

HANS KÜNG AND THE MAGISTERIUM

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I

THE FACTS

Important Vatican announcements are made on Tuesdays. When a diocese is vacant, those interested in learning the identity of their new chief pastor have only to stay close to their radios on Tuesday to learn his identity. If no announcement is forthcoming in the forenoon, they know they must wait another week at least to learn the outcome of the arcane process by which Catholic bishops are selected.

In keeping with this established curial practice, the Vatican Commission on Justice and Peace, headed by the African Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, held on Tuesday, December 18, 1979, a well-attended press conference to present the Pope's message for World Peace Day (January 1, 1980). Entitled "Truth, the Power of Peace," this called for "a resolute effort of mind and action to stabilize from within the tottering and ever-threatened edifice of peace by putting its content of truth back into it." Murder, massacre, torture, and all forms of oppression, the Pope said, "must be called by their proper names." Peace, like truth, required moreover "readiness for sincere and continual dialogue. . . . Truth causes minds to come together; it shows what already unites the parties that were previously opposed."

When Cardinal Gantin and his associates had answered the journalists' questions about the Pope's characteristically forceful message, Fr. Romeo Panciroli, Director of the Vatican Press Bureau, surprised all present, not least the Cardinal, by announcing that he had a communication on another matter. It was a "Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Some Major Points in the Theological Doctrine of Professor Hans Küng." This culminated in the statement: "Professor Hans Küng in his writing has departed from the integral truth of the Catholic faith, and therefore he can no longer be considered a Catholic theologian nor function as such in a teaching role."

Panciroli's announcement was a sensation. The Pope's message on peace, for the presentation of which the press conference had been summoned, was all but forgotten as the journalists rushed to the telephones to communicate the news which within the hour was being broadcast over the world's airwaves. On the day following, it was the CDF's judgment of Küng, rather than the Pope's words about peace, which appeared on the front pages of the world press. The Holy Father

suffered partial eclipse even in *Osservatore romano*, which on December 19 surrounded his message with three even longer declarations on "the Küng case."¹

Within hours Küng, who had already left Germany for a Christmas skiing holiday abroad, was telling interviewers that the proceedings against him were "a cloak-and-dagger action"² which, especially such a short time before Christmas, had taken him completely by surprise.

I consider it really scandalous [Küng added] that a church which appeals to Jesus Christ and wishes to defend human rights is still resorting, in the twentieth century, to the procedure of the Inquisition. . . . I am ashamed of my church, now that the Pope has finally admitted, after 350 years, that the authorities made a fundamental mistake in the Galileo case. And now these same authorities are depriving a Catholic theologian of his permission to teach. . . . I find it especially saddening that German cardinals and bishops have chosen to collaborate with the Inquisition at the very time that the Dutch Cardinal Willebrands has managed to save his theologian Schillebeeckx by the skin of his teeth, as it were, by personally intervening with the Pope, whereas here our leaders are joining in the attempt to get me.³

These statements earned Küng a rebuke from a leading German newspaper not known for its partiality to the Catholic Church or its hierarchy. In an editorial entitled "Küng's Language," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented on December 20 that Küng's "intemperate language" indicated "an unbridled desire to exalt himself at the expense of those who stand in his path. Küng, a man of great gifts, has come over the years to feel more and more that the Church revolves around himself."

A Secret Meeting

The collaboration between the church authorities in Rome and Germany, of which Küng complained, was evident from the start. Simultaneously with Fr. Panciroli's bombshell in Rome, parallel statements were issued by Cardinal Joseph Höffner, Archbishop of Cologne and President of the (West) German Bishops' Conference, and by Dr. Georg Moser, Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, in whose diocese the University of

¹ The Pope fared better in the English-language weekly edition. This printed his message on peace in the issue of December 24 and the CDF's Declaration on Küng in the following issue of January 7.

² "Eine Nacht- und Nebel-Aktion," literally "night and fog."

³ Transcript of Küng interview in German television, December 18, 1979 (*Dokumentation der deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, no. 59; ed. Josef Homeyer, Kaiserstr. 163, 53 Bonn). Küng's reference to a "Nacht- und Nebel-Aktion" was in another interview and figured prominently in the exchanges of the following days.

