

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Worldpremiere at DOK.fest Munich 2019



A documentary by Christoph Röhl

Theatrical Release Germany: 31th OCTOBER 2019

PRESS KIT



TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original Title: DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
Country of Production: Germany
Year of Production: 2019
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Subtitles: English, German

LOGLINE

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH tells the story of a man who has dedicated his life to preserving the Church but instead led it into its greatest crisis: Joseph Ratzinger, the German Pope Benedict XVI. The documentary analyses the ideological, cultural and organizational failings of an institution that claims to proclaim the absolute truth as it struggles to come to terms with modern democratic society that has accepted diversity and pluralism as fundamental rights.

SYNOPSIS

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH tells the story of a man who has dedicated his life to preserving the Church but instead led it into its greatest crisis: Joseph Ratzinger, the German Pope Benedict XVI. During his 30 years working within the Vatican he was the key figure in restoring fundamental Catholic doctrine after a brief period of modernization in the 1960s. The interview partners, who have all worked within the clerical system, describe how Ratzinger's policies contributed to the dramatic loss of moral authority that the Church suffers from today. The film deals with Ratzinger's past to understand his mind-set. We treat his key advisors – many of who were involved in the cover-up of the global child sex abuse crisis and were implicated in corruption scandals. This is an epic story, with a tragic hero in the central role. Ratzinger, who believed that truth could exclusively be found in the teachings of Catholic Church and that contemporary society was lost if it did not rediscover its Catholic values, was forced in a moment of heightened crisis to acknowledge that his greatest enemies were inside the Church, even amongst his inner circle. By the time that he became aware of his errors, he found himself surrounded by chaos and enemies, his whole world crumbling around him.

"Although I am not a believer, I have always been fascinated by the extraordinary appeal of the worldwide Catholic Church. Many think that Ratzinger's resignation drew a line under the manifold problems and crises of the institutional church. I see this differently because the crises that appeared during Benedict's pontificate had systemic origins – and continue to exist today. Ratzinger's departure has a symbolic meaning that goes far beyond his own person and raises essential questions about the abuse of power in all undemocratic, authoritarian and patriarchal systems."

Christoph Röhl



PROTAGONISTS

Doris Wagner, Germany

Theologian and former religious sister

For eight years she lived as a consecrated woman in an ecclesiastical movement called “The Work” that maintained close relationships with Joseph Ratzinger. After leaving this intensely secretive ultra-conservative Catholic community, she wrote about her experiences in two best-selling books.

Archbishop Charles Scicluna, Malta

Chief prosecutor under Ratzinger

He was "Promotor Iustitiae" (Chief Prosecutor) under Cardinal Ratzinger at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was appointed by Ratzinger in 2002 and ever since has been responsible for dealing with all cases of clerical sex abuse from around the world. In 2004 he was ordered by Joseph Ratzinger to investigate the abuser and founder of the Legionaries of Christ, Father Marcial Maciel.

Archbishop Georg Gänswein, Vatican

Private Secretary of Pope Benedict XVI.

As private secretary of Pope Benedict XVI, he experienced all the ups and downs of Benedict's eight-year pontificate. Since the resignation of Benedict XVI, Gänswein has remained the private secretary to the emeritus pope, but is also Prefect of the Papal Household under Pope Francis.

Tony Flannery, Ireland

Priest (Redemptorist)

Because of his "heretical" interpretation of the church doctrine he came into conflict with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. When he refused to revise his views in 2012, he was suspended as a priest.

Prof. Dr. Hermann Häring, Germany

Theologian

As a student of Professor Joseph Ratzinger in Tübingen, he witnessed first hand Ratzinger's reaction to the 1968 Revolution. Presently, he is Emeritus Professor of Theology and is considered to be an expert on Ratzinger's theology.

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Beinert, Germany

Theologian and long-time confidant of Joseph Ratzinger

He was Ratzinger's assistant during the student revolt of 1968 in Tübingen. After this tumultuous event, he chose to move with Ratzinger to the University of Regensburg. To this day he has remained in close contact with Joseph Ratzinger and belongs to Ratzinger's famed “Studentenkreis,” a group of former students and colleagues.

