

HANS KÜNG'S CHRISTOLOGY: AN EVALUATION OF ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS

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ONE OF the most successful religious books of our time has been Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*.¹ It has been translated into many languages; it has been reviewed by the popular press and by a large number of theological magazines;² it has been praised as one of the most moving accounts of Christ and of Christianity ever written; and it has been criticized as a betrayal of the Roman Catholic tradition.

I do not propose to review the contents of the book. Let me say briefly that I was moved by its presentation of Christ. The concrete Jesus who appears in these pages is more real than the persons we meet each day, more ideal than the best characters of fiction. It is true that at times Küng engages in exaggeration, in one-sidedness, and in broadsides against hierarchs. Without doubt, this displeases some who are seeking a calm, dispassionate, and scientific account of the Master. However, once one accepts the fact that Küng is writing in order to bring a person alive for modern man, one can begin to see in his rhetoric a device for conveying with feeling and emotion the passionate and vibrant vitality of the man who was Jesus Christ.³

What I propose to do in this article is to set forth and critically comment on some of the basic presuppositions that undergird Küng's Christology. It is true that there is no passage in the work in which Küng himself details the basic ground on which he stands. I believe, however, that a careful reading of *On Being a Christian* reveals that he holds the following four propositions as fundamental to his thought.⁴

¹ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976).

² For reviews by theologians, see *ETL* 52 (1976) 259-60, 446-47; *Greg* 58 (1977) 561-66; *HeyJ* 18 (1977) 436-46; *JES* 14 (1977) 501-2; *JR* 58 (1978) 53-61; *NRT* 97 (1975) 251-66; *RSPT* 59 (1975) 466-68; *TS* 38 (1977) 359-65. A German work that is so critical of Küng that Yves Congar describes it as having the air of an "execution" is the collection of articles entitled *Diskussion über Hans Küngs "Christ sein"* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1976). This work contains criticisms of the German original of *On Being a Christian* by Ratzinger, Kasper, Grillmeier, Balthasar, Rahner, Lehmann, and others.

³ The following quotations from *On Being a Christian* give an idea of the vigorous style which Küng employs. "He [Christ] did not simply passively endure death, but actively provoked it" (335). "Whenever Jesus had to assert God's will in face of the resistance of the powerful—persons, institutions, traditions, hierarchs—he did so aggressively, with no holds barred" (254). "There is nothing in him [Christ] of the prudent diplomat or the churchman ready for compromise and determined to maintain a balance. The Gospels present us with an obviously clear-sighted, resolute, unswerving, and—if necessary—also pugnacious and aggressive and always fearless Jesus" (186).

⁴ The accounts of the basic positions of *On Being a Christian* given at the beginning of

THE STARTING POINT

The starting point for Christology is the real earthly Christ. As Küng puts it, "Would it not perhaps correspond more to the New Testament evidence and to modern man's historical way of thinking if he started out like the first disciples from the real human being Jesus, his historical message and manifestation, his life and fate, his historical reality and historical activity, and then ask about the relationship of this human being Jesus to God, about his unity with the Father."⁵

With this proposition of Küng's I am in hearty agreement. In fact, I would say that Küng is here following the actual journey by which Christology necessarily arose. All human reflection on the mission and nature of any person begins with that person's historical activity. All abstract generalizations about persons inevitably go back to concrete experiences of these persons, either by oneself or by others. Hence, when our generalizations about individuals lose contact with concrete experience, they are invalidated.

Further, previously enunciated theory cannot be well appropriated unless the new appropriator partakes in some way of the experience that gave it birth. Hence students of abstract physics learn the great theories by participating in experiments that enable them to share in the process by which the theories originated. So, too, later Christians must come to grips with the concrete life of Christ if they are to grasp in a vital way his mission and person. The dogmatic assertions of Christology were the end result of a process of prayerful reflection on the life of the earthly Christ in the light of the experience of his risen presence and power. For those who went through the process, these assertions had the living meaning that a summary statement has for the man or woman who makes the summary after going through the detail which underlies it. These assertions were seen to be abstractions, summary presentations of that which was far vaster; hence they gave birth to an existential realization that they were incomplete. One implicitly knew that one could and had to return to the data in order to come up with new answers to new questions.^{5a}

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the manual Christology was that it deprived those who learned it of the process of discovery. Students

each of the four sections of this paper were submitted to Küng in order to make certain that they faithfully rendered his thought. He was kind enough to read them through and to suggest a few minor additions and subtractions. I have incorporated all these suggestions into the summaries. I am grateful to him for his assistance.

⁵ *On Being a Christian* 133.

