-I) and the European Network Church on the Move (EN-RE) at their joint conference in Rome offer their heartfelt congratulations to the great theologian and ecumenist Professor Hans Kueng on the completion of his 90th year of life.** *"His lifelong perseverance for the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church as well as his commitment to ecumenism and to the dialogue between world religions remain for us a great encouragement, inspiration and incentive at the same time"*, they explain. **Kueng is also one of the spiritual fathers of the grass root movements of EN-RE and of the We Are Church Referendum of 1995.** They are grateful for his support to the First Forum of the People of God that took place in 2015 in Rome.

Appointed by Pope John XXIII as an official advisor to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), notwithstanding the later ecclesiastical marginalization, **this Swiss theologian of world renown has made decisive contributions to the understanding of the Catholic faith, ecumenical theology and interreligious dialogue.** His 1957 dissertation entitled "Justification" on the Protestant theologian Karl Barth and a Catholic response was also praised by Joseph Ratzinger, who taught Dogmatic Theology from 1966 to 1969 alongside Kueng in Tuebingen/Germany. With his foundational works ("The Church" in 1967, "Being a Christian" in 1974 and "Does God exist?" 1978), Kueng not only brought to the public selective ideas of reform, but intensively substantiated these in his works both biblically and systematically.

With his **ecumenical commitment**, Kueng made a significant contribution to the 1999 establishment of a Catholic-Lutheran agreement in the doctrine of justification. Eucharistic Hospitality, for which the *Institute for Ecumenical Research* founded by him in 1963 in Tuebingen, spoke at the Berlin Ecumenical Kirchentag 2003, was a step in the right direction for Kueng.

### **Kueng and the permanent problem of church reform**

Like no other contemporary, **Hans Kueng has raised and kept alive the question for truth and credibility in Christianity.** After the Council and the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" on birth control (1968), Kueng in his 1970 book "Infallible? A question" raised the question of infallibility of the papal magisterium.

For this reason, on 18 December 1979, under Pope John Paul II, his ecclesiastical teaching permit ("missio canonica") was withdrawn. But Kueng did not withdraw his theologically based statements about the

controversial infallibility dogma of 1870 and thereby **showed that not obedience, but resistance - a rather rare Catholic "virtue" - is demanded when it comes to resisting Roman prescriptions.**

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In 1968 he initiated and designed **the Declaration "For the Freedom of Theology"**, which was revised by Yves Congar, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx and finally signed by 1,360 Catholic theologians from around the world, including Joseph Ratzinger. In 1989, Kueng was a **co-signer of the "Cologne Declaration,"** which argued for open Catholicism and against an overarching papal authority.

The second volume of his memoirs "Controversial Truth" gives a historical and systematic justification of the concerns of We Are Church, which had been clearly defined since the Second Vatican Council and for which Kueng fought for with great intensity in the 1960s and 1970s. In Volume 6 of his Complete Works he describes in the introduction the "permanent problem of church reform":

[www.wir-sind-kirche.de/files/002618\\_KUENG\\_Bd6\\_Kirchenreform\\_Einleitung.pdf](http://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/files/002618_KUENG_Bd6_Kirchenreform_Einleitung.pdf)

The fact that Kueng's questions to the papacy are far from resolved is shown by the growing conflicts between Rome and the local churches and the conflicts between Pope Francis and parts of the Curia. Compulsory celibacy, the ordination of women and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper remain in the discussion, despite all the prohibitions from Rome, indeed there are and remain urgent reform points.

Since the withdrawal of the *Missio Canonica* (1980), Kueng has devoted himself to **inter-religious dialogue** with great intensity. He also published three major works on Judaism (1991), Christianity (1995) and Islam (2004). Since 1990 he has been developing the Global Ethics Project, which he has been promoting since 1995 in the "Global Ethics Foundation". A milestone is the "Declaration on Global Ethics", adopted by the Chicago World Religions Congress in Chicago in 1993, which has led to a worldwide network of interfaith relationships.

## **Kueng and the grass root movements**

**Hans Kueng is one of the spiritual fathers of the Initiative Church from Below, member of EN-RE, founded in 1980, and of the We are Church Referendum in 1995, which resulted in the Movement We Are Church.** At the opening of the Conciliar Assembly "Signs of the Times - Hope and Resistance" in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, his last big appearance in Germany, he said: *"We must not give up ... Especially in the current phase of the internal church restoration, it is important to ... keep our breath for longer"*, a word that applies especially to the current turning point in the history of the church.

[www.wir-sind-kirche.de/files/wsk/K%C3%9CNG\\_Paulskirche\\_20121018.pdf](http://www.wir-sind-kirche.de/files/wsk/K%C3%9CNG_Paulskirche_20121018.pdf)

Half a year after the election of Pope Francis, he wrote about We are Church: *"In its demands, it has the message of Jesus Christ behind it, and at the same time meets the requirements of today's democratic and pluralistic society. During the time of the restoration pacts Wojtyla and Ratzinger there was little hope that their concerns would be heard in the hierarchy. With Pope Francis, however, a turnaround seems to have occurred which makes it easier to fulfill many of their demands. In the winter church the Church Movement kept the embers glowing under the ashes. May the fire of reform finally seize the whole Church and also the Vatican. So continue, dear friends, courage, creativity and perseverance!"*

## **Media contacts**