



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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Introduction

Fr. Tom Lumpkin

Hi. I'm Tom Lumpkin, a member of the *Association of United States Catholic Priests*, and a member of *Elephants in the Living Room*; and it is my privilege to introduce Helmut. What struck me - I had never met Helmut 'til just now, but only know of him of what I've read - but what struck me in reading over what we've learned from him, about him, is how similar in many ways his experiences have been to our own; and, yet he has made some particular contributions to the Church that are unique and I want to bring those out. I think, all of us here have had the same experience of hope the last 50 years since the Vatican Council. It's been a very renewing and energizing experience.

Helmut was ordained in 1977, and, I am sure, that when he was ordained, his hope and expectation was, he was going to be a part in this renewal of the Church, make it more closer to the Gospel. And that was what his ministry would mainly be about. And he had, like many of us did nowadays, I guess, get labeled: Vatican II priests. He was very active and concerned about social justice. He spent a number of years working with the Austrian branch of *Caritas International*, which is the International Catholic social outreach, and at one point was even the director of the Austrian branch of Caritas. In some ways he was unlike us, he had managerial skills. (Laughter) After being the director of Caritas, a little later, the Cardinal (Groër) of Vienna, appointed him the Vicar General of the diocese, which is really mainstream managerial stuff. (Laughter) But like many of us, then too, he experienced under the papacy of John Paul a retrenchment and a centralization of the Vatican II reforms, and experienced some disillusionment, I think, about that, realized the problems that were there, and, it seems, like from what I've read what happened along with that, was the revelations of the sexual abuse by priests. Vienna was particularly hard hit by that, in that the Cardinal (Groër) was made to resign because of sexual improprieties with seminarians. But, I think, one of the graces of that whole sexual abuse revelation was that it helped him, as well as helped many of us, sharpen our analysis of what was the real illness within the Church; not so much individual people, but there was a systemic problem. There was a clerical culture that was made almost to act over and above the baptized, all in the name of the good of the Church; and that this was a real fundamental root issue that was behind a lot of the problems in the Church.

In 2006, I think, his analysis of the situation, he became a founder of the *Austrian Priests Initiative*, which called for open discussion within the Church, the problems facing the Church. And this was a particular contribution of his. At that time, of course, the bishops had their voice at every national conference, every language group had its episcopal conferences, the papacy, and even the nuns had their own voice. Here in the United States had the *Leadership Conference of Religious* already. The priests did not have their own voice; and the *Austrian Priests Initiative* was, I think, the first one that helped priests find their own voice in addressing the issues facing us today. That gave birth to similar associations in other parts of the world, in Ireland, especially, we think of, and France, Australia and most recently in the United States. And I know for a fact a number of us from the *Association of United States Catholic Priests* are here tonight, that we would attribute our idea to form our association to the association in Austria and the association in Ireland. So your initiative was really a big factor in us getting started here in the United States just a couple of years ago. That's a contribution we are particularly grateful for.

In 2006 the other big contribution that Helmut made was he and the *Priests' Initiative* announced a Call to Disobedience. And the title which was clearly provocative, and the agenda which was, a lot of things that the call to disobedience called for, were things that people were privately discussing, or privately even doing. But it was like he kinda brought out into the light what was hidden in the darkness, I think; those

things were going on that people were doing on their own, and change Church structures. But the Call to Disobedience got international attention. It just had that effect of, "Oh! here is a group of priests calling for disobedience;" and it just brought many issues out into the light, and, I think, again, that's a particular contribution that we are grateful to you for doing. So without any more *adieu*, I invite you all to warmly welcome Fr. Helmut Schuller. (Applause)