^{5a} St. Thomas seems to exemplify this process. His systematic Christology in the *Summa theologiae* was preceded by the prayerful reflections on the Gospels manifested in his commentaries. Further, within his systematizing the concrete mysteries of Christ's life found an important place.

learned immediately the summary enunciations of the Church, but they did not realize existentially that these were but a summary. They lacked rooting in the concrete Christ, since the proof-texts which supported the summary were often wrenched out of the living context of Christ's life. They did not see a need to return constantly to the life of Christ for further light on who he was, what he said and did, and what he demanded of his followers. The doctrine of the Church tended to become a dead abstraction; it should have been a partial summary of the concrete activity of a person which continuously awakened the memory of that person and drove students to discover further aspects of the demands he made upon them as the varied paths of their own lives provoked new questions.

In that Hans Küng has so vigorously insisted on beginning his Christology with the real earthly Christ, he has strengthened a movement that has been taking shape in Roman Catholic circles. He has made next to impossible the return to an arid doctrine of Christ that starts with abstract propositions. For this he deserves our gratitude.

THE REAL CHRIST

This real Christ can be partially uncovered with reasonable certitude by modern Scripture scholars. They cannot give us a chronological biography, but they can furnish us with the drives, patterns, and values which characterized the earthly Christ and which are normative for us. Küng tells us: "The stories of Jesus lead us to ask for his real history; not indeed for a continuous biography, but certainly for what really happened. Despite all the difficulties, the preconditions for such an investigation have become easier. This is the result of the modern *historical-critical method*."⁶ Küng goes on to reveal the shortcomings of past views of Christ: the Christ of piety, of dogma, of the enthusiasts, and of literature.⁷ Then he sets forth the sources for a better view⁸ and proceeds to elaborate at length the basic traits of Jesus Christ, his activity and preaching.⁹ The fundamental insight which sums up all else for Küng with regard to Jesus is that

He asserts a completely underived, supremely personal authority. He is not merely an expert or a specialist, like the priests and theologians, but one who—without appealing to any source or argument for his authority—on his own account proclaims in word and deed God's will (=man's well-being), identifies himself with God's cause (=man's cause), is wholly devoted to this cause and thus, without any claim to title or authority, becomes the supremely personal public *advocate of God and man*.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid. 155.

⁷ Ibid. 126-44.

⁸ Ibid. 145-65.

⁹ Ibid. 177-342.

¹⁰ Ibid. 293.

Thus "Jesus is God's advocate . . . in a deeply intimate-existential sense, a personal ambassador, trustee, confidant, friend of God. . . . Jesus seems to be driven on by . . . ultimate reality in all his life and action."¹¹ In the end he dies for the cause for which he so totally lived.¹²

Again, I believe that Küng's position is correct. There is mounting evidence that Scripture scholars are moving toward substantial agreement on the basic drives, patterns, and values present in Christ's earthly life. *Jesus von Nazareth*, Gunther Bornkamm's study along these lines which was written in 1956, is still a standard presentation.¹³ In fact, Bornkamm's updating of this work in a long article written almost twenty years later shows little basic change.¹⁴ Further, a recent summary study of contemporary research on Jesus reveals a wide area of agreement on the nature of his activity and teaching.¹⁵ Walter Kasper's highly acclaimed *Jesus the Christ*¹⁶ is the work of a systematic theologian who has assimilated the basic findings of biblical specialists in this area.¹⁷

It is true that one can disagree with some of the stresses that Küng sees in the life of Christ. It seems at times as if the basic way in which Küng sees Christ as following the will of the Father is by opposing hierarchical figures.¹⁸ However, his fundamental principle is correct: we can uncover the real Christ with reasonable certitude.

VALIDITY OF SUBSEQUENT INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST

A distinction must be made between the historical account of Jesus' life and subsequent interpretations. Such interpretations, whether they appear in the post-NT Church or even in the NT itself, can never have the normative value of the account of Christ's earthly existence. In fact, they have validity only insofar as they express in another context and in other thought patterns the enduring meaning of Christ's earthly life.

Küng's distinction between the historical account of Christ's earthly life and the subsequent interpretation thereof is explicit. "But the question arises quite seriously at least for our historical consciousness: how much in these Gospels is an account of what really happened and how much is interpretation? How do we distinguish between Jesus' own words and deeds and interpretation, supplementation, paschal exaltation or

¹¹ Ibid. 317.

¹² Ibid. 334-42.

¹³ The English translation is G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

¹⁴ "Jesus Christ," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1974.

¹⁵ G. Aulén, *Jesus in Contemporary Historical Research* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

¹⁶ W. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

¹⁷ In a review of these two works (*CBQ* 39 [1977] 583-85) Raymond Brown praises their overall fidelity to the biblical data.

