



SIEBENQUELL

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## »Yet I taught Ephraim to walk.«

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SOURCE: WWW.LITIA.DE

*The most unsettling and disquieting experience of my last year, was the moment when I participated in a gathering to discuss the future of the Church. It was utterly disheartening. The session started with accusations, outrage and criticism. This was followed by demands and wishes for a different Church. These demands were, for the most part, populist or utopian in nature and not very well considered as to their advisability, let alone their viability. The entire evening left me cold. Repeatedly I asked; who is supposed to deliver all these dreams? Who is supposed to make all this happen? What are we willing to invest to make such a vision of Church possible? In the months that have passed since that encounter, I am still waiting for a single answer.*

*Like so many people in our culture and our generation, these people are obsessed with the finished product and the result. They want and demand new life. They were far less concerned with the process, evolution and unfolding of new life. They were solely focused on the desired outcome.*

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*The prophet Hosea lived in a time of turmoil and crisis that easily rivals and surpasses what we are facing at the moment. The very foundations of religious life and faith were shaken by corruption, and the institutions of the faith were unreliable and deeply flawed. Hosea was deeply shaken by these developments, but he did not develop a spirituality of outrage. In his wondrous book, he speaks a difficult word, swathed in such harmless sounding language.*

**»Yet, I taught Ephraim to walk«. (Hosea 11, 3)**

*God was profoundly disappointed and hurt by his people. Yet he lovingly and tenderly speaks of his relationship to them and employs a foundational image of family life to do so: teaching a child to walk. Yet, teaching a child to walk requires a number of things, and God is will to do them all. Faced with great problems in our Church, the question will have to be answered eventually: Will we follow God's lead?*

**1. First, we must exercise patience.** *Patience means that we are willing to offer time and space to another that we ourselves do not require. After all, we can already walk and we require neither the time nor the space to practice such a basic, natural and certain aspect of our lives. However, God is willing to do this to give us the time and the space to learn and grow beyond your helplessness. The question that always goes hand in hand with this is whether we are willing to do the same for each other and for others.*

**2. Secondly, teaching a child to walk requires repetition.** *No one learns to walk during his or her very first attempt. It is a process of constant practice over a long period of weeks and months. It is a repetitive process of stumbling, swaying, falling and starting all over again. God is willing to do this for his people. The question is, are we?*

**3. Thirdly, to teach a child to walk is a process of accompaniment.** *The adults walk alongside the child, hold both hands, stabilize, and to make frequent stops so that the child can readjust his or her balance. Accompaniment requires people of the long stride to take small steps. This is what we do for the child. It is not possible to accompany a child if we refuse to adapt our much faster pace to their decidedly slower one. To accompany a child it to let the child set the pace, according to what he or she is able to accomplish at any given time. God is willing to do this for his people. Are we?*

**4. Fourthly, to teach a child to walk is a process of judgment.** *We have to discern the moment when we finally let go of their tiny hands. We have to decide when we allow the child to make the attempt without our interference. At the same time, we have to stay close enough to ensure that no real harm comes to the child while he or she is testing his or her legs. Furthermore, we have to discern where problems, hindrances and struggles still exist, which the child is not yet ready to tackle. Learning to take your first steps does not mean you are ready to take the stairs. God is willing to do this for his people. Are we?*

**5. Fifthly and finally, teaching a child to walk is a process that must end in autonomy.** *Otherwise, we have failed. It is never the goal to make the child utterly dependent upon us if he or she wishes to walk. At some point, the child will need to walk on his or her own. The child will need the parent for many other things, but not for walking. Included in this genuine*

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*autonomy, is the freedom of our children to choose where they walk (including away from the parents), the paths they will take, the direction they will set and the pace with which they choose to move. God is willing to do this for his people. Are we?*

*This is the path of God with his people in order to aid them in reaching a greater freedom, a greater maturity. It is a relationship forged of patience, repetition, accompaniment, judgement and autonomy. Will this be our path through the brokenness and immaturity within our Church? Or will we sit back and demand changes, reforms and renewal for which we ourselves will invest nothing, all the while criticizing others for failing to realise and deliver our demands?*

*Outrage, bitterness and disappointment are deeply human emotions, but they alone cannot fuel or fashion an authentic Christian life. However, prophetic existence can. Moreover, that prophetic way of living in the messy, broken and battered world consists of patience, repetition, accompaniment, judgement and autonomy. It is how God changed the world. It is how God saved the world.*

*Will we follow God's lead?*

**Erik Riechers SAC**

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