The Catholic Tipping Point

Fr. Helmut Schuller

Well, thank you very much that you have invited me to come here. It is a great pleasure for me to meet you; and I think it will be the same touching experience that I had already in the other cities I have visited up to now. When I am looking at you, I am asking me, "Why are the bishops so afraid you are gathering?" It seems to me the people who are engaged for our Church, for your Church, who are the ones who are investing a lot of energy, and of faith and of hope, sometimes of money and gifts to the Church, who are the ones who are taking care for the future of this Church at the base of our society and the base of our Church. So what are they afraid of? They should be proud to have such a crowd; and so many people who are engaged in this Church. And as you look at me, I am a common priest; yes, I'm a pastor. I'm no rebellion priest, or something. Revolutions must be in a very bad shape if someone like me is a revolutionist. (Laughter) I'm doing my ministry. I'm a priest for a parish community five km east from Vienna; I'm a chaplain for two universities: university for economics and university for agriculture. I am writing in the Diocesan Weekly official commentaries to the Gospel, much influence in the spiritual level of our Church; and I'm a member of the Presbyteral Council of our archbishop. So what are they afraid of? They want to forbid me, not successfully as you can see, to speak to you; but what concerns me more, is that they want to forbid you to listen, and to discern for yourself, what you are thinking about all the opinions and issues. So let's start to dive in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council; and let's have a lot of hope for the further way; because I think that there is no decision to be made that the Second Vatican Council is the vision for this Church for our time; and we should discuss in a short discussion or conversation how could be move there.

I think the deepest sorrow in our hearts - so that we founded this *Priest Initiative* - was the future of the parish communities at the base of the Church and of society. I and a lot of other priests in Austria are informed that we will be the last pastors for their parish communities. After our retirement, they will become clustered, or merged, or whatever you may call it, to new mega parishes; in the next two or three years, where now there are two or three, but finally one parish priest will travel around with his car, climbing out of the car, going into the church, celebrating mass, climbing out of the church, climbing into his car, bringing sacraments to other people, knowing nobody or anyone, have no contacts, almost. And, if you are a quick Catholic, you can have a short dialogue with us. (Laughter) And I am sure you will begin with the sentence, "Father, I know you have not much time." That cannot be the future of our ministry. It cannot be the future of our parish communities, because parish communities are at the base of the Church. They are the level where the Church is reaching out daily, and practically, for the people of our time, for those who are in need for something, for those who are at the margins of our society. As you were told, I was engaged many years in this social justice in our society, and in the global society, and we are reaching out there for building up a communal, which is inclusive, which is inviting the people to come with us. They are welcome there. They are welcome to God. That is the way Jesus was open; and we want to continue it.

An inclusive communal, that was the first very important vision of the Second Vatican Council. There was rediscovered the people of the Church on its pilgrimage through the time, with the people of our time. And this people of the Church should be a communal, such as it had began at the origins of our Church: little communities in the beginning, in the houses breaking the bread, praying, sharing their faith and their hope, sharing the birth of our Lord, going outside to look if they could do service to those who are in need, sharing their properties, and all that; that was the vision at the beginning. And the Second Vatican Council rediscovered this vision. And it is very interesting when you look at the document of the Second Vatican Council in which the Church is speaking about itself: *Lumen Gentium*. Then there is firstly spoken about the People of God, and, afterwards, about the ministry for these people. It means for the hierarchy, let me say, ministry for the people. That was the vision of the Second Vatican Council! And, therefore, we are in deep sorrow that the Church is losing that level of reaching out to the people of our time, of

being community, out of the holy communion in our time. Around the Eucharist we are singing; and we are celebrating and building up this community as a sign for our time that we have to be inclusive, that we have to invite. And, therefore, we started this pastor's initiative In Austria. We wanted to speak out of our sorrow. We wanted to say to the government of our Church, to the leaders of our Church, "You have to do something. Things are going wrong. We are disappearing from the landscapes with our communities. We are getting out of touch with the people. We are losing contact with them, not only the priests but also all the faithful who are engaged in these communities." It is the vision of the Second Vatican Council and therefore we said, "You have to do something." And there were all these perspectives, and all these expectations, we are carrying with you for 40 or 50 years almost. "Open the ministry of the priesthood. Open it for the gifted, for the married men, and for women also." (Applause)

We were asked by the bishops to pray for vocations; and I think God has fulfilled this prayer. (Laughter and Applause) I think God has fulfilled this prayer and He has given this Church a lot of gifts, a lot of gifted people, who have the vocation to be ministers, to do the ministry of leading the communities, to the ministry of inspiring them, coordinating them, accompanying them; and therefore we are asking for this opening; the opening for the women, not only because we have a lack of priests, we should open it also if we would have enough priests, enough male priests. (Applause) Yes? Because we are the ones that have the message in our Church that man and woman are together the image of God in this world; and to deliver this message in a credible way is the reason for asking for representing this image of God together, men and women, in the structures of our ministry. And also practically speaking. I have read in some newspaper, that 80% of the services that the Church is offering to the people of today are done by lay people. And 80% of this 80% are done by the women. (Laughter and Applause) Why be afraid against this opening?