¹⁸ See the last two quotations in n. 3 above.

glorification by the community or the evangelists?"¹⁹ Therefore, when Küng speaks of the reality of Christ's earthly life, he is speaking of the reality as apprehended by the original witnesses. What they saw and grasped was the real Christ. What was subsequently added was interpretation. Hence, we find in the Gospels a mixture of reportage and interpretation. Our problem is to "distinguish between the historical record and its theological interpretation."²⁰

This distinction between the reality grasped by the original witnesses and subsequent interpretation is crucial for Küng. The overriding importance he gives to the original witness of the reality of the earthly Christ accounts in large measure for the misgivings with which he looks upon any postresurrectional interpretation which goes beyond what was manifested to the witnesses of the earthly life. The subsequent Greek shift from the functional Christology of the NT to a Christology of essence is seen as highly questionable.²¹ Even the shift in the later NT books from a stress on the concrete aspects of the earthly Christ to a stress on the incarnation of God's Son in John and in the deutero-Pauline writings is regarded with reserve.²² As he puts it,

the development starting out from the idea of incarnation cannot be viewed without some misgivings. Can it be overlooked that an increasing concentration on the incarnation in Christian theology and piety caused a premature shift of emphasis? A shift of emphasis which was not covered by the original message and which makes an understanding of the Christian message considerably more difficult today? A shift of emphasis from death and resurrection to eternal pre-existence and incarnation: the man Jesus of Nazareth overshadowed by the Son of God?²³

The key phrase in this quotation, which concerns certain developments especially present in John, is that they are "not covered by the original message," that is, by the reality of the earthly Christ's pattern of existence as grasped by the original witnesses. They are mere subsequent interpretations.

It is not that Küng rules out such subsequent interpretations. They are valuable to the degree that they enable the Church to present the message of Christ to different times and cultures. Such interpretations have validity, however, only insofar as they are derivable from the pattern of life of the earthly Christ. And so St. Paul is praised to the degree that "as authorized ambassador he simply drew out the logical conclusions of the message first outlined in the proclamation, behaviour and fate of Jesus."²⁴ Further, "the different interpretations illuminate and comple-

¹⁹ *On Being a Christian* 154.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 327.

²¹ *Ibid.* 439-40; cf. 474-77, 325.

²² *Ibid.* 438.

²³ *Ibid.* 439.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 409.

ment one another. But all are possible only in the light of the concrete history of this Jesus of Nazareth which they must never be allowed to supersede."²⁵

In summary, Küng reflects what is basically a two-step process. The first step involves the reality of the earthly Christ which was grasped by the original witnesses. This is the real Christ, the Christ whom modern biblical scholars can uncover with great probability. The second step is that of interpretation. This takes place after the period of the earthly Christ. Such interpretation is valid only insofar as it translates for a subsequent culture what was grasped by the original witnesses of the real Christ.

Küng's views on the real Christ and subsequent interpretations of him contain a number of implications and presuppositions which I consider questionable. Accordingly, I shall attempt to present briefly what I consider to be a more adequate view of the interpretative venture and I shall indicate how far Küng differs from this view. Finally, I shall indicate how my criticism of Küng's view is supported by the data of Scripture, Church tradition, and modern cognitional theory.

The Interpretative Venture

1) There is a concrete history that is lived which is prior to the history that is recounted. That lived history in all its concreteness is the ultimate ground of all the history that is written. Each historian must make use of the tools which permit him or her to contact these lived events that ground all history. And so the concrete words and deeds of the earthly Christ constitute the indispensable source of any historical account of his life. In turn, that historical account alone can be the initial basis of any genuine Christology and soteriology, since we can come to an understanding of the mission and person of Christ (as of every historical human being we know) only through knowing what he said and did.

2) History as lived in its full concreteness is forever beyond the grasp of any single historian or group of historians. This is so because any concrete reality has so many facets and can be viewed from so many perspectives that its intelligibility can never be exhausted. Thus, in my window is a flower box. At first glance one might think that in a few moments one could exhaustively recount all that might be said about the dirt in the box. However, one discovers that one can keep asking more and more questions and keep coming up with more and more answers. What are the various colors of the dirt? What are the chemical components? What can grow in it? What is its weight? What about the current market value? Where did it come from? Who brought it here? How was

²⁵ Ibid. 462.

it formed? The number of questions that can be asked is endless, and the answers are far more complex than the questions.²⁶ If one would keep extending the list of questions and keep seeking the answers, one would eventually appreciate the truth of Tennyson's lines:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.²⁷

Applying these considerations to Christ, we can understand better John's notion that all the books in the world could not contain his whole life.²⁸ If the total grasp of a pile of dirt or of a flower is not possible, how can we expect one historian or even all the historians who ever lived to grasp completely the man who was Jesus Christ?

3) Hence all perceptions, understandings, and communications regarding any concrete reality—even those by eyewitnesses—are necessarily partial. They may be true or false answers to the implicit questions asked by the witnesses; but because they are answers to a limited set of questions, these perceptions, understandings, and communications are inevitably interpretations, partial views of concrete reality. With regard to Christ, this means that every account of his activity, whether true or false, is an interpretation. The Fathers, the councils, and the scholastic theologians have given us only interpretations. Moreover, even the NT writers and before them the original witnesses possessed, and were able to pass on, not the concrete reality of Christ but only their limited interpretations. All these views are necessarily interpretations, because the intelligibility of concrete reality is so vast and the possibilities of any human intellect are so limited that a total uninterpreted grasp of any reality is impossible.²⁹

²⁶ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 214–20.

