

# American Catholic Council

## Interview with Dr. Hans Kung

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*Dr. Hans Kung is one of the most distinguished theologians of our era. He was drawn from his teaching career in Germany to be a peritus, or expert, at the Second Vatican Council during the early 1960s. He became and remains one of the most definitive interpreters of that important event in Roman Catholic Church history. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, and has authored hundreds of books, articles, and a libretto.*

*The interview took place at the residence/office of Dr. Kung in Tubingen on July 17, 2010. The Interviewer is Dr. Anthony Padovano, a Catholic theologian, priest and professor in the United States.*

I am Dr. Anthony Padovano. I am a Catholic theologian from the United States, and it is a great privilege and pleasure to be able to do this interview with you. I am especially grateful for the work that you have done over the years. And I have been asked by the American Catholic Council to represent them and their sentiments and desires in my time with you this morning. I thank you for our years as friends and colleagues and as someone who has given great inspiration and made such a substantial difference in my own life.

### **What gives you hope as you stay committed to reform in the Catholic Church?**

Well, it's sometimes a little difficult to keep hope in this present traumatic situation of the Catholic Church. But I have, especially, two reasons. The first is, the world is moving on, going ahead--with or without the Church. That's already visible now. (I speak now specially about the Roman Catholic Church.) And I think if we will not be left behind completely and become more a big sect, then we have [to] move forward.

The second reason, I believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is stronger than the hierarchy. The present hierarchy, I think, is in a stage, in a phase of restoration, but if Jesus would come back, I think he would decide many, many things in a different way.

**You have talked about the idea that we may be in the greatest crisis since the Reformation, but that you saw in this a great opportunity for reform. Would you like to say something more about that for our audience?**

Well, humanity mostly learns by suffering. There are always situations where it is very visible already a long time that you should change something. That's also true for policy – American policy, German, Swiss policy, whatever. But people are not ready to change some-thing without having to suffer.

I think it was visible – the world economic crisis, financial crisis. I myself have heard a great deal about all that. I was convinced, with many competent economists, philosophers, ethicists, that we cannot go on like this. But it was not possible to have, for instance, a law in the American Congress before we had the catastrophe.

And it is obviously not possible in the Vatican to change a few things that are already visible and I think [it is] understood by many, many people all over the world that we have to change. It was not possible in the more quiet time of, let us say, the first two or three years of Pope Benedict. And now, of course, I think even the Vatican is starting to reflect that maybe we should change. At least some people in the Vatican are reflecting on that.

And so we shall learn. If we do not learn now, we shall have to suffer more. More people will leave, more parishes will be without pastors; more churches will be empty; more youth will trust no more. Consider the Church: more women will be in complete frustration and leave the Church or be disassociated internally from the Church, I think. And also in the ecumenical camp, the ecumenical sphere of the Church, they think we cannot go on with the Catholic Church, etc., etc. All this, I think, are indications that we have to change now.

**When I was just beginning to teach theology as a young profess, I rad your book, Council, Reform and Reunion. Clearly it was a prophetic book. Do you think the Council that followed, of which you were so much a part, succeeded? And where did it fail when it failed?**

Well, that's a complex question, Anthony. I wouldn't say it failed. It was a great success, but only fifty percent. If you read this book now, you will see that we have some things. We have better liturgy, new estimation of the Bible, we have the importance of the laity. Even, I think, in questions of Church discipline, a lot of things have changed. So I think we should not denigrate the Council; the Council made a good work. But unfortunately, the Council was not allowed to speak about the question of celibacy, about the question of birth control, contraception.

Ordination [for him] was far away from all of these discussions, and the question of the real status of the present Church's laws was left in some ambiguity. As a matter of fact, many documents of the Council are ambivalent documents because the Rome machinery of the Roman Curia was able to stop every movement of reform in some way – not

completely, but halfway. And that is the reason why we are now in this very difficult situation.

What also I did not expect – that we could have just a restoration movement, as under the Polish Pope and the German Pope now, I think that has to be seen clearly. Under Pope Paul VI, who had a great deal of sympathy from me personally, I was also protected, as a matter of fact, from Roman interventions.

But as soon as Karol Wojtyła became a Pope, I saw, of course, that he had great charisma with the media and so on--but the restoration movement started immediately. He stopped immediately the dispensation of Catholic priests--that they could be dispensed from the law of celibacy. And here the catastrophic movement started of covering up the sexual scandals and so on.

