
Within the Roman Catholic Church there were in the last decades of the twentieth century two basic attitudes to the Second Vatican Council. The first was that it was the beginning of a reform movement, which could and should continue. The second was that it represented a high-water mark in insubordination, and the sooner flood turned to ebb the better. The latter view prevailed in the Curia, and the former found its most constant and effective champion in Hans Küng. It is the story of his struggle to contend for this ‘disputed truth’, which forms the framework and *Leitmotiv* of this, the second volume in a possible trilogy of autobiography. As he says, rather disarmingly on page 524, ‘I had firmly reckoned on being able to describe the whole second half of my life (1968-2007) in this second volume. But this has proved so complex and full of tensions that I didn’t want to make any cuts which might be at the expense of precision and concreteness. So I am making a break at the year 1980.’

In 1980 Küng was still only 52; and Anglo-Saxon readers may be surprised, not only by the absence of any false modesty, but also by his achievements, his industry and the sheer volume of detailed recall of academic and ecclesiastical infighting. There is something very Germanic (in this case Swiss-Germanic) about this; but then, so is the very concept of the celebrity theologian, which in its modern form depends on a conjunction of widespread fascination with the phenomenon of the post-Conciliar Roman Catholic Church, the social and academic prestige of the German professorate, and mastery of modern means of communication. ‘I have media at my disposal which reach further than episcopal pastoral letters. On 12 September 1971 I give the *New Zealand Herald* an extensive interview…’ (p. 205). Küng presents his story in an eminently readable, racy and at times rather journalistic historic present (admirably translated by the late John Bowden). I found myself on occasion putting down a novel in order to get back to the next exciting instalment.

An opening chapter, provocatively entitled ‘Roman Provocations’, gives examples of curial and papal entrenchment in power structures and on clerical celibacy, credal formulations, mixed marriages and contraception. It is followed by an analysis of the cultural revolution of 1968, especially in Germany, and of the differing reactions in church and university. It is clear where his sympathies lie. The book is dedicated not to the Church of Rome but to ‘the University of Tübingen, my place of work for five decades in great gratitude.’
On the other hand, he writes of ‘repression’ in the US and England and of the ‘taming’ of the church in the Low Countries; and he discovers that the Roman Inquisition, re-styled the Doctrinal Congregation, has had a secret file on him since 1957. Its latent hostility comes into the open after the publication in 1970 of his *Infallible? An Enquiry*. That question mark is unforgivable – and unforgiven. From now on his life is dominated by the struggle between the rival claims of the pursuit of truth and of the exercise of authority, of the individual scholar and of institutional power. The battle is of titanic proportions; and one can only admire the courage, skill and stamina of Mr Valiant-for-Truth, while noting how irritating he must have been for his adversaries.

He quite self-consciously takes his contemporary, Joseph Ratzinger, as his *Doppelgänger* (double) from their time as friendly companions among the *periti* at the Council and colleagues in Tübingen, through divergence, when Ratzinger left first for Regensburg (‘like a move from Harvard to Idaho State University’ p. 122), then for a bishopric and eventually the Curia, to rapprochement followed by further divergence, as Küng continues to the present day to comment on the controversies, racking the contemporary Church. It would take the pen of a Gogol or a Dostoyevsky to do justice to the inwardness of this relationship. Küng devotes his prologue and much rolling commentary to the description and analysis of a closeness, which like that of two notes not quite in unison can hurt ears and shatter glass. It was the events of 1968, which led Ratzinger to move further back into the Bavarian Catholicism of his boyhood and Küng to move further out into critical engagement with both the church and the world. He makes much of his background in free, neutral and democratic Switzerland; and indeed this reformer reminds me, in personality and even in looks, if not in theology, more of the Swiss Zwingli than of the German Luther or French Calvin.

It is in the context of the debate on *Infallibility* that Küng sets out his basic ecclesiological disagreement with Ratzinger. ‘Can I, like Ratzinger, regard the church and theology of the church fathers in the time after the New Testament … as the criterion for what is Catholic?’ (p. 165) A similar tension between the scriptural and the patristic divides them later on Christology. This is to prove dangerous, as Küng’s repeated demands for reform in the Church are deflected by attacks on his orthodoxy. We get the flavour of his objection to Ratzinger’s approach in, for example, ‘Such a constricted Hellenistic-Roman Catholicism is incapable of a real dialogue with modern philosophy, with science, with democracy as we understand it or indeed with modern theology generally. It is an obstacle to ecumenical understanding, goes against any authentic inculturation, and prevents a formulation of the Christian message