²⁷ Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Flower in the Crannied Wall."

²⁸ Jn 21:25.

²⁹ This point has been made many times by authors with an immense diversity of interests. Thus, the systematic theologian Gordon Kaufman (*Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* [New York: Scribner's, 1968] 185–86) inveighs against the notion of some object fully out there which the historian grasps. All historical knowledge is "relational in character. There is no such thing as a historical object-in-itself; there is only the object-in-relation-to-the-historian (as mediated through 'historical evidence'), and it is this object alone that the historian can reconstruct." The specialist in Christology Dermot Lane (*The Reality of Jesus* [New York: Paulist, 1975] 27) approvingly quotes C. K. Robinson to the effect that there are no uninterpreted events in history since he who selects interprets. The expert in theological method Bernard Lonergan (*Method in Theology* 218–19) says: "In brief, the historical process itself and, within it, the personal development of the historian give rise to a series of different standpoints. The different standpoints give rise to different

Accordingly, Hans Küng's tendency to identify the understandings of the eyewitnesses with the reality of Christ and his further tendency to distinguish that initial understanding and its communication from all subsequent views (which he labels "interpretations") represent a confusion. The original witnesses were just as much interpreters as were their successors in the faith. What blurs the issue is the tendency of later NT writers to convey their new understandings of Christ by making up events, amplifying miracles, and creating new dialogue. A modern historian conveys a new interpretation of an old event not by creating words and actions but by explicitly and conceptually drawing new conclusions from (a) old data seen from a different perspective and/or from (b) newly uncovered data. However, the later biblical interpreters of the NT period (who, at least sometimes, were the same persons as the original interpreters but at a later stage of development) tended to answer new questions and hence give new interpretations not conceptually but by creating new events. Instead of answering the new question "Is Christ God?" with an abstract affirmative answer, the later interpreters in the Gospels preferred to depict him speaking in a divine way—"Before Abraham came to be, I am"—or acting with divine powers. This, of course, should not surprise us. Most of the original interpretations of Christ given in the Gospels are conveyed not in the form of abstract propositions but implicitly through words and deeds. Hence it would be quite normal to convey new interpretations in the same implicit manner; and that would tend to involve creating new words and deeds.

In either case, however, we are dealing with interpretations of the person and mission of Christ. The distinction to be drawn, therefore, is not a distinction between the uninterpreted Christ of the first witnesses and the interpreted Christ of later Christians. Rather, it is the distinction between the value of the various interpretations. With regard to the content of answers given, are they true or false, adequate or inadequate? With regard to the form of the answers, are they conceptual explanations or imaginative illustrations? With regard to the questions themselves, are they significant or insignificant? When we grasp that these are the proper distinctions to be made, we can better evaluate Küng's tendency to make normative what he thinks to be the real Christ but what we have seen to be the first interpretation.

selective processes. The different selective processes give rise to different histories that are (1) not contradictory, (2) not complete information and not complete explanation, but (3) incomplete and approximate portrayals of an enormously complex reality." The historian Edward H. Carr (*What Is History?* [New York: Random House, 1961] 24) states that "the facts of history never come to us 'pure,' since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder." The psychologist of art Rudolf Arnheim (*Visual Thinking* [Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1971] 19-23) indicates that even the sense of sight is selective and interpretative in its operation.

4) While it is true that all historians depend ultimately on accounts and monuments that go back to the events studied, good historical method does not assume that the first interpretation, that of the eyewitnesses to an event or events, is *ipso facto* the best and most normative interpretation. This is a commonplace of modern historians, but it may be worthwhile to give their reasons for it.

First of all, the later interpreter or historian often has the benefit of the accounts of many eyewitnesses; and he can use these accounts to check one another and to formulate a more comprehensive view of what really happened. Thus, the detective who interviews all the witnesses may have a better view of the crime than any single eyewitness; and a reader of four accounts of the events of Jesus' earthly life may know better what happened than a man who witnessed these events and wrote one of the accounts.

Secondly, the historian has the advantage of examining the past events from a perspective which became possible only after those events.³⁰ He knows what happened subsequently, and he can better grasp what was significant and what was not significant for the future in the prior events. Thus, the historian of a war can grasp with hindsight that a given battle constituted the turning point of the struggle, although those present at the battle could in no way appreciate that fact. Similarly, the first Christians who accompanied Christ were able in the light of the Resurrection to grasp the significance of his life and death in a manner that was impossible when they accompanied him on his journeys.