Tübingen is located and to whom it fell, therefore, to notify the provincial government that he was withdrawing the *missio canonica* and *nihil obstat* required, under the provisions of the 1933 Concordat between the Holy See and the German Reich, by teachers of Catholic theology in the German state universities.⁴ The Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference provided further evidence of a co-ordinated action when it released an enormous documentation on the Küng case going back almost twelve years.⁵

Plans for these actions had been discussed on December 11 at a meeting attended by Archbishop Jérôme Hamer, Secretary of the CDF, Cardinal Höffner, Bishop Moser, Archbishop Guido Del Mestri, Papal Nuncio in Bonn, and Msgr. Dr. Josef Homeyer, Secretary of the German Bishops' Conference. They met, for reasons of secrecy, in Brussels. According to an old Roman adage, "when everything is secret, nothing is secret." So it was to prove in this case. When news of this meeting leaked and was published in January, the hierarchy was embarrassed and Küng's supporters claimed foul play.

At least one participant in the secret Brussels conference was dismayed to learn of the action planned. While Cardinal Höffner had long been pressing for a showdown with Küng, Bishop Moser had been trying for months to mediate the long-standing dispute and had confided to friends that his contacts with Küng had achieved some initial success.⁶ The action proposed by the CDF would torpedo these negotiations. Moser also feared the impact of a negative Roman decision on the pastoral situation in his diocese, especially just before Christmas. And he was not happy with the role assigned to him in the affair.

Before leaving Brussels, therefore, Moser telephoned the Prefect of the CDF in Rome, the Yugoslav Cardinal Franjo Seper, to plead his objections to the proposed course of action and to its timing. The Bishop

⁴ The Church's interest in this matter is explained by the fact that the theological education of diocesan seminarians (and additionally today of thousands of professional lay ministers, including all teachers of Catholic religion in the state schools) is in the hands of the faculties of Catholic theology at the state universities. Germany has no private universities. On the Concordat see J. J. Hughes, "The Pope's 'Pact with Hitler': Betrayal or Self-Defense?" *Journal of Church and State* 17 (1975) 63-80.

⁵ This approaches 100,000 words in German and would fill a sizable book in English translation. Dated "Bonn, December 18, 1979," it is stated to be "only a selection" of the full record. It has been cited in n. 3 above and will be cited hereafter as *Dok.*, followed by the pertinent number(s). In January this documentation appeared in French translation in Paris.

⁶ Höffner's attitude, long apparent from his public statements, is amply confirmed by the documentation. The 56-year-old Moser, Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart since 1975, knows the university world from his years as student chaplain and director of an adult education and conference center. While some German bishops feuded with their professors, Moser has enjoyed friendly relations with the Catholic theological faculty in Tübingen.

followed this telephone call with an urgent letter setting forth the reasons for his misgivings, but to no avail. The CDF's declaration that Küng could no longer be considered a Catholic theologian was adopted at the Congregation's regular meeting in Rome on December 15 and approved by the Pope the same afternoon.

The statements issued in Cologne and Rottenburg on December 18, simultaneously with the announcement of the CDF's action in Rome, by Cardinal Höffner and Bishop Moser respectively, reflect their different viewpoints. Höffner's statement, longer even than that of the CDF, outlines the disputed doctrinal issues and the decade of efforts to persuade Küng to bring his teaching into line with Catholic doctrine. Höffner charges Küng with "unprecedented inflexibility and unusual incorrigibility" and mentions his "sometimes excessive attacks against church discipline and order."

Moser's brief statement, by contrast, merely mentions the action taken by Rome and says that in consequence he will notify the provincial Minister of Education and Prof. Küng that the latter's *missio* and *nihil obstat* were being withdrawn and that a search for a successor must be instituted. Moser expresses "keen disappointment" at the failure of all efforts by himself and others, over many years, to reach an accommodation. He addresses to all members of his diocese "the urgent and heartfelt request to respect the Holy Father's decision, and to avoid hasty and unkind reactions." The statement closes with a summons to prayer "for unity and peace in the Church."