There were moments in the history of our Church where the whole Church has been in the hands of one woman, Mary of Magdala; because, between her visit at the tomb of Christ and her contact to the apostles, the Church was in her hands. I have heard some interesting dialogue out of a discussion from the faithful of this country, with the bishop; and at the end, the bishop remembered the dialogue part they said, "How do you speak with us? We are standing in the succession of the apostles." And one very courageous woman said, "Yes, and I am standing in the succession of that woman the apostles didn't want to listen to." (Laughter) So that means why be afraid because of tradition, because Jesus did not. If the Church only would do what Jesus did, and do not what Jesus did not, that would be a very interesting situation. And I cannot see that our bishops are Palestinian fishermen; (Laughter) because things have changed. The structures of the Church have changed; and, therefore, not to be afraid, and to open this ministry, and to start its new design for a new time.

But we are also asking for a new participation of the People of God in the decision making of the Church, not to imitate democracy, but out of our principal perspectives: out of respect for the dignity of the baptized, of the gifted baptized, who are given to the Church as stones for building of Church. So, to let the lay people take part in the decision making is not only an imitation of modern democracy, but it is the real respect for the dignity of the baptized. And, therefore, we are remembering that Pope Paul VI started at the end of the 60s a very interesting project - almost nobody is remembering. The project was a consequence out of the Second Vatican Council, out of the rediscovery of the People of God. The name of the project was *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis*. It means a ground law, a kind of constitution for the Church, because this pope realized that having rediscovered the People of God is the one thing, but there is a legitimate question about the rights of this people. Are they only silent sheep; or are they called to come forward, and to share the decision making in the Church, and to have fundamental rights in their Church?

So, I would ask you, when you are speaking about lay people, or sometimes about the baptized, try to use a new word for this issue. Speak sometimes about Church citizens, citizens of the Church. If someone of you is in need of a quotation of the bible - because we Catholics always need a quotation out of the bible - I have one to offer to you. In the letter to the Ephesians we are named the co-citizens of the saints and the house companies of God. Yes! And Paul VI started this project, to find the constitution for this Church, and to find fundamental rights and the declarations for the lives of the Church; and he stated this project; and it was very first class at the beginning of the 80s. I think also there may have been a lot of

reasons, but one reason might have been that the Vatican system realized that such a constitution would really rock the boat. (Laughter)

It means that there would be a new culture in this Church with things we are familiar with in our so-called bad secular society, such as control of those who are in power, accountability of those who are in power in front of those who are the People of God; control of power, accountability of those who are in the ministry of leading of our Church. That would be a very necessary new culture for our church; the synodal structure, the possibility to bring forward and to have a legal structure, to have discussions, and to have discernments about the questions and the problems of our Church, to have legal structures for decision making, as of the nomination of bishops, and so on, and so on. And I tell you, if there would have been such a constitution in place in the last years, I think the issue of child abuse in our Church would have been handled in quite another way. (Applause) Maybe we would not have to wait until the media is covering what is going on, and until they through enough pressure that something was done. Also, a lot of bishops are giving us the impression that this is all false stuff, and it's a persecution of the Church by the media. Quite the contrary! I was responsible from 1995 to 2005, almost 10 years, for the first office of a diocese for the victims of child abuse. I worked in this office as Vicar General, and then I asked the archbishop to nominate some independent, not a priest as I was, but an independent scientist who is not dependent on the diocese; and so it happened. It's now led by a gifted specialist for child abuse out of the Church. And I have experience with this stuff; I know from what I am speaking. Yes, a fundamental rights constitution for our Church in respect for the dignity of the People of God.