So we have to see what happens now started already in the time of the Council first, because of this compromise [ed: the refusal of the Curia to permit discussion of celibacy and sexual issues], and secondly, by the reactionary policy of especially these two Popes of restoration, Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger.

**It astonishes me that the bishops, some of whom were very courageous during the Second Vatican Council, even when they knew that either John XXIII or Paul VI might not have been in favor of some of the things they were proposing. And I've always wondered, and would like to hear your thoughts on this, why that courage was not there under John Paul II? So many of them seemed to have become so quickly docile and so obedient.**

Well it was, of course, always a great deal of opportunism in the change of the House of Bishops. We had very convinced people. I remember Cardinal Dearden of Detroit, and many others – Cardinal Bernardin, etc., etc., but others were ambivalent and they are just following the train of the Vatican. I think that is one of the main reasons why we have so many problems with many bishops – not all; many – that they are not looking so much at their communities, but at the Vatican. And if the wind changes in Rome, everywhere, bishops – most bishops, I must say – most bishops also change their mind.

**Yes, yes. You helped Joseph Ratzinger get his first theology position here at Tübingen, and soon after his election [as Pope], you and he had a four-hour dinner engagement together. So you've had a relationship with Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI. When you look at John Paul II and Benedict XVI, could you compare them or contrast them for us a little bit?**

Well, I think people who want to know that, they should study, especially the second volume of my memoirs. I've received now so many letters, especially from the United States and Canada and, well, from all over the world, as a matter of fact, who say, "Now I understand why all of this has happened." And there you have a very clear comparison between the two Popes, their characters and so on.

It's very difficult now to say it here in a few words. I only want to say about Pope Benedict. We met already the first time in 1957. We had, I think, a sympathy [for] each other. We were in the Council, they youngest *periti*. We were called the “teenager theologians” of the Second Vatican Council. And we had good relations, also, and afterwards. And I was the young dean of the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen, who proposed him as professor on my parallel chair in dogmatics, and he accepted that. And we were here together during three years. He was also in my home up here; I was in his home. We had a lot of common experiences.

But he changed – I think he *was* changed – very much by the student revolts of '68. Of course, if you read it – I cannot explain it now to you – but if you read his whole story, you see that he remained, as a matter of fact, always a conservative. And he had a certain opening at the time of the Council and then he closed again. But I believe that if he had not gone to Regensburg in Bavaria (in a very conservative university theologically), if he would have remained in Tübingen, he would have done the same things. But he ended, then, of course, [in] the hierarchy and, well, then he became a “man of the Roman Curia.”

I think that's the bad thing in our Catholic Church: we are identifying all the time too much (or the world is identifying) the Catholic Church as a community of faithful with the Roman system. *And the Roman system is very different from the Catholic Church.*

The Catholic Church comes from the beginning, 2,000 years of a great history – ambivalent history, also, but a great history. But the Roman system originates in the 11th century. Since then, we have the law of celibacy, we have this Roman absolutism, we have this forced clericalism. And so if someone enters this Roman system, he is, to a certain extent, blocked in this system. We expected in the Council that we could break through the system.

But as I said, the Council had not the necessary freedom to do that completely. And so Joseph Ratzinger, when he entered the hierarchy, became Archbishop of Munich, he became a cardinal, he became the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and he became more and more a Roman person. I think, also, today, he is living in this very artificial atmosphere of the Vatican. That is a strange atmosphere of a court.

And I [am] happy to come now to your main question, that he accepted my proposal when I was elected Pope – he knew he was not my main candidate – that he accepted my proposal and he invited me in a very gentle way to Castel Gandolfo. We had a four-hour discussion, indeed. We walked through the park. We had a nice atmosphere. We had the same kind of gentle, friendly conversation that we had before.

We did not touch – that was my proposal – we did not touch the controversial issues on the reform of the Church, which are because we know each other so well. We know very well what is different on celibacy, etc. To just use the time for this question would have been useless. We discussed the problem of science and the problem of faith and religion, natural sciences. He received my book, *The Beginning of All Things*, which he admired

greatly. We had a very positive discussion on that. Afterwards on the dialogue of religions; then on global ethics.

So I was very happy. We had a common communiqué afterwards – that's also very new – that he proposed a common communiqué as a Pope with a theologian. That was unheard [of before]. And I admired his courage to do that. And I thought, and I had the hope, as also many people in the Church, that he would have found the way to the future., and that he would give up his former inquisitorial mind he had in the Holy Office, ex-Holy Office, and he would be open to the new problems.