Protest and Mediation

These pastoral injunctions had no more success than Moser's previous intervention with Cardinal Seper. The impact of the CDF action on Moser's diocese was immediate and dramatic. Tumultuous protests by the Tübingen students were predictable, as were declarations of support for Küng by faculty colleagues at his own university and elsewhere—not only in Germany. Less predictable was the threat of a "preaching strike" by a group of pastors in the Rottenburg Diocese. Most alarming of all was the resignation as President of the Priests' Senate of the 58-year-old Msgr. Erich Sommer, dean of Central Stuttgart and pastor of the newly erected cathedral there. Writing to Bishop Moser on December 19, Sommer said that in the climate created by "this blow, just before Christmas," he could no longer fulfil his extraparochial responsibilities. Though one could criticize Küng's theological views, his writings had helped innumerable people in questions of faith. His repudiation would have grave pastoral consequences, Sommer told his bishop, causing a loss of church credibility, especially among the young.

Faced with an escalating pastoral crisis, Bishop Moser, accompanied

by two members of his diocesan curia, visited Prof. Küng in his house in Tübingen on December 19. Present also were two of Küng's faculty colleagues, Professors Walter Kasper and Norbert Greinacher. Moser disclosed that he had not yet withdrawn the *missio* and urgently requested from Küng a response to the CDF's charges which might permit Moser to mediate in Rome. This was forthcoming the day following (December 20) and Moser flew with it to the Eternal City before nightfall. Unable to obtain an audience with the Pope, the Rottenburg Bishop delivered Küng's response to Cardinals Seper and Casaroli, Papal Secretary of State, and obtained from the latter an assurance that the Holy Father would receive a delegation of German bishops to discuss the situation between Christmas and New Year.

On December 23 Bishop Moser, who had returned to his diocese on the twenty-first, again visited Küng in Tübingen to explain why the Swiss theologian's response to the CDF's charges was insufficient. Further concessions were imperative if Küng's university position was to be saved. Moser outlined the position in writing the day following in a letter which was personally delivered to Küng's Tübingen address on December 24. The Bishop implored Küng

not to write for the eyes and ears of the public, but for church authority. . . . First and minimal steps on your part are insufficient in the present situation. In the light of the Christmas festival, I again beseech you finally to make your long-awaited contribution to a solution of the conflict. Failing this, I can only repeat what [the late] Cardinal Döpfner wrote you on May 6, 1975, "I just do not see what more I can do."⁷

Küng's response would have to reach him by eight o'clock the evening of December 27, Moser wrote, as the meeting with the Pope in Rome was scheduled for the twenty-eighth.

When this letter arrived, Küng was on his way back to his Alpine ski resort. It was eight o'clock Christmas morning before Küng's research assistant in Tübingen could reach his chief by telephone to read him the Bishop's letter and formulate a reply. This was sent to Moser on December 26. It says that following "several conversations of many hours' duration" with the Bishop immediately before Christmas, Küng was unable, in the very short time allowed him, to add anything to his statement of December 20. While Küng appreciated the Bishop's efforts at mediation in a grave and difficult situation, he could find in the CDF's declaration no readiness to understand his (Küng's) position. Furthermore, Küng could not understand why Rome, "which normally thinks in centuries," was forcing to a hasty conclusion, especially between Christmas and New Year, a matter with such complex ramifications both in

⁷ "wüsste ich mir kaum mehr zu helfen" (*Dok.* 62).

theology and church politics. Küng (who for over a decade had used disputes over procedural matters to stave off the conversation sought by the CDF) now asked Bishop Moser to convey to the Pope the "urgent request to talk, in this critical moment, with a theologian of our church who for decades now has tried in conscience and according to the best of his ability to work for the cause of the Christian faith within and without."⁸

The Decision Ratified

No other aspect of the complex affair was so baffling to outsiders as the meeting with the Pope the afternoon of December 28. Present were the three German Cardinals (Höffner, Volk, and Ratzinger); Bishop Moser with his Metropolitan, Archbishop Saier of Freiburg; and from the Roman Curia the Cardinals Seper and Casaroli. What was the purpose of such a meeting, people asked, when a final decision had already been made on December 15 and publicly announced three days later? The meeting was held to consider whether Küng's oral and written statements to Moser after the announcement of the eighteenth were sufficient to rescind the decision.