Thirdly, the future historian has the immense advantage of benefiting from the advance in human understanding and sensitization that occurs with the passing of time. The knowledge of man is cumulative; what one generation discovers tends to become the habitual knowledge of the next generation; and when knowledge becomes habitual, it sensitizes its possessor to such an extent that he or she sees what the nonsensitized miss completely. Thus, the psychological discoveries of the last generation have passed into the habitual knowledge of many a present-day college student. And so that student is sensitized to such things as defense mechanisms, operant conditioning, and Freudian slips. Consequently, the modern student who reads accounts of activities of the past can easily detect manifestations of these operations even though the generation that wrote the accounts had no notion of them at all. Similarly, the historian whose mind has been expanded by the growth of the social sciences after the events he recounts is able to envision a history of far greater breadth and depth than the history recorded by the original witnesses. And so, whereas the historians of the past wrote history largely

³⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 192.

in terms of political institutions, the expanded modern mind now realizes that ideas, economic forces, social structures, and a host of other factors have been at work in shaping the past. Accordingly, the history viewed through these perspectives is far more comprehensive and normative than the fragmented history written by eyewitnesses with limited viewpoints.

Fourthly, a similar expansion of viewpoint occurs when a person who witnesses a series of events tries to live out the ideals the events encourage. To hear a master when one is starting out is one thing; however, once one begins to live out what he taught, one finds that one understands in a far deeper way the meaning of what he said and lived. Lived experience changes a person and allows him or her to appreciate as never before what had been witnessed in the blindness that characterizes the tyro and the initiate. And so the first disciples of Jesus missed much of what he said and did; they were truly blind. It was the searing effect of the Passion and Resurrection and their living-out of the paschal faith that opened their eyes to see on a thousand roads to Emmaus what they had missed on the one road to Calvary.³¹

The list of factors making for a more comprehensive view on the part of the later historian could be lengthened. But I have said enough. Note, however, that my main point is not that eyewitnesses are wrong and subsequent interpreters are right. Instead, the basic point is that later interpreters have opportunities that enable them to ask more and better questions, questions that never occurred to the eyewitnesses. Thus, it is conceivable that the first companions of Jesus would have asked such questions as "Is he the Messiah?" or "Is he the Prophet?" It is inconceivable that they would have asked "Is he the Son of God?" or "Did he exist from all eternity?" These last are ultimate questions, questions that could be formulated only after the passage of time had allowed for a development of Christian experience and reflection on the fruits of that experience.³² They are not questions that were answered negatively by the eyewitnesses and positively by subsequent interpreters. They were not asked by the eyewitnesses at all. Their minds lacked the expansion that would have made the questions possible.

Summary Critique of Küng's View

Hans Küng believes that the real earthly Christ who confronted the original witnesses is *the* norm of Christology. I concede that the earthly

³¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 29.

³² For accounts of the manner in which more ultimate questions can emerge from a development of Christian experience and reflection, see Peter Chirico, *Infallibility: The Crossroads of Doctrine* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1977) 114-24, 171-77.

Christ is the *initial* norm of Christology, although I have purposely abstracted from considering here whether the earthly Christ is the *total* norm.³³

I disagree with Küng in three respects. First, I believe that his distinction between (a) the real earthly Christ grasped by the original witnesses and (b) subsequent interpretations is inadmissible. There is no understanding of the earthly Christ which can be called a grasp of the "real Christ" in contradistinction to all others called "interpretations." All understandings of Christ are interpretations, inasmuch as all are partial views of him from limited perspectives.

Secondly, I disagree with Küng's elevation of the interpretation of the original witnesses (which, as we have seen, he confuses with the grasp of the real Christ) to the status of the norm to which all other Christological interpretations must conform. According to the critical method practiced by historians in most fields today, initial interpretations tend to be narrow and limited, whereas later interpretations tend to reflect a more comprehensive perspective. Accordingly, it seems unreasonable to subject later interpretations to an initial interpretation.

Thirdly, Küng's view supposes that all that can be said about the earthly Christ as norm was said by one group of interpreters. I believe that this is a variation of a recurring tendency in Christian theology to identify God's revelation of Himself with some limited understanding of that revelation. This tendency was evidenced in those who held that all revelation was in Scripture, or in some select part of Scripture, or in a certain group of Christians. Küng's variation locates revelation in the first interpretations of the earthly Christ. My view is that the concrete Christ was and is the locus of revelation, that all views of Christ are interpretations and hence partial, that later interpretations from broader and deeper perspectives are always possible, and that no one interpretation can be so comprehensive that all subsequent interpretations must fall within its perspectives. This is not to deny that Scripture is a norm that subsequent interpretations may not contradict. It is to assert the possibility of later interpretations which go beyond the interpretations of Scripture without contradicting them. Ultimately it is to assert the possibility of a genuine development of doctrine, a development which is not merely a restatement in other language of what was once stated by the first interpreters.