And then I want to move your attention to the second great document of the Second Vatican Council, its title is: *Gaudium et Spes*: joy and hope. It's a document where the Church is speaking about herself concerning the pestilent practice in our time. And the beginning of this document, the first words are very touching, really moving, very problematic and prophetic: "The anger and the hopes, the sadness and the joy of the people of our time are the anger and the hopes, the sadness and the joy of the disciples of Jesus and the Church." It means a new companionship for our time, and for the people of our time; a brave march into this modern society without prejudice against it, without saying, "Oh! that society with its culture of death;" nothing of that measure and pattern was heard at the Second Vatican Council. Instead of this, Pope John XXIII told us that not only the world has to learn from the Church, but also the Church from society; and from the time (Applause) a really optimistic view on this society with all its dark sides, with all its conflicts, with all its chaos. We know it! But the Second Vatican Council appreciated looking at that time in our society. It is also a civilization which is trying to let take part each human being, at the wealth of this world, at the chances of this world, justice for each human being of this world, pronounced in the Declaration of United Nations of Human Rights.

So I think that it was this approach which shaped the Second Vatican Council in its thinking; and we wanted to make the Church brave to go in this society. It's no easy way. It's not easily done, because there are a lot of questions we have to answer. There are a lot of things that we have to change. We have to find a new language, I think, a renewal of our language, a language of faith and of teaching, a renewal of the language of our praying. I have realized that now you have in your country, the priests especially, a special discussion about the new missal, English language. That is the thing that is touched in this perspective, a new language; or a new language, which is taking the risk of finding new words, new pictures, or going back to the Latin original text, and to be busy that the texts are not too far away from this original text. And I think it is quite a signal for the approach we have now in our Church to this issue. Concerning also our moral teaching, we have to look carefully on what is going on in changes. And not all changes are as bad as they seem. Some of them are a problem for us; but some of them, also, a discovery. We have to learn again, like Jesus did, to appreciate what the people want to do by good will.

Let's speak about, for example, about the heavy question of how to do with the new relationships and partnerships in our society. I think, what is necessary, is a shift, from the concentrated external form of partnerships and relationships, to concentrating on the quality of these relationships, and to see when the people are trying hard to care for one another; to see that they want to build up their relationships on trust, on fidelity, on looking to one another, and to stabilize their relations, to appreciate it, and not to speak only about the deficits, because they are not complying with all the laws we have created over the centuries. Therefore, I think this *Gaudium et Spes* gave us a very important blow into this direction; and, therefore,

we are also asking for these changes as priests, as pastors, because we understand ourselves as companions of the people, as assistance for their searching for life.

To have the People of God in the middle is deeply related to the new dimension that was opened by Jesus, our Lord, because he was the one who came to encourage the people to believe that each of them, independent of their state in society, independent of from where they are, and where they come from, they have a direct access to God, as children of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus; and how our ministry is not the ministry of administering God, but to assist the people to find their direct access to God. (Applause) The temptation is tremendous to misunderstand the power in the ministry, in the priesthood, as a power to decide to which people God may come, and to which not; which people should have access to Him and which not. Therefore, we cannot tolerate any more that the Eucharist should become an instrument of sanctioning of people. (Applause) It is the highest symbol we have, and the deepest in some sense, symbol for unity, for invitation, for inclusion, for the openness of the love of God for everyone, as Jesus has told us. It's the deepest symbol for coming together, as it is in our cultures as mankind. Whenever we are speaking about meal, about coming together, and eating together; it is a symbol of finding together, and, therefore, also, our asking for a change in the handling of this problem of the divorced and remarried.