The group met at Castel Gandolfo, reportedly for five hours. Moser subsequently stated that Küng's oral and written statements to him, as well as passages in Küng's writings to which he had himself drawn attention, were carefully and calmly considered. Moser's previously expressed criticisms of the procedure and timing (immediately before Christmas) were, he said, "not overlooked." The result was announced by the Vatican Press Office two days later.⁹ "All the participants in the consultation reached the conclusion that, unfortunately, Prof. Küng's most recent affirmations do not constitute a sufficient basis for modifying the decision contained in the [CDF's] Declaration of December 15." Both the Holy See and the German Bishops continued to hope, however, that Küng, "who has expressed more than once his desire to continue to be a Catholic theologian, will after thorough reflection take up a position that will make it possible to restore" the *missio* and *nihil obstat*.¹⁰

As the new year opened, it appeared that Küng's forced departure from the Catholic theological faculty was only a matter of time. In early February he recognized that his position had become untenable and canceled his remaining lectures. Since he enjoys life tenure in the state university system, his salary continues. He will most likely be offered a new position in the philosophical faculty. There is no question, therefore, of Küng's being "silenced." His archfoe, Cardinal Höffner, emphasized

⁸ *Dok.* 63.

¹⁰ *Dok.* 64.

⁹ This 36-hour delay was never explained.

that no spiritual sanctions had been invoked. Küng remains a Catholic priest and is not excommunicated.¹¹

II

PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS

Much of the controversy which arose following the CDF's Declaration of December 18 concerned procedural questions. In a "Pulpit Statement" read in all German churches in early January the German bishops "gladly admit that church procedures can be improved" but affirm "unequivocally" that in this case justice was done.¹² The abundant documentation makes it possible to examine this claim.¹³

The controversy goes back to 1968, when the CDF invited Küng to contribute to its investigation of statements in his book *Die Kirche* (1967; Eng., *The Church*) about church unity and the possibility of a valid celebration of the Eucharist by a layman in an emergency. With the publication of *Unfehlbar? Eine Anfrage* (1970; Eng., *Infallible? An Inquiry*) Küng's attacks on the Vatican I definition of papal infallibility became the focus of the CDF's investigation. Questions about Küng's Christology and Mariology were raised by passages in *Christ sein* (1974; Eng., *On Being a Christian*), though they were never formally incorporated into the CDF's doctrinal investigation.

Thanks in good part to the mediation of Cardinal Döpfner, until his death in July 1976 Archbishop of Munich and President of the German Bishops' Conference, the CDF declared on February 15, 1975 that it was suspending its investigation of Küng's works "for now." The Congregation acted at the direction of Pope Paul VI in response to Küng's assurance that he would continue to study the questions in dispute and might be able to modify his views. Also at the Pope's behest, the CDF admonished Küng not to repeat the theses to which Rome and the German bishops had objected.

In two publications in the spring of 1979 Küng reiterated his previous criticisms of papal infallibility in sharper form, claiming that Rome's failure to proceed against him was a tacit admission that his views were

¹¹ Küng's fate had he not enjoyed the protection of German law was the subject of much troubled speculation. In Sept. 1979 the French Dominican Jean Pohier was suspended *a divinis* and forbidden to teach or lead conferences because the CDF was unsatisfied with corrections he had made, at the Congregation's insistence, in his book *Quand je dis Dieu*.

¹² The German bishops held an exceptional special meeting to draft this statement and an accompanying declaration; three million copies were subsequently distributed in German churches. The bishops clearly judged the pastoral situation to be grave.

¹³ In addition to the documentation already mentioned in n. 3 above, see W. Jens, ed., *Um Nichts als die Wahrheit: Deutsche Bischofskonferenz contra Hans Küng* (Munich, 1978).

licit.¹⁴ Bishop Moser wrote Küng on April 5, 1979 that these statements "can in my view only be understood as a provocation. I therefore assume that unpleasant consequences are unavoidable and that there will be grave difficulties."¹⁵ This was a clear warning, eight months in advance, that action by Rome was inevitable. Only the timing remained uncertain.