And, well, first I waited, and we had an exchange of letters. Then I wrote columns, that were already more serious, against the law of celibacy and also another one about his own activity in the process of covering up the sexual scandals. But that was provoked by his own actions. I thought I must react.

If a Pope, whoever he is, opposes himself to the Second Vatican Council on major points and accepts bishops, four bishops ordained outside the Catholic Church who are denying the decree on ecumenism, the decree on religious freedom, practically the constitution of the Church, who are not accepting the change towards Judaism, Islam, world religions, the modern secular world, how can we accept these people as bishops ordained within our church?

That is an act against the Second Vatican Council. And [against, even, to formal canon law. The Ecumenical Council, together with the Pope, of course, is the highest authority in the Catholic Church, and no Pope can just change a Council. Now, Joseph Ratzinger, of course, would say that, "I did not change. I am only interpreting." But he interprets everything always backwards and not forwards. So [it is] a complicated story, as you see.

**Where do you think the reform movement, which seems so small against the massiveness of the Vatican, may have succeeded and where has it failed? Should it have followed different strategies?**

You're always asking such complicated questions. How should I answer all that? There are, as a matter of fact, different questions involved. I think the reform movement was strong at the beginning, but it was blocked more and more by an absolutist system. I think few people can realize how powerful a Pope is. I think often they say he cannot do everything; he depends on the Curia. But from the constitutional point of view, the Pope is more powerful than Louis XIV.

In France, in the absolutist monarchy, if [the king] does not want [something], you can do nothing in matter which have to be treated according to the law. It is different if lay people – in fact, it was now, of course, propagated in the reform movement – take another position with regard to birth control. That can't be decided by the [cardinals] themselves and so that's not a problem anymore for most Catholics in reality.

But the law of celibacy is a law, and every pastor everywhere in the world has problems if you say I [shall] stay in the parish. So our problem is that we have to change an absolutist system--without the French Revolution!

### **Or the guillotine?**

With[out] the guillotine. We have to change it in a peaceful way. And that depends on the goodwill, especially of the Pope, and of course, all of the Curia. But if a Pope wants, he can tell every cardinal just...give a farewell. I think we had, sometimes, Popes who changed radically the situation, maybe sometimes for the better, maybe sometimes for the worse. So our reform movement in the Catholic Church is very different from the reform movement in the Protestant world, where they do not have this kind of absolutist system.

Now, if you ask how it is we will go on – well, we had, of course, now, a very difficult time. But here, also, I think the newest crisis of the Catholic Church changed the situation as much on the grassroots level as, I think, to compare it with the Wall Street crisis changed the mind of the people of the United States on the civil level.

I think a lot of people who found this system of Wall Street very natural, very comfortable. They say now it was a disaster. And a lot of people who felt, "Well we have the manifestations of the Pope; we had a charismatic figure with Pope John Paul II; we have now a more modest person but a great scholar" – well, they see that a lot of this policy is just a facade. It's a "Potemkin" church where behind, [where behind the façade is crashing.

You have thousands of parishes all over the world without priests anymore. I said it already – you have all of these problems with celibacy. You have, I think, [] also a Youth Congress of the Pope. I have seen it here in Germany. It did not change anything in the parishes. We do not have more peace because of that; we do not have a different situation in the general youth.

A lot of people were just impressed by these great numbers of young people. But the greatest part was, of course, the charismatic movement from conservative circles – from Italy, Spain, Poland and so on. And it was not useful, for instance, here in Tubingen. There was a small group of people there from our parish here, St. Paul, who are servants in the Mass. They were absolutely frustrated. They went to Cologne in the Congress of Youth, and the priest who came was a conservative man. I do not know him; I wasn't present.

He asked, before he gave Holy Communion, "Have you made a confession?" Of course, they all hadn't made a confession. Can you imagine that he said then, "Well, then, and he didn't give them Communion. They came back and they were absolutely frustrated.

That's only one small story. If you on go this way, we will of course frustrate more and more of the younger generation. As a matter of fact, we [] have [not] [] integrated the young generation of our churches here in Europe, certainly; and in America it's the same development, as I believe. And we are frustrated – especially, of course, women.