Yes, such issues are moving us deeply; and all this sorrow is coming out of our hearts as pastors of the People of God; and we share this sorrow with the faithful, with the Church's citizens, with the lay people, with the baptized, however you would call them. And, therefore, we decided to start this *Priests' Initiative*, to start to speak out clearly what's going on, to speak up about all these things in our Church, and to start as priests because we as priests waited up to now in the background looking at the lay people struggling for Church reform. Thanks to God a lot of priests assisted these movements but I think we have to speak up, as priests, in our own language, in our own experience; and, therefore, we decided to start. At first, we were only twelve of us; then there was a little bit growing; then we founded this initiative officially and publicly. We invited our colleagues to come, and to stand together, and to speak up together, and to give one another support for our ministry. And first we did - we are very politely educated priests - (Laughter) we visited our bishops in Austria. We have only nine of them. Six of them wanted to speak with us; they were very cultivated, very polite, (Laughter) at meetings with the bishops, always giving tea in our cups and being very polite; and so, sometimes, writing something down on their papers before them. But the end was, "Yes, there is no possibility. We are a worldwide Church; nothing we can change; Rome has to decide. God bless you!" (Laughter)

Then Pope Benedict XVI visited Austria, and we asked to meet him, to find the occasion to meet him. And we were told it is not possible, because he is a pilgrim, and a pilgrim is not discussing. So we had to accept it; but we should write a letter to him. We did! Priests are not masters in speaking shortly, (laughter) and also in not writing shortly; but we know modern CEO's like to have only one sheet of paper before them. They have not much time to study sheets, and sheets, and sheets; so we urged ourselves to bring it on one sheet, all our points; and to make the Pope know what is moving us. (Laughter) Seven months later we got an answer; not we, but our archbishop in Vienna, because we must not exist officially; so therefore we cannot receive a letter. (Laughter) We have sent it but we cannot receive an answer - yes, very interesting experiences. Yes! And the archbishop was told to tell us that, "There are no questions, because the answers are there for decades, for centuries. The answers in place are enough; and may God bless us." (Laughter)

And, then, I had an invitation to lunch by the papal nuncio in Vienna. He wanted to hear directly what's moving us. It was in this year (Archbishop) Edmond Farhat. Edmond Farhat was born in Lebanon. He is a member of the Maronite Church; and it will be important in some seconds, so keep in mind the Maronite Church and at the end of this lunch he asked me two strange questions. The first one was: "Father Helmut Schuller, could you tell me what are the problems of the Romans with the optional celibacy?" I was very astonished about this question of the nuncio; and until I found words for my astonishment, he told me, "You must know I am a member of the priests and bishops of the Maronite Church, which is part of our Church, situated in the Middle East, such as the Greek Catholic Church, and so on. In our Church we have married and unmarried priests officially; and we have no problems with it." And then I asked him - then I found some words - (Laughter) and I said, "Excellency, please tell it not to me, tell it at the top of the Church. It must be much easier for you to get some answers than I." And then the second strange

question was, "Why do you not go to Rome?" (Laughter) So, I phoned my colleagues of the board of the *Priests' Initiative*; and they said we should go there. So I took this precious book, *Aurium Pontificem*, of all the offices of the Vatican - it has all the email addresses and numbers, and I wrote a lot of emails to all of the offices, congregations and councils. "We want to speak with you because the Papal Nuncio of Vienna has recommended it to you." (Laughter)

We received a direct answer. We were invited by the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith - CDF, as you say in the United States, the CDF - and, yes, we should come. There will be a dialogue. So we started to go to Rome. And the morning we arrived, I got a phone call at my cell phone from the CDF that it is a pity, but we have to cancel this meeting out of problems with time. So, I phone our archbishop Schönborn from Vienna, "It is really difficult now, archbishop. We came there because the papal nuncio told us to come there. We had arranged one meeting; and this meeting is cancelled now. What can we do?" And he told me, "To wait a little bit, and I will try to find out what is going on." And then he phoned me again, and he told me that, "On the same morning you arrived here, all offices of the Vatican were forbidden to speak to you." So I am very experienced in this thing. (Laughter) So the Vatican, it was the state secretary, as I was told later, was not only afraid that one of us could speak to you, they were also afraid that one of us could speak to the Congregations of the Vatican. Okay, but the issue was brought before the pope; and the pope has decided one of those should speak with us, surprisingly the CDF. So we were back at phase one of this play.