From the start Küng repeatedly declared his readiness to co-operate with the CDF's investigation but made his participation contingent upon the prior establishment of fair procedures. Though Küng gratefully acknowledged improvements in the ground rules as they were made, he continued to advance four objections: (1) that he was not allowed access to his dossier or (2) to select his own counsel (the *relator pro auctore*); (3) that there was no clarity about the CDF's competence or the right of appeal, and (4) that deadlines were unilaterally set by Rome.

In fact, the CDF did not insist on its deadlines. Lengthy delays were frequent on both sides, due to the pressure of other business. The CDF claimed that the right of appeal was governed by "the general norms" (presumably canon law). And in response to the first two objections, the Congregation explained that its procedures were investigative only and not comparable to a criminal trial. These responses to Küng's objections are likely to satisfy only diehard supporters of the ecclesiastical establishment. Even those with little sympathy for Küng's disputed theological positions will continue to believe that the CDF's procedures need further improvement. The German bishops tacitly concede this point in their "Pulpit Statement" cited above.

In defending his theological position, Küng repeatedly affirmed his intention of maintaining Catholic truth. These statements did not satisfy his critics, however, since they never questioned this intention. At issue was whether Küng's acknowledged desire to affirm Catholic doctrine was in fact achieved in his writings. The documentation contains, even at the end, many statements by Küng's critics praising his pastoral concern and acknowledging that his writings have helped many earnest seekers after truth.

We touch here a point of special difficulty. It is beyond question that Küng, more than most academic theologians, is genuinely concerned to commend the Christian faith to many educated people of good will who sincerely seek the truth but who find the traditional presentations of the Church's faith unappealing or simply not credible.¹⁶ This pastoral quality

¹⁴ *Dok.* 55 and 56. A crucial sentence: "It has proved impossible up to now to declare before the world that the critics of infallibility are not Catholic."

¹⁵ *Dok.* 58.

¹⁶ On Dec. 6, 1969 Küng wrote to a colleague: "I have always understood theology as the cure of souls, and experienced great joy in this approach" (*Dok.* 7). Copies of this letter were sent to a number of correspondents, including the CDF (cf. *Dok.* 8).

in Küng's writings has gained him great sympathy. People whom he has helped by his writings are unlikely to accept the charge that he has departed from central Catholic teachings. Such people are impatient with the claim (for which there is, however, abundant evidence) that Küng's writings have also upset many other people and caused confusion.

The documentation shows that Küng has had powerful friends in the hierarchy. That a final judgment by Rome was averted for so long has clearly been due to the long-continued efforts of such men as Cardinals Döpfner and Volk, and Bishop Moser. Though their interventions at Rome are not documented, they are obvious to anyone capable of reading between the lines. Many times these men pleaded with Küng to be less intransigent. Bishop Moser's expression of "bitter disappointment" in his final declaration of December 30¹⁷ is consistent with the whole record.

Two Objections

It remains to consider two objections raised even by those critical of Küng to the manner in which the affair was concluded. It is urged, first, that the investigation of Küng's writings, which had been suspended in February 1975, should have been formally reopened by the CDF following Küng's renewed attack on the doctrine of papal infallibility in the spring of 1979. Had Küng been given a final opportunity to justify or modify his views, his failure to do so would have placed the action of the CDF on a firmer foundation. Instead, the procedure adopted allowed Küng to complain that in the final stage (i.e., in December 1979) he was treated "as object and not as partner"¹⁸—a statement which is factually correct.

In justification of the procedure adopted, one could plead that Küng's interminable evasions had exhausted the patience of the authorities, who finally decided they could no longer permit him to delay a long-overdue decision by fresh disputes over procedural questions, and by theological justifications which did not meet the charges against him. Critics of this procedure, on the other hand, ask whether action prompted by exasperation, however understandable, was wise or even Christian.

The final objection concerns the timing. For Christians in all German-speaking lands, Christmas is the spiritual and emotional high point of the year. Many of the familiar Advent and Christmas customs originated in Germany: the Advent wreath, the Christmas tree, some of the best-known carols. During the Christmas season ordinary business, even the collection of back taxes, is suspended while people devote themselves to a protracted period of religiosity and the cult of the family. German churches remain decorated from the first Sunday in Advent until Candlemas (February 2).

