

Dissent without Consequences?

*Those who had the dubious pleasure of witnessing yesterday's second day of the 4th Synodal Assembly felt reminded of the best days of the disciplinarian of the SPD federal caucus, Herbert Wehner, because of the actions of DBK (German Bishop's Conference) head Bishop Bätzing. There, fellow bishops were "brought on course" in backroom discussions and by means of a roll call vote, and, since what must not be cannot be, both the action text for the magisterial re-evaluation of homosexuality as well as the action text on the basic order of clerical service from that very forum were bulldozed through, despite the basic text for Synodal Forum IV "Life in Successful Relationships" having been duly rejected the day before. Likewise, a basic text suddenly found the necessary majority among the bishops, which again raises the redundant question of the sacramental ministry of women and thus the binding nature of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. The bishops are urged to bring this question to Rome. Even though participants were moved enough to celebrate afterwards, the sober observer could ask himself what will become of the basic and action texts of the year 2022/23, written at the green synodal table and pushed through by the presidential team Bätzing-Stetter-Karp, when they run through the Roman-world-synodal filters at the end of next year? Bishop Bätzing himself has already described the task that awaits him then, namely when he will change from being the disciplinarian of the Synodal Way to the manager of disappointed expectations of certain church circles. In any case, the universal church is certainly not waiting to be healed by the Catholic Church in Germany, which accounts for just 1.5% of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics and in which, along with the lived faith, money is now also increasingly evaporating. And what is being debated in Frankfurt has hardly anything to do with the reality of faith and life of the people in our parishes and institutions!*

In view of the above debate, another public but no less explosive statement made by Bishop Dr. Bätzing and Dr. Irme Stetter-Karp, President of the ZdK (Central Committee of German Catholics), on Thursday at the start of the 4th Synodal Assembly threatens to be lost: Now, weeks after the Open Letter in which Bätzing was called upon by thousands of faithful Catholics, associations and initiatives to end the cooperation of the Bishops' Conference with Dr. Stetter-Karp if she does not publicly withdraw her demand for a nationwide expansion of

abortion services, Bätzing and Stetter-Karp are reacting for the first time and each in a remarkable way.

On behalf of the German bishops, Bishop Bätzing explained that they are certainly in disagreement with Stetter-Karp with regard to her demand and that of the ZdK, but that they know that they are united in the basic concern of the protection of life.

Dr. Stetter-Karp, on the other hand, relativized the protection of unborn life by placing it under the reservation of self-determination of the woman; for Bishop Bätzing this is an opinion that everyone must be free to bring to the attention of the DBK.

How far does someone in a top Catholic position have to move away from the Church's teaching on the protection of unborn life before a pain threshold is reached for the German Bishops' Conference and its chairman, so that they no longer see any basis for further cooperation?

And what does Bishop Bätzing mean when he says that the non-church public has not taken up the discussion? Is the "instinct of faith on the street" to be used here as a yardstick for the relevance of an ethical-religious debate about the demands of Dr. Stetter-Karp? It is already sad enough that political majorities are emerging in our country who are in favor of further weakening the protection of life at its beginning and end. Within the church, however, there cannot and must not be any compromises here; life is not the subject of democratic debate, but sacred and therefore to be protected! It is therefore also the tragic founding error of Donum Vitae (a pro-choice organization) and Stetter-Karp to believe that they can and may protect life by relativizing the right to life. As a citizen she may represent this position for herself, but as a Catholic and highest lay representative certainly not!

By Bishop Bätzing now believing that it is enough to note the dissent with Stetter-Karp without letting consequences follow, he endangers the credibility of the Bishops' Conference and violates his official duties as a bishop!

Bätzing's reason for not reacting to the open letter also revealed his profoundly clerical understanding of transparency and the culture of debate within the Church. His claim that since the Bishops' Conference has declared its support for the protection of life, there is no need to take a position on the justified demand to end the cooperation with Dr. Stetter-Karp

only shows an ineffectual attempt to sit out unpleasant decisions, to avoid annoying debates and, above all, to no longer take one's own faithful seriously!

Like Die Tagespost, Maria 1.0 - here also representing the signatories of the open letter - rejects any attempt by Dr. Stetter-Karp to establish a connection between Maria 1.0 and those who have obviously insulted or threatened her.

Such lapses do not correspond to our understanding of an inner-church culture of dispute. On the other hand, Stetter-Karp will have to listen to demands for her resignation and the questioning of her self-image as a Catholic, as someone who continues to place herself outside the teachings of the Church on one of the most central points of the faith. It is up to Dr. Stetter-Karp, who has just recently again been at the forefront of the campaign against Rainer Maria Cardinal Woelki, which lacks any objective justification and fairness, to judge for herself how credible her complaint about the harshness of a factual dispute is.