Minutes after that information, my cell phone rang again; here is the CDF, "We are happy to tell you that the problems this time are solved. (Laughter) We can meet one another." So we met for two hours. We had the occasion to give a report about our experiences as pastors. We had decided not to do an abstract theological discussion. We wanted to deliver and to provide them with pastors experience; and our partner was Archbishop Luis Ladaria Ferrer, a Spanish Jesuit, who is speaking fluently German, which made our conversation really simple; and he is the *sacred aurio*, which means in Italian, the man who is running the congregation for the prefect, who was then, you know, William Lavada, I think. So he listened to us for one and a half hours, very open minded, very polite, very humble. At the end I asked him, "Is there something in what we are saying which is against the teaching of our Church, in its substance against our faith?" And he said "Not really. Interesting questions, but you should have discussed with your bishops in Austria." (Laughter) But at the end of our meeting, because during the meeting there sat beside this Archbishop Luis Ladaria Ferrer a young priest, and at the end of this meeting he started to speak to us that all of the ideas we have are against the teaching of the Church; it's not necessary we should do it; we should finish it in the presence of his chief, because the chief was overlord over him.

So we were very astonished. Ladaria Ferrer said nothing anymore, only smiled a little bit. And I remember the impression when Cardinal Schönborn was reporting to us about the pre-consultations of the conclave now last March. He said in his pre-consultations that between the cardinals, one cardinal stood up and said "I am feeling very badly in my congregation, because I feel mobbed by this young priest in my congregation. Do you understand mobbed, to get mobbed? Mobbing is a very common English word in Austria, but I am astonished some of my American friends do not understand mobbing. It means to exclude someone, to bring someone outside in a classroom, at the work place, etc, etc, etc. So this cardinal feels mobbed by this young cleric he has in his office.

So my impression is a worldwide government is essentially governed by people who are known by none of us. They are from the movements: *Legionnaires of Christ*, *Opus Dei*, *Comuni Libertazione*, and *Opus without Dei*. (Laughter) It is a new spiritual family, but also at the right wing of the Church, like we say, politely. That is the situation. They are controlling the correspondence; they are preparing the documents; and they are deciding to whom their chiefs are speaking to. Yes, but only in brackets now. And then we moved on. We did a little resume, and then we said we have to do the next step. And then we published our call with this terrifying, shocking word: disobedience, out of three fundamental reasons.

The first reason is, we are realizing more and more that we are asked for obedience in a Church, and by the leaders of the Church, who are not controlled by anyone. We have no balance of control. We are asked for obedience, firstly, the priests, and then, you the faithful; but nobody is allowed to ask our leaders for their decision making, for what they are doing, or not doing. It's a mysterious situation,

because, also, because in the monasteries of our Church tradition, there is balance of power. Abbots are elected. They are accountable to the monks and to the convent; and if things are going wrong the monks have the possibility to elect another abbot; and the former one gets a nice goodbye. (Laughter) Obedience without control of those who are who are asking for it, and who are commanding it, that is, our impression, a very mysterious thing; and we, as Austrians and Germans, we know about what we are speaking. Obedience functioning from the top to the bottom - and I can't imagine to say disobedience is addressing the systems heart - but we are warning all who are terrified, "Don't be so afraid. There are much, much, much more victims of obedience than of disobedience in our history." (Applause)

The second reason was we have the impression that our obedience is used by the leaders of our Church to keep down the legitimate desires and expectations of the People of God in Church reform. (Applause) It's used that we should not be advocates of our communities, but commanders from the top to the bottom, and to tell you why what is not possible. That was the second reason. We have to pay attention, as priests that we not begin to start to betray the People of God of their legitimize expectations and desires, out of being afraid for our own standing, for our own good relations with the leaders of our Church. We have to stand up for a very clear dispute.

And the third reason was that we are realizing that we are daily practicing silently disobedience in our pastoral work:

- We are breaking Church law and Church order for inviting the remarried and divorced to the Holy Communion.
- We are breaking Church law and Church order in voluntarily letting the lay people take part in decision making of our parish communities.
- We are breaking Church law and Church order when we are reaching out for the communities of the other Christian Churches to act together with us the holy will of Jesus, and so on, and so on.

As long as this disobedience is practiced silently none of the bishops have any problem with it. (Laughter) And the moment we are speaking out and saying we have to speak out clearly what we are doing because it is unhealthy to leave it at that level: the practical silent one at the first level, and the official one is silent about this practice at the second level. It's dysfunctional; and therefore we founded it important to this provocative terrifying step to say, "We do not want to be obedient in the way the bishops are asking us. And we have built up this appeal on our Christian teaching about obedience, to which we are first owing God, secondly to our conscience, and thirdly to the authorities; but not only to the authorities, but in the thinking of the Second Vatican Council also in front of the People of God." (Applause)

So maybe you will not understand up to now also what's really the reason for this terrifying, shocking, disobedience word; but maybe you have now a better understanding what could have moved us to do that step. But afterwards the things went around. There was at the beginning a very angry reaction of our bishops, if we could be seen as priests any more of this Church, if we should not become excommunicated from this Church. But slowly and slowly, the bishops realized in Austria that our decision has some very vast support, a very strong support, from the side of the People of God. It is almost 80% of such independent opinion surveys have told us, and also on the side of the priests. Most of the priests are agreeing with us, not all of them, with this terrifying disobedience word, but with the whole content of our appeal; and yes, they want to join us. That is another story. So sometimes we think we will also do the work. Okay, you can do it also when you are 430 out of 3,500 priests in Austria, as roughly spoken, 15%. When our bishops were very angry; and they told us this disobedience word is the real problem, that they can move on with a reform of Church. I asked them, "Why do you not move on with those almost 3,000 priests who have not signed up to appeal for disobedience, the obedient priests you could go on with them." And deep in my heart I have to question, "What has the People of God, the people of the Church got for its obedience in the last decades?" That was our arguments and all the things.

So what is the situation now? We found friends at the priests' side in a lot of countries. We started to build up an international network. We had special relations with the *Association of Catholic Priests in Ireland*. With the *Association of Catholic Priests in the United States*, in Great Britain, in France, in Switzerland, in Germany, and Australia, and with a lot of single priests, not of organization of priests, in all the other continents of the worldwide Church. (Applause) In October we will have a meeting in Austria. We invited all the friends and colleagues in this organization to come together, and to explore, and to

discuss what could be the potentials of an international cooperation of speaking out as priests on an international level. Let's see what will go on.

We had a very important support by Pope Benedict XVI on the Holy Thursday in 2012, because when he was preaching on this specific date to the priests of the world in the St. Peter's Cathedral, he started his preaching with addressing us the group with this Call to Disobedience; and he asked us some questions, very critical, but also appreciating that our source could be serious and true. He did it because he was urged, as I was informed, by the German bishops who were afraid that this disobedience stuff and priests initiatives could spill over to Germany; (Laughter) and it could be fine when the pope could ban it before. But he didn't ban us. So out of what reasons whatever, he didn't.

Yes, that is a little overlook about our issues our desires; also about the history of our Priests' Initiative; and at the ground of all that is the decision was that we decided to start our clear and outspoken advocacy for the people of the Church.

And therefore I am appreciating it very much to be with you here, because I think you are part of this people of the Church; and we are sharing, as I have felt in your reactions during this speech, we are sharing a lot of these problems and issues; and we should find the way to move the things forward. But, let me say, one is directing all the change and that is the Spirit of God. (Applause) And therefore we have to respect which contributions of our thinking would be helpful for her to lead this change. (Loud applause) Because, as you know in the Bible, Yahweh in the Hebrew language is a female word; and, therefore, the Spirit you are wondering what will she do. We tried to give contributions to this change, to this necessary change. The real changes will be brought by Him; and lets pray to God that we, with all our reflections and praying, our discussing, and our seeking, and looking for, are part of this change.

So I thank you very much for your attention up to now, and for your patience with Austrian English. (Laughter) I tried my best to find the right words for what I wanted to say to you; but in these meetings I always have a kind of Pentecostal feeling, (Laughter) that across the borders of our languages, we are agreeing very perfectly concerning all the things we are speaking of, and the sorrows of our Church. So a lot of thanks to you for having paid attention to me; and let us now enter the second chapter, coming from the monologue to the dialogue, and from monologue to conversation, a short one, but an important one, I think. Thank you very much. (Applause)

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