¹⁷ *Dok.* 65.

¹⁸ Statement by Kung, Dec. 30, 1979 (*Dok.* 66).

Only those who have experienced this German *Weihnacht* will be able to appreciate the sense of shock and outrage which swept through the German-speaking world at the news of the CDF's action immediately before Christmas. The Swiss Catholic newspaper *Orientierung* called Rome's action a "flagrant violation" of a "fundamental right of the faithful: to celebrate the Christian feasts with spiritual joy." The paper asked, "in all seriousness: if something is unsuitable at Christmas, can it be suitable among Christians at any time?"¹⁹

There is no evidence that a different procedure would have produced a different result. To this extent the German bishops were justified in claiming that justice had been done. If we ask, however, whether justice was *seen* to be done, we are addressing the question of wisdom and prudence. On this score doubts remain. The record shows that these doubts were advanced in Rome by Bishop Moser, most recently in the lengthy meeting with the Pope on December 28.

III

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Küng's commission to teach in the name of the Church was not withdrawn because of his criticisms of church authority or of the Pope, but for theological reasons. The German bishops stated in January that they had always recognized the pastoral concern evident in Küng's works. It was only "certain portions" of his theology which had been repudiated, not the whole. The CDF Declaration gives, as the primary reason for the decision, Küng's view that the Church's infallibility was reducible to "a certain fundamental indefectibility of the Church in truth, with the possibility of error in doctrinal statements which the magisterium of the Church teaches must be held definitely." Before examining Küng's attack on papal infallibility, we must note a fundamental divergence between his view of the magisterium and that of the CDF.²⁰

¹⁹ *Orientierung* 44, no. 1 (1980) 3 and 7. The CDF's handling of the Küng affair may be an instance of a phenomenon noted by the famed church historian Ludwig von Pastor in 1923: "many curialists are unable to understand the mentality of other nations" (Alois C. Hudal, *Römische Tagebücher: Lebensbeichte eines alten Bischofs* [Graz, 1978] 33).

²⁰ Discussion of Küng's disputed views on Christology lies outside the scope of this article. The CDF mentioned these views in its Declaration of Dec. 15, 1979 but did not make them the basis for its decision. The German bishops explain in their Declaration of Jan. 7, 1980: "The Roman Declaration does not formally cite the Christological question as the principal point in giving reasons for the decision. This was done for procedural reasons, because the almost ten-year-old doctrinal investigation had not included these problems. However, the merely incidental mention of the Christological question does not mean that this and other defects [in Küng's works] (e.g., with regard to Mary and the sacraments) are to be taken less seriously." For a discussion of Küng's Christology which is both generous and critical (a model of scholarly discourse), see Peter Chirico, "Hans Küng's Christology," *T'S* 40 (1979) 256-72.

The Magisterium and Theologians

During his lengthy correspondence with the CDF, Küng often challenges the Congregation to supply him with answers to his theological questions and objections. On June 21, 1971, for instance, Küng tells the CDF that he would be grateful to know of "a single serious theologian" capable of supplying "serious reasons" for believing that there were ordained presbyters in the Pauline community at Corinth. On January 24, 1972 he invites Cardinal Seper to send one of his Congregation's experts to present his views in Küng's seminar on infallibility at Tübingen, the costs of travel and lodging to be paid by Küng's Ecumenical Institute.²¹

In these and similar exchanges Küng was demanding not merely more than the CDF was prepared to give but more than it was competent to give. The fundamental divergence between Küng's position and that of the Congregation is so clearly stated in the CDF's letter to Küng of March 30, 1974²² that it is worth citing at length.

It is certainly permissible for a Catholic theologian to question a truth of faith and to seek to explain it. But even if he is unable to find at once an intelligible justification of this truth, the Catholic theologian cannot cast doubt upon or deny the truth of faith itself. No Catholic theologian considers it legitimate, while remaining Catholic, to doubt or deny a dogma of faith in the name of theology. And insofar as your inquiry [in *Infallible?*] touches theological problems in this connection, it has already been answered by many competent authors.

The CDF defined its own function thus:

As you know, the competence of this Congregