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Vatican newspaper says Kung letter lacks charity

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- A recent "open letter" by Swiss Fr. Hans Küng to the world's bishops is off target in its criticism of Pope Benedict XVI and shows a lack of charity, an article in the Vatican newspaper said.

Fr. Pier Giordano Cabra, the former editor of Küng's works in Italian, said Küng's letter focused almost exclusively on reforming church structures rather than on renewing the hearts of church members and promoting their ongoing conversion.

Küng, in a letter distributed by The New York Times Syndicate April 16, said Pope Benedict has worsened relations with Anglicans, Jews and Muslims and failed to give adequate responses to modern problems such as AIDS and the challenges of new scientific discoveries.

Regarding the sex abuse crisis, Küng said many people expect a personal apology from Pope Benedict, who he said had helped engineer a "worldwide system of covering up cases of sexual crimes committed by clerics" when he headed the Vatican's doctrinal congregation.

With the clerical sex abuse scandal "crying out to heaven," Küng wrote, "the handling of these cases has given rise to an unprecedented leadership crisis and a collapse of trust in church leadership." The church, he said, "now finds itself in the worst credibility crisis since the Reformation."

Küng taught with the future pope in Germany in the 1960s and had his permission to teach as a Catholic theologian revoked by the Vatican in 1979.

Vatican officials and many bishops have credited Pope Benedict -- when he was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith -- with creating much stricter guidelines for dealing with abusive priests and easing procedures for removing them from the priesthood.

Cabra's brief article in *L'Osservatore Romano* April 23, written as an open letter to the Swiss theologian, did not get into Küng's claims about the handling of clerical sex abuse but instead focused on the theologian's assertions about Pope Benedict, the way he runs the Vatican and his reading of the Second Vatican Council.

The Italian priest also took issue with the tone of Küng's letter, which he said lacked charity.

"Truth is necessary, but 'the greatest of these is love,' which generously recognizes the work of others, which neither opposes nor divides (and) which does not highlight faults," Father Cabra wrote.

"Perhaps if your letter reflected a little more of the hymn to charity, it would have been a more elegantly evangelical greeting" to the world's bishops "and a more fruitful contribution to the church, which is suffering because of the weaknesses of its sons," he said.

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