³³ In the following section I shall take up the question of whether the norm of Christology is (a) the earthly Christ as justified by the Resurrection or (b) the risen Christ as the fulfilment of the earthly Christ. Hans Küng takes the first option. Hence for him the earthly Christ is the total norm of Christology. I shall hold the second alternative, thus claiming that the earthly Christ is only a partial norm and that the risen Christ who fulfils the earthly Christ is the total norm.

Additional Critiques of Küng's View

This criticism of Küng from the viewpoint of the historical-critical method is buttressed by evidence from Church tradition, from the Scriptures, and from modern cognitional theory.³⁴ First, Küng's view goes counter to the notion of development implicit in the two-thousand-year-old history of Roman Catholicism. Doctrines have emerged which are not directly derivable from the initial scriptural interpretations. Such is the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. We have seen the shift from a biblical emphasis on words and deeds and functions of Christ to conciliar affirmations of his divine and human natures. Theology has recognized a living tradition which is more than the explicitation or logical prolongation of the declarations of Scripture. These constituents of the Roman Catholic tradition contradict in concrete practice Küng's notion that the original interpretation of the earthly Christ is the only norm for subsequent interpretations. In fact, it is Küng's view of the exclusive normative value of the initial interpretations that grounds his negative attitude towards these subsequent developments.

Secondly, Küng's view contradicts the development manifested in Scripture itself. The plain fact is that in the NT we find new perspectives and new viewpoints not reducible to older perspectives and viewpoints. The Paul of 1 Thessalonians is not normative for the Paul of Romans. Further, the total sweep of the NT gives evidence of a development of Christological understanding that is a far cry from being a simple prolongation of initial views. Thus, from the early recognition that God had designated Jesus as Lord and Messiah through the Resurrection, the NT moved to seeing Jesus as divine at earlier and earlier stages of his career, until ultimately it viewed him as divine at conception and even in a prehuman existence.³⁵

Thirdly, Küng's view contradicts the dynamic nature of human understanding. As Lonergan has copiously illustrated, logic and the explicitation of the implicit are not the basic paths of the human development of understanding.³⁶ These two procedures make explicitly known what is

³⁴ It may seem odd that my treatment of Küng has centered on historical-critical rather than dogmatic aspects. I believe this is legitimate, because the basis from which Küng operates is the historical-critical method, and from this basis he freely criticizes the documents of the tradition. I agree that we must use the tools of the historical-critical method. Once one accepts this method, however, one must also accept its implications. As Fritz Buri indicates ("Theologische Forschung und kirchliches Lehramt," *TZ* 29 [1973] 128-34), a theologian has to give up many treasured presuppositions once he accepts modern critical investigatory methods. My basic criticism is that Küng hangs on to theological views that are inconsistent with the method he uses.

³⁵ R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977) 29-32, 133-38, 140-42, 160-61, 311-16.

³⁶ B. Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1957) esp. 451-79.

already known in some vague way. However, genuine human development of understanding is characterized by stages of successively higher viewpoints and perspectives with the emergence of new questions. The adult is not the child writ large, and adult understanding of childhood is not just the logical expansion of the child's understanding of the same childhood. Similarly, advances in physics and chemistry do not occur because later scientists draw out the logical conclusions of the findings of earlier scientists; rather, they occur because the dynamic nature of persons provokes the emergence of higher viewpoints and more comprehensive perspectives in which new questions are asked of the old data and new answers given. Accordingly, Küng's view, which would restrict normative development to a prolongation of the findings of the perspective of the initial witnesses, misconstrues the dynamic cognitional process which is at the base of the development of human understanding in all other fields of knowledge.

THE RESURRECTION

*The Resurrection is Christ's reception into a new and glorified life by the Father.*³⁷ *The basic function of the Resurrection is to attest that the cause of Christ, the pattern of his life, truly did manifest in its totality the work of God.*³⁸ Küng believes that there is a risen Christ who lives forever with the Father. For him, the Resurrection is not just a myth that expresses an enduring general truth in legendary form. Resurrection speaks of a reality beyond historical verification, but of a reality nonetheless.³⁹ That reality was experienced by the early Christians in the Resurrection appearances; and it is these experiences, and not a simple pondering over Jesus' words and deeds, which gave rise to the Resurrection faith.⁴⁰ That Resurrection faith is basically this: "this crucified Jesus . . . was right. . . . God . . . approved of his proclamation, his behaviour, his fate."⁴¹ Hence the Resurrection "does not bring the revelation of additional truths."⁴² Rather, it manifests that Jesus himself was and is the revelation of God in the pattern of his earthly existence.

Further, the risen Christ is the norm and standard of Christian ethics insofar as he is "*in person the living archetypal embodiment*" of what he was when he walked the earth.⁴³ He is a perpetual exemplar who "provides inviting, obligatory and challenging *examples, significant deeds, orientation standards, exemplary values, model cases.*"⁴⁴ Of course, he is not to be copied in every detail; for he is a basic model of the drives and

³⁷ *On Being a Christian* 343-81.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 382.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 349-50.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 370-76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 382.

