



FRIDAYFAX 2.0

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Joseph Ratzinger: Every House Can Be Transformed into a Small Church

VATICAN CITY. In a speech held on the 7th of Feb. 2007, "Benedict XVI" the current Pope, spoke to a general audience about Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple active in the early Church. It included - for a Roman Catholic audience - a few quite explosive statements like: **every home can be transformed into a small church; Aquila and Priscilla are a model of the church of all times; husband and wife teams can – and should be – part of an apostolic Mission.** Commentators make this to mean that he is actually saying: **housechurch-leaders like Priscilla and Aquila are the key for the growth of the Church.**



In a 2005 edition of the Fridayfax, we printed this quote:

"We might have to part with the notion of a popular Church. It is possible that we are on the verge of a new era in the history of the Church, under circumstances very different from those we have faced in the past, when Christianity will resemble the mustard seed that is, will continue only in the form of small and seemingly insignificant groups, which yet will oppose evil with all their strength and bring Good into this world."

(These words, from a 1996 book written by the then Josef Cardinal Ratzinger: *Salt of the Earth*, were not included in the English translation but in the original German language. They created such a flap in Germany at the time the book was published that they were omitted in subsequent translations.)

Now in 2007, Joseph Ratzinger is getting much more outspoken on the role of the homes. We take and report this as one of many examples of leaders of traditional churches that positively try to come to grips with the current reformational movement of God towards recovering the homes as the valid expression of church, which they were in biblical times as well. Here a few excerpts of his address. (The full version can be retrieved at www.zenit.org, 7th February, 2007.)

"Dear Brothers and Sisters,

today we consider a married couple. The couple in question are Priscilla and Aquila, who have their place among the circle of numerous collaborators drawn to the apostle Paul. Based on the information we have, this married couple developed a very active role at the time of the origins of the Church. The names of Aquila and Priscilla are Latin, but the man and woman who bear them were of Jewish origin. However, Aquila, at least, came geographically from the Diaspora of northern Anatolia, which overlooks the Black Sea, in what is now Turkey; while Priscilla, whose name is sometimes abbreviated to Prisca, was probably a Jew originating from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2). In any case, it is from Rome that they arrive at Corinth, where Paul met them at the beginning of the 50s; there he became associated with them, since, as Luke tells us, they also practiced Paul's trade of tentmakers for domestic use, and he was even welcomed into their home (cf. Acts 18:3).

In a second moment, they move to Ephesus, in Asia Minor. There they played a decisive role in completing the formation of the Alexandrian Jew, Apollo. Since he only had a superficial knowledge of the Christian faith, "Priscilla and Aquila heard him, then took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). When the apostle Paul writes his First Letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus, together with his characteristic greetings, he explicitly mentions "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church at their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19).

In this way we come to know the hugely important role this couple played in the sphere of the primitive Church: that of welcoming in their own home the group of local Christians when they got together to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. It is precisely that type of gathering that in Greek is called "ekklesia" - the Latin word is "ecclesia" - that means assembly, gathering. So, in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, the Church gets together, the Church summoned by Christ.

In this way we can see the very birth of the reality of the Church in the homes of the believers. Christians, in

fact, until around the third century, did not have their own places of worship... (but) they gather in the homes of Christians, which in this way become "Church."

In the first half of the first century as in the second century, Christian houses become true and proper "church." As I have said, they read Scripture together and celebrated the Eucharist. That was what used to happen, for example, in Corinth, where Paul mentions a certain "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church" (Romans 16:23), or in Laodicea, where the community would get together in the house of a certain Nympha (Colossians 4:15), or in Colossae, where the gathering would take place in the house of a certain Archippus (cf. Philemon 2). Having subsequently returned to Rome, Aquila and Priscilla continue to develop that most precious function in the capital of the empire as well. Paul, in fact, writing to the Romans, sends this precise greeting: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house" (Romans 16:3-5). What extraordinary praise is found in these words! And it is the apostle Paul, no less, who offers it! He explicitly recognizes in them two true and important collaborators of his apostolate.

In this way, the memory of a woman who has surely been an active person of great value in the history of Roman Christianity is perpetuated. One thing is certain: Together with the gratitude of those first Churches, of which Paul speaks, our own must be added, since due to the faith and apostolic commitment of faithful lay people, of families, of married couples such as Priscilla and Aquila, Christianity has reached our generation. And it is always in this way that the Church grows. In particular, this couple proves just how important the action of Christian spouses is. When these are supported by faith and a strong spirituality, their courageous commitment to and in the Church becomes natural. Their daily community of life is prolonged and somehow sublimated in the taking on of a public responsibility for the good of the Body of Christ, even if just a small part of it. This is how it was in the first generation and this is how it will often be.

One further lesson we cannot neglect to take from their example: Every house can be transformed into a small church. Not only in the sense that, therein, Christian love, typically made of altruism and mutual care, should reign, but even more in the sense that the whole of family life, founded on faith, is called to revolve around the sole lordship of Jesus Christ. For this reason we honour Aquila and Priscilla as models of conjugal life, responsibly committed to the service of the entire Christian community. And we find in them the model of the Church, the family of God for all times."

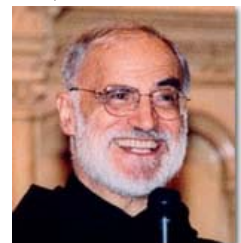
(A week later – 14th Feb 2007 - Ratzinger spoke more on the role of women in the church. Amongst others he quotes Gal 3:28 and says: "All are united in the same nature, though each one with specific functions (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30). The Apostle Paul admits as something normal that woman can "prophesy" in the Christian community (1 Corinthians 11:5), that is, pronounce herself openly under the influence of the Holy Spirit, on the condition that it is for the edification of the community and in a dignified manner. Therefore, the famous exhortation 'the women should keep silence in the churches' must be relativized...')



Joseph Ratzinger is by far not the only one within the Roman Catholic Church that encourages the role of housechurches. **Dr. Klaus Küng**, Family-Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in St. Pölten, Austria, has even initiated a "Movement Housechurch" ("Bewegung Hauskirche") that actively initiates "ecclesia domestica", as housechurches are called in the II Vaticanum. Starting point for Küng is that church is the "family of God" and that housechurch is a holistic pursuit of humanity and holiness, a christian life in word and example, a "school of developed humanity marked by caring love towards the young, sick and old, helping each other daily, sharing of material goods, joys and sorrows" (as written in a papal

memo called 'Familiaris Consortio'. (See their website – in German only – at www.hauskirche.at)

A few years back, I had lunch with **Raniero Cantalamessa**, since 1980 until today the official "preacher to the papal Household" and asked him: "Raniero, are there many in your church that have heard from God about a rediscovery of the homes as the natural and biblical place for the church?" And he said: "Many, literally at all levels of our structures."



In the future, we will most probably see every possible church, denomination and mission structure not only hearing from God about his original design of ekklesia – part of which is the housechurch - but trying to respond, initiating their own ways of re-approaching an often long-lost truth, even if it contradicts own traditions and decrees. This is one more clear sign that God is calling the entire church back to its roots, its original DNA, and making it to remember the rock from which she was hewn. And if this is possible in the very structured Roman Catholic Church, it may also be possible in any other church or denomination.