

KEEP PERSEVERING!

I admit that writing an article about the Church in Germany amid the current turbulent and often conflict-ridden situation in the world is not easy for me.

But I smile when I read what the taz – a left-wing daily newspaper from Berlin – recently wrote about the Pope's greeting to the Association of Exorcists in Rome: 'Without the crucifixes in Bavarian classrooms, would the pupils be unable to see the blackboard because of all the sulphurous smoke?!'

'Of course they would!' I have to say. And at the same time, I am reading Anselm Grün's new book entitled: *'Resisting and Growing – The Power of Darkness in Our Time – and How We Can Counter It!'* A book about the demons of the present day, which we encounter not only in our personal lives, but which also shape our society: the flood of communications, the instrumentalisation of spirituality, the absolutisation of economics, our own ego, dogmatism, the pressure to perform, the pressure to present ourselves, the lack of compassion, blindness, the polarisation of society – these are the chapter headings. And the list could easily be extended: poverty and war, ignorance towards refugees, acceleration at all levels, or excessive marketing in AI, as my son recently told me. This is how the present day presents itself.

But how can people become whole and healthy, free and happy, and what strengthens the necessary resilience that we so often talk about? And what does that mean for faith and for an institution like the Church, which, as part of society, would like to be 'demon-free' and exclusively focused on life? Well, this analysis also remains difficult. Too many experts have addressed the question in various studies, but the diagnoses and answers vary considerably. Some speak of secularisation, which simply no longer allows for any search for or even assumption of 'added value' in faith. The range of options available is too extensive, even without faith, to be able to live responsibly and meaningfully. Others, on the other hand, see this loss of faith as a reduction in quality of life, which is also clearly noticeable within the churches. The approximately 10 per cent of people who still go to church on Sundays not only suffer from this, but also occasionally complain about an overly liberal church that has forgotten the Gospel.

However, and the latter usually admit this too, the reduced passion for many things related to faith and the church has its own history. And in this history, the church (in both denominations, incidentally, ie: protestant and catholic) is seen as a community that is catching up on its learning, which, on the Catholic side, among other things, has created an almost unbridgeable gap between itself and the people due to its hierarchical structure – even though it continues to play a privileged role in relation to the German state. The divide is so wide that it was only at the height of the so-called 'abuse crisis' from 2010 onwards that the officials and bishops responsible finally realised that their claim to credibility was almost beyond repair.

The existential plight of officials and institutions was followed, in addition to the well-known and widely read studies, by the Synodal Path in Germany from 2019 onwards. The bishops decreed repentance and renewal, called on the laity for help, and negotiated until 2023 the issues that now also play or have played a role in Rome and at the World Synod: power and the separation of powers, sexual morality, the priestly way of life, and the role of women.

In intensive and live-broadcast debates, recommendations, resolutions, votes and compromises were discussed and reached, and the establishment of a synodal council was envisaged, in which bishops and lay people would work together on a permanent basis – however, its establishment is still pending. With a degree of understanding, the nearly thirty bishops sought a way back to the people, to perceive their concerns and needs and to play a role in their lives again with their message. Whether and how sustainably this will succeed remains largely open.

In this context, Norbert Mette, Roman Catholic theologian and professor emeritus at the University of Dortmund, will give a lecture in Nuremberg on the 30th anniversary of the Church People's Movement, which will once again outline the context, mood and culture as well as the guidelines of the official church that still give the Church People's Movement its justified significance today. It can be assumed that he will look back to the Second Vatican Council and recall the upheavals of the 1970s. But he will also look back on

many years marked by stagnation or conflicts over pregnancy counselling or the dogmatic exclusion of women from the priesthood.

What can already be anticipated is this: the topics of the Synodal Path in Germany in 2020 were those that the church reform movement put on the agenda in 1995 with more than 1.8 million signatures and which it has pursued with great perseverance ever since.

However, after 25 years of commitment, will the younger generation continue to pursue these internal church reforms with the same passion? In Germany, it would be difficult to find a young woman or man who would be willing to campaign as vehemently for the 'diaconate of women' or the abolition of compulsory celibacy as the church reform movement did. Instead, they will look for a place where their abilities are appreciated and welcomed. Equality and gender justice included. Most applicants are no longer looking for a place below this standard. Not in our society. And not in the Church either.

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