⁴² *Ibid.* 383.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 545.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 552.

intentions that each disciple must realize "in an infinite variety of ways according to time, place and person."⁴⁵

Without doubt, the Christian faith affirms that the Resurrection is Jesus' entry into a new life. The living faith of two thousand years has worshiped and prayed to the Father through a Christ believed to be alive and well. Only those who think that theology is the interpretation and reinterpretation of texts apart from a living corporate faith kept vital by prayer, liturgy, and corporate service in the name of Christ can conclude that resurrection means something less than the continuing personal vital existence of Christ in his humanity. Moreover, this new and glorified existence of Christ does serve to justify the pattern of Christ's life, to prove that "he was right," to manifest that his earthly life was and is a basic standard and norm of Christian ethics. Küng is correct, I believe, in what he affirms about the Resurrection.

However, I believe that Küng's stress on the Resurrection as the justification and continuous embodiment of the life pattern of the earthly Christ leads to a forgetfulness of the element of newness and creativity in the revealing activity of the risen Christ. Küng's risen Christ is only the re-presenter of the earthly Christ. His revealing mission is restricted to helping the Church remember his past and live out of that remembrance.⁴⁶ Yet the biblical risen Christ is not simply the justifier and re-presenter of the earthly Christ. Rather, he is the surpassing fulfillment of what he was. He is no longer limited in operation to a small section of the Middle East. He now transcends the limits of time, space, and culture which necessarily marked his earthly existence. He has become universal Lord and Savior. He pours out his creative Spirit. He ultimately makes possible our own resurrection. In short, he is all that he once was and supremely more.⁴⁷ Thinking of his resurrection as only the justification and re-presentation of who he was is like thinking of the flowering adult genius of Michelangelo as only the vindication and re-presentation of his youthful talent. Rather, it is the adult Michelangelo who counts supremely in his own right, just as it is the present living, risen Christ who counts as *the* revelation of God, *the* norm of Christian existence.⁴⁸ What is difficult to understand is that Küng can clearly state that Christ's resurrection means "a radical transformation into a wholly different state, into another, new, unparalleled, definitive, immortal life,"⁴⁹ and yet can deny

⁴⁵ Ibid. 551.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 124-26.

⁴⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* 144-60; Lane, *The Reality of Jesus* 47-48, 52-81; E. Pousset, "La résurrection," *NRT* 91 (1969) 1009-44, esp. 1034-44; J. A. T. Robinson, "Resurrection in the NT," *IDB* 4 (1962) 43-53.

⁴⁸ G. Moran, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) 71-76.

⁴⁹ *On Becoming a Christian* 350.

that the Resurrection brings "the revelation of additional truths."⁵⁰ It is difficult to understand how someone can enter into a wholly different condition of existence, can communicate himself as thus transformed to his friends over the centuries, and yet can manifest to them no more than he manifested before he was transformed.

In the third section of this article I indicated how Küng's views on interpretation and on the historical-critical method lead him to declare that the first interpretations of the earthly Christ—what he calls the real Christ—are the total norm and standard for all subsequent Christian understanding and ethical living. In this section I have tried to show how his view of the Resurrection as God's confirming approval of the pattern of Christ's earthly life reinforces the notion that the earthly Christ is the total norm and standard.

The combination of these views, the one hermeneutical and the other more theological, has the effect of ruling out the legitimacy of a genuine newness in normative Christian understanding. If one holds, as I do, that the risen Christ surpasses and fulfils his earthly existence and that the Church constantly encounters him over the centuries in new and different ways, then one expects to learn new things that complement and complete the old understanding. The more one encounters the risen Christ—a Christ at a stage of existence superior to that of the earthly Christ—the more one can learn of him and his will for mankind over and above what was learned by those who walked the Palestinian hills with him. Not only can one review the data of the earthly Christ from new perspectives; one can also encounter new data proceeding from a present meeting with the risen Christ in personal prayer, liturgy, and everyday life. However, if one holds, as Küng does, that all that is normative is contained in the life of the earthly Christ as grasped by the original witnesses, then the emergence of genuine newness is ruled out in advance. It is thus quite consistent for Küng to take a dim view of the Christological developments of the councils and the theologians⁵¹ and even of the NT.⁵² Again, it is consistent for him to question the later Marian dogmas.⁵³ Finally, it is quite understandable that he has written a much-debated study denying the validity of the dogma of papal infallibility, a dogma that certainly cannot be found in the earthly life of Christ as grasped by the original witnesses.⁵⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hans Küng has furnished us with a stimulating Christology. In an admirable way he utilizes the historical-critical method to unfold the

⁵⁰ Ibid. 383.

⁵² Ibid. 436–40.

⁵¹ Ibid. 440–57.

⁵³ Ibid. 457–62.

⁵⁴ H. Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

basic patterns, drives, and values of the earthly Christ as these were experienced by those who accompanied the Master. Further, in line with the long-standing faith experience of the Roman Catholic tradition, he explains that the Resurrection means that the Christ who suffered has entered into a new and fuller life by the power of God and that this raising by the Father attests that the pattern of Christ's earthly life truly manifested God in His saving design for man.

The difficulties in Küng's presentation stem from two sources. First, he does not recognize that the Resurrection does more than justify the pattern of Christ's earthly life; he does not see that it has revelatory significance in its own right precisely because it is the attainment of a stage of existence that surpasses and fulfils the earthly stage. Secondly, while he accepts the historical-critical method explicitly, he does not accept certain implications that are bound up with this method. Thus, Küng contrasts the real Christ who was encountered by the original witnesses with subsequent interpretations, whereas the historical-critical method would assert that there is no real Christ grasped by witnesses as contrasted to the Christ of subsequent interpretations; for all are interpretations. Further, Küng exalts the grasp of the original witnesses to the status of a total norm and standard to which all subsequent interpretations must conform, whereas the historical-critical method would tend to see a first grasp as relatively incomplete, and it would recognize that subsequent interpretations, especially those by the original witnesses at a later stage of their development, would have a better chance of reflecting broader and deeper perspectives.

The defects of Küng's view, I believe, center around an inadequate notion of doctrinal development.⁵⁵ Commonly, modern views recognize that such development involves the emergence of the new, and the attempt is made to explain how the new can flow from the old and be consistent with it while transcending it.⁵⁶ On the contrary, implicit in much of Küng's work, and occasionally explicitly stated, is the notion that legitimate development is either the logical prolongation of the initial message of Christ heard by his earthly companions or the explicitation of what was implicit in the actions of Christ as witnessed (and necessarily interpreted) by these same companions. Such a notion does not allow for the emergence of the genuinely new in a way that can be legitimated.

⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that John Courtney Murray (*The Problem of God* [New Haven: Yale Univ., 1964] 52-53) saw development of doctrine as the crucial issue causing divisions at the Christological crisis of Nicaea.

⁵⁶ For a history of what has been held on the development of doctrine, see J. Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972). I have attempted to illustrate how new teaching emerges in specific areas of doctrine in my "Dynamics of Change in the Church," *TS* 39 (1978) 55-75, and also in my *Infallibility: The Crossroads* 166-93.

Küng's understanding of (a) the historical-critical method, (b) the meaning of the Resurrection, and (c) the nature of legitimate doctrinal development conditions all his judgments upon teachings that have emerged and are still emerging in the Roman Catholic tradition.⁵⁷ I believe that the sooner we recognize that these are the three issues that affect all the rest, the better we will be in a position to dialogue reasonably with him on particular issues.

⁵⁷ To avoid undue complexity, I have not treated other effects that flow from Küng's basic views. E.g., it seems that his lack of stress on the new and vital power of the continuing presence of the risen Lord accounts for his failure to grapple with the problem reflected in such notions as *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and "anonymous Christian." These concepts were framed to confront a real difficulty. If one acknowledges that Christ has become universal Lord and Savior through his death and resurrection, and if one agrees that non-Christians can be saved, then one must postulate that all who are saved, Christians and non-Christians, have some real relationship to Christ. Christians have an explicitly grasped relationship. Non-Christians must also have some real relationship to him even though they do not explicitly recognize him. This can be possible only if his risen presence in power allows him to "touch" them even without their knowing it, just as the force of gravity from the sun and the stars "touched" people for centuries without their knowing it. In attempting to explain how the living Christ constituted the possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly recognize him, Christian theology devised such concepts as "anonymous Christian" and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. I would agree with Küng's rejection of these notions (89-98); for, although they reflect a genuine understanding of our tradition, they do so in terms and concepts that are unnecessarily offensive to non-Christians. However, the problem they attempt to meet remains.

Küng does not meet the problem. He asserts the elements that lead to it: that Christ is universal Savior (426), that non-Christians can be saved (91), that a Christian can only be a person who explicitly recognizes Christ (125-26). But he does not grapple with the problem these elements pose, because that problem can be resolved only if he would recognize a present effectivity of the risen Christ that goes beyond the mere recalling of what he once said and did. That recalling of what he said and did only takes place for Christians and those who hear the Christian message in some way. For others there is no such recalling. To limit the activity of the risen Christ to the recalling of his earthly life is to rule out his being the Savior of non-Christians. At best, Christ could only reveal the basic and universal structures of salvation already present in creation and discoverable even without Christ. In fact, this is the kind of view taken by a number of rigorous thinkers who deny the reality of the present risen Christ. On this see S. Ogden, *Christ without Myth* (London: Collins, 1962); S. Ogden, *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 188-205; J. P. Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 37 (1976) 555-59.