Thomas P. Doyle, USA

Religious priest (Dominican) and Canon Lawyer

He worked in the Apostolic Nunciature (the Vatican Embassy) in Washington D.C., where his job was to vet prospective bishops. He was one of the first to draw attention to sexual abuse by Catholic priests and is known worldwide for his advocacy for victims' rights.

Klaus Mertes, Germany

Jesuit Priest

As headmaster of the Jesuit school Canisius-College in Berlin he played a decisive role in revealing the extent of the cover-up of child sex abuse in Germany. His actions were viewed with suspicion by the Church hierarchy, but in the secular world he has received various honours, including an honorary doctorate from the University of Freiburg.

Xavier Léger, France

Former member of the Legionaries of Christ

He started training as a priest with the Legionaries of Christ. He left the Legionaries after becoming aware that it was run like a cult, in which members' lives and minds were being controlled. He sees himself as a victim of "spiritual abuse", but has since rebuilt his life by marrying and having children.

Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, Austria

Journalist

She has been a correspondent for the London church magazine *The Tablet* for thirty years and is considered an expert on the Catholic Church. She is based in Vienna and is generally known as "Mrs Tab Vienna".

Pablo Pérez Guajardo, Mexico

Former priest of the Legionaries of Christ

For twenty years he worked alongside the Legionary founder Marcial Maciel in Rome. He witnessed first hand how Maciel corrupted Vatican officials and Cardinals, including Ratzinger. After the scandals came to light, he left the Legionaries of Christ but he still practices as a priest in Mexico.

Emiliano Fittipaldi, Italy

Journalist

In his many articles in the newspaper *L'Espresso* he has laid bare the corruption at the Vatican. In the second Vatileaks affair, he was charged with publishing secret documents and summoned to appear in front of the Vatican court.

Marie Collins, Ireland

Former member of the Vatican Child Protection Commission

Since the 1990s she has been a worldwide advocate for victims of child sex abuse. She was invited by Pope Francis to join the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to find ways to improve how cases of clerical child sex abuse are dealt with. In 2017, she resigned in protest, citing an intense culture of resistance within the Vatican.

TEAM

Author & Director:	Christoph Röhl
Cinematography:	Juan Sarmiento G., Julia Weingarten
Editor:	Martin Reimers
Sound Engineers:	Sebastian Kleinloh, Fabio Fortunati
Music:	Ali N. Askin
Script & Editing Consultant:	Anne Fabini
Project Consultant:	Matthias Katsch
Comissioning Editors:	Udo Bremer (ZDF/3sat) Rolf Bergmann (rbb)
Creative Producer:	Katharina Bergfeld Nadja Smith
Producer:	Martin Heisler
Distributor Germany:	Joachim Kühn
World Sales Agent:	Elina Kewitz



Christoph Röhl (Author & Director)



Born in UK in 1967. He studied History and German in Manchester, and later studied directing at the German Film Academy in Berlin, Germany. His films have won numerous international awards and were released in cinemas in Europe. In 2014 he was presented with the *World Childhood Foundation Award* by Queen Silvia of Sweden, in recognition for his "outstanding work in raising awareness of child sex abuse". Röhl is a founding member of the Met Film School, the largest film school in the UK.

FILMOGRAPHY (selection)

- 2019 **DEFENDER OF THE FAITH** (Writer, Director)
Feature Documentary, Flare Film with ZDF/3sat & rbb
- 2018 **KAISERSTURZ** (Director)
TV-Film, 90mins, ZDF, Cast: Sylvester Groth, Sunnyi Melles, Christian Redl
- 2014 **DIE AUERWÄHLTEN / THE CHOSEN ONES** (Director)
TV-Film, 88min, ndf, WDR, Degeto. Cast: Ulrich Tukur, Julia Jentsch
* **Neues Deutsches Fernsehen**, Filmfest München, Nominierung 2014
* **The World Childhood Foundation Award**, The Childhood Foundation, 2014
* **Prix Europa Fernsehpreis Nominierung**, 2014
* **Best Film**, ZOOM Festival de Ficció Internacional TV, 2014
* **First Prize**, Youth Jury, ZOOM Festival de Ficció Internacional TV, 2014
- 2010 **UND WIR SIND NICHT DIE EINZIGEN / WE'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES**
Feature Documentary, 90min, 3Sat
* **Robert-Geissendörfer Preis**, 2012
* **Nominierung Deutscher Fernsehpreis**, 2012



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