I can't understand – even in my own team here in the Global Ethics Foundation – when we heard the most recent sentence from Rome that says, "We do not anymore tolerate this. We do not accept this." They just get really angry." And I think a lot of women all over the world are just really angry at this whole development and they say, "We do not accept any more a Pope who make this..."

For instance, now, I just read today in the *National Herald Tribune*, which, I am an reader of this paper. You see, I am very much interested in the development in America. I read that now they made a new decree in Rome and put for having a better process for this intervention against priests – pedophile priests, you say? But they put on the same level in this decree as most serious crimes in the Church – schism, heresy, pedophilia, and the attempt of the ordination of women.

Now, already the paper reported the first reactions. It's absurd to have the ordination of women placed – you can be for or against it – but to place it on the same level as pedophilia, and heresy and schism... And as a matter of fact, I have read in the same newspaper that 59% of Catholics in the United States are for the ordination of women, and only thirty or so are against it. How can Church leadership now go ahead with this if they see these numbers, if they see these reactions everywhere?

Sometimes I have the impression that they are like in the Kremlin in the last decades before the great change under Gorbachev. These people had all of the information possible in the Kremlin, but they didn't consider them. They were told the market economy is more efficient than the state economy. But they say, "No, that's not true." They had all the arguments against it. They all said...they had numerous arguments against them.

So I think in Rome they have arguments against everything. They can all say, "No, no, no," but I think this system has no future – this Roman system. The Catholic Church has a future, but the Roman system has no future. And the reform movements are very important to keep up this spirit now, because I think now the reform movements represent better the Catholic Church as a community of faithful than the Roman Curia.

**This is one of the reasons why we are convening this American Catholic Council on the eve of the 50th Anniversary of opening of Vatican II, because we feel that witness is important. I think your words of encouragement will mean a great deal to the audience that will be listening in on this.**

**Another question occurred to me, Hans, and that is, both you and I lecturing in the university have found that there is a deep spiritual hunger in young people. They do not want to connect that with institutional Catholicism, which they find rather rigid. And yet there are great treasures in institutional Catholicism that could help that spiritual search if the institutional Church were more credible. Their elders also feel this spiritual hunger. Is selective Catholicism a better way to deal with finding some of the nourishment for the spiritual life? In so many cases, it seems to be that people**

**feel, "I must accept the entire thing or nothing," and I wonder if you have some thoughts on that.**

Well, I'm, of course, not for the mixture of everything. This cocktail religion, you know, you trust in what you like – that is too comfortable. We have not to adapt ourselves just to modern trends, to every modern trend. And I think in America sometimes even is a greater danger than here in Europe, but it's here also. I think that we do not have to be modernist in this sense. But on the other hand, of course, we have to concentrate on the essentials. Not everything is equally important – piety. I think we cannot give up the Eucharist, for instance. Not at all. Now the present hierarchy is giving up the Eucharist for the law of celibacy. So we have to oppose that.

As a matter of fact, the hierarchy is sometimes more selective, but in their own way, of course, than the ordinary citizen. And I think we have to keep the essentials of the Roman Catholic Church, and we can give up what is not essential. Now, the individual person has certainly the right to find his or her own way. I think to follow Christ never was a unique way. Sometimes what is presented is that everyone has basically to become monastic. That is not the ideal anymore.

On the other hand, we do not want to neglect our special sources of mysticism – mystique in the good sense – of all we had in medieval piety. We have, of course, great treasures. Think of music, think of pictures, think of...well, nice songs and so on. But all this has to be, on one side, concentrated on the Gospel.

Jesus Christ himself is the essence of Christianity. Jesus Christ himself has to be the norm – what we have to accept and what we have not to accept. So I think that is the norm we have to follow in all things. But in that, we have to be as open as possible. I have no objection, for instance, to practice meditation in the Buddhist way. If it is done in the right Christian spirit you can do that. And we can learn from all the other religions, and I'm much more involved now in dialogue of religions than in any time before.

So we need both things: concentration on the essentials but an opening spirit. You could also say the same thing with respect to the other churches. We need, at the same time, I think, Catholic openness in time and space. We need an open Catholic mind to accept whatever is good. But at the same time, we need an evangelical spirit of the Gospel, and an evangelical spirit to make the distinction of the spirit, as it says in Paul, what is really according to the Gospel, what is against the Gospel, or what is just besides the Gospel.

What is against the Gospel has to be abolished. What is according to the Gospel has to be preserved and fostered. And what is besides the Gospel...well, you can make a choice. It's a little set in principle, but I think you understand what I mean.

**I do. In watching your career and your spiritual journey, I noticed that as the Vatican restricted your work as a Catholic theologian, you began to work very assiduously also – continuing, of course, with Catholic theology – but also**

**emphasizing as I had not seen before the global ethic and the openness to other world religions. Have you felt that that turn towards the global ethic and the other religions, enriched your spiritual life?**

Very much so. I kept, of course, also in the dialogue of religions my own Christian faith, and I think the dialogue has to integrate two dimensions at once. We have to respect our partners on the same level, and at the same time we have to be rooted in our own faith. I think that is possible, and I have had so many dialogues all over the world with all sorts of religions, and I always found that it's better to not be a neutral man who says, "I know everything; we are all the same" and so on. No Jew, no Muslim, no Hindu, no Buddhist likes it just to say, "We know better than you what you are," or, "You are all anonymous Christians." They also do not like that.

I may say it in such a way: if I am asked, "What is for you, your way of life and your spirituality?" I say, "Well, the way, the truth, and the [life] is Jesus Christ according to the formula of St. John." But if I have a Jewish person beside myself, I know that when he is asked the same question, "What is for you? The truth, the light and the way?" he will say, of course, "The Torah," and a Muslim would say, "The Koran." We know that when we are making dialogue, so we don't necessarily have give that up. We can keep it but now we can understand each other. We can converge, we can have very good discussions on what we converge on and how we are different.

And now we come to the decisive point. My discovery in all of these dialogues was that we agree more on questions of ethics and behavior than on questions of faith and dogmatics. I come, as you know, Anthony, from dogmatic theology, and I am still very strong in that, I believe. I know the Ecumenical Council as well as everybody else in the Church, and I know Roman theology even better than most people in the Church. And I keep that all the time in mind.

But I know that I have to respect the other, and at the same time, they are respecting me. I came to Tehran to the Mullahs, for instance. I said, "Well, I am a convinced Christian theologian, but I would like to understand the Koran." And I said, "But I would like to understand Islam better." That was the position. It was possible, even, to talk to very conservative people. I was even able to talk about the question of women in Islam, etc., etc.

But that is the attitude that you need: complete openness for the others, but you will remain yourself, rooted in your own faith. That is the same thing in diplomacy. I think the best diplomat is a person who understands the position of his partner in the other country as well as he himself. Then he is able to have negotiation in a way and that is a little secret of success.

**Yes. One of the things that's clear from our time together in this conversation is how much you are nourished by the image of Christ and by the power of the New Testament. That's a marvelous witness to be able to see from your own life. So many**

**people today are discouraged when they face a kind of triple problem – the moral rigidity of the Catholic Church especially with regard to sexual issues. And the second thing is the terribly oppressive structure through which we have to operate. And thirdly, this very toxic climate of clericalism and secrecy. It amounts to a kind of Berlin Wall of sorts. If there are any other thoughts on that other than what we've pursued together, how can we work to bring this Berlin Wall down?**

If you permit me, I would like to add something to my former answer, because I omitted the more objective side of the global ethic. I think it's very important – and that could also be an answer already to another question – to realize that all great riches and theosophical traditions agree on four imperatives of humanity: do not murder, do not lie, do not steal, do not abuse sexuality.

And they agree on two basic principles: the golden rule – don't do to others what you would not have done to yourself, and I think, basically, also, the principle of humanity which is at the root of everything – every human being has to be treated in a truly human way and not in a inhuman...even in a bestial way.

I could give you long talks about that, but I think, especially in American society, it's not yet well received. And I think the Bush years were not made to think globally. So I hope that global ethics will become more of a topic in the United States. I do not want to go on about that, but I want to add this.

Now, to your question. You of course asked three questions at once, but let us first say something about your first part of the Berlin Wall. That was...?

**The moral rigidity in the Church, the toxic climate of clericalism and secrecy, and the very oppressive structure through which we have to operate amount to kind of a Berlin Wall almost blocking people, imprisoning them, and making them less effective. And I wondered if, in addition to what you already suggested, you had some other thoughts on how we could bring that wall down.**

Well, there are, of course, different things. First, I would always give the advice, speak out. Speak out. I address letters to the bishops. Speak out – that was the first. And tell the truth – how it is in your dioceses, in your parishes and so on. But the same, of course, also priests, please speak out, and to lay people, speak out!

Unfortunately, I have not received, until now, one answer from a bishop – not privately, not openly – publicly. I think if, now, more and more people are speaking out, this is, of course, a great power. I think, also, bishops will hear more now than, let us say, five years ago.

Then, of course, we have to act – do what we can do on the local level. I think a lot of parishes already go their own way, where it is possible. I just think we have to, at the same time, also to effect a third principle: that unconditional obedience is due only to God

himself and to Christ as his representative; not to a Pope, not to a bishop, not even to a council. I think the main authority in the Church is God himself.

And I think, also, in my own activity, I had this big confrontation with the Vatican. I have to think a great deal what is the authority I have to obey. I have to obey God and my own conscience – of course, not as a lone wolf, but as a loyal member of the community. And I think that is valuable for every parish priest, for every lay person, for a bishop, for everybody. Well, we have to obey God more than human beings. And so a lot of things can be worked out on the parish level.

For instance, if women are committed to a local community, they can do a great deal. And then, of course, we have to ask more energetically that we want to change. Yes, we can. I think, yes, we can. It's also valuable now in the Church. Yes, we can. And what is also valuable in the Church – the other famous words we had before the Berlin Wall fell – we are the people; *Wir sind die Völk*. We!

And I observe now in our setup here that more and more people are now realizing we are the Church – not "The bishop is the Church." The bishop is the servant of the community, not the lord of the community. And if we are convinced, and if more and more people are convinced *we* are the Church, we are all together. Not against the bishop, with the bishop, but if the bishop does not want, we are the Church. Please, obey to the community.

I think that is one of the main reasons why we cannot move. Bishops are too much considered as just administrators of the Roman bureaucracy. They are not representative of democracy. They were, according to the Second Vatican Council, chosen by God Himself as representing the ministries in the Church, and they should really look at what are the desires and the justified demands of their own community, and not just what the Vatican administration is asking for.

You see, that is, of course, a long, long process of changing mentality. And we are, I think, in the middle of it, and we reached – now, just because of this policy with regard to the schismatic bishops and with regard to the sexual scandals, we've reached a phase of a new consciousness.

I think more and more people are realizing that we cannot go on like this, and now the reform movement should use this occasion to speak out more, to act more, to do everything we can. A lot of people always say, "Well, what can I do?" Well, I'm a single person, a theologian, and I had to face the whole Vatican machinery. You can read – again, I think you should – in the second volume of my memoir – that was a very, very hard story. Everyone has a charism; in community we can act.

**Sometimes the criticism, Hans, against you is so harsh, and reading it makes me feel pain. But you are the victim of some of that. And yet, it never seems to silence you or to depress you. You seem to be able to go on as a faithful priest, as a faithful Catholic. And I wonder just what enables you to continue in the face of that. So many**

**other people would give up against that barrage of criticism that comes up every so often.**

Well first, I think that the foundation of my whole existence, my work in theology and my fight with the authorities is, of course, my Christian faith. I have confidence in God that I can move on, so to speak – like St. Peter on the waves, not looking so much all the time on the waves, but looking at the road. I [am realistic, as you know. I'm not a romantic.

But I am deeply convinced that if I do what, according to my conscious, is the Will of God and is according to the Gospels of Jesus Christ, then I have seen his foundations for my statements, for some action, to write a book on infallibility or not, etc., etc. That is certainly the basis of how you can come through – if you have this deep conviction of faith in the sense of an unshakeable confidence in God himself.

Then, of course, you cannot do it alone. You see, I have here the Global Ethics Foundation. I had before the Institute for Ecumenical Research. I had always a team around myself supporting me. Also, I think, mentally, psychologically, you cannot play a hero every day. And I never play the hero. As a matter of fact, I have just done my duty.

But I was always supported by people. I always asked a great deal of advice all the time. I am firm in my scholarship. I do not decide things I do not know. And I try, then, to ask questions from people I respect: "What would they do? What are their opinion?" And I tried, also, in theology a lot to have a common guard, so to speak; a vanguard.

I know that I was disappointed by many people in theology. I thought we could have a common front of Ratzinger and Rahner, Congar, and Schillebeeckx, etc., etc. I also talked about that in my memoir – about how I was disappointed in different ways. But, well, I never gave up. It's perhaps my Swiss character and, I think, everything I got from my mother, from the genes of both, as a matter of fact. I have a happy mixture of several things. I can be very strong, but I did not lose my humor.

Well, I think everybody has his own charism. That is one main thing – I was responsible for the big talk in the Council, I wrote the draft for Cardinal Sins about charism. And I am deeply convinced that every faithful [person] has a [conscious in] St. Paul and the epistle to...passages to the Romans and Corinthians about charism. Every Christian has his or her own charism. And it can be a very humble charism – just to give advice people, to console, or to take some leadership.

Everybody has his or her own charism and should contribute something through the community. I think if we are not alone, but if we are together, we can do very many things. And especially, we have not to despair anytime.

**In the first volume of your memoirs, you talk about the fact that you were once a conservative Catholic. As a young seminarian, you obeyed all the rules. You once wrote in your diary that you never wanted to do anything except follow the Pope's**

**directive. And yet you changed from that. And I wonder what changed you, or how did that process occur?**

Well, I would have to tell you a long story first – that I changed already in my youth because of the Catholic Youth Movement. We had a much more open piety, spirituality, than our parish priest for instance, during this time. I was in Switzerland during the Nazi time, and we had a great deal of freedom and could speak out freely.

Then I was in Rome and I changed there when I saw that the Pope makes mistakes, and the great mistake, I thought, myself, along with many others – that Pius XII has forbidden, strictly, and without and kind of pity the [worker priest] in France. That changed [me] –I described this in the first volume.

And so I became, then, critical then also because the neo-scholastic theology at the Gregorian University didn't satisfy my wishes, my deep desires, and I changed in theology. And I concentrate more and more on the biblical message. I am one of the rather rare dogmatic scholars who made Scripture studies. I have written a book on being a Christian, having made sermons on every passage on the Gospel of Mark, etc., etc.

And the figure of Jesus Christ really fascinated me. I saw, well, that's really the way you can go – not for having a solution for everything, but the main direction: not to hate, but to love, to try to be...not just to earn, but to devote. I think all of this was important for, then, what I had to do afterwards.

I was always convinced that have Jesus as an authority behind me. When I asked for certain Church reforms and I, of course, did not expect that I would come into this confrontation, I was very happy when I had the first, I [can] say, [triumphal] lecture tour across the United States in 1963, with John F. Kennedy as a young president, with Pope John XXIII as the old Pope. I had authorities behind me.

And afterwards, that changed. And I would have preferred to go sailing with the wind, but the wind changed and I was without, against my will, in the opposition, but in the loyal opposition of his Holiness. That I didn't wish, but, well, that was my destiny and I had to come through.

**The record shows that you have been one of the great prophetic voices of our era and given an enormous amount of hope to so many people. How do you want to be remembered?**

Well, you are probably expecting a very humble answer. As Pope Benedict said, I'm only a humble servant in the dominion of the Lord. I don't like this kind of thing. I am a theologian; I will be remembered as a theologian. That, I think, was my vocation. And I would like to be remembered as a critical and productive theologian and as a person who wanted to do whatever he does in the service of the Church and of the general society.

I became more and more a man moving from the promise of the union of churches to the problems of dialogue of religions, and finally, to the community of the nations. I became what they call sometimes a universal thinker who is exposed to very many problems as once in economics, in politics, in education. I try whatever I could to do. And I think I have not to think too much about how I shall be remembered. I shall be remembered especially by my books, I believe. And so sometimes books are more powerful than people who are in power.

**Hans, is there anything else that I did not cover or question that you would like to comment on?**

I would like to give a comment that my English is very bad, and if you could ask me in German I could be much more precise, and I could tell you much better what I want to say. Well, I would like to greet everybody who sees this film. Probably I know some of them very well; I have so many friends all over the United States. And I hope you go on. And maybe I'll come back to the United States sometime again.

**You found the time to share those thoughts with us. I have found your reflections extremely hopeful. And from the bottom of my heart I wish to let you know how grateful I am. Thank you very much.**

Thank you.

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This conversation was recorded in Tübingen, Germany of July 17, 2010. The interviewer is Dr. Anthony Padovano, a distinguished professor of theology and literature and a priest living in the United States. It was staged and witnessed by Ms. Theresa Padovano and Mr. John Hushon. This material was lightly edited by John Hushon and Anthony Padovano. ©American Catholic Council, 2011. American Catholic Council has pre-granted re-print rights to this interview, in whole or in part (provided that the ACC source—[AmericanCatholicCouncil.org](http://AmericanCatholicCouncil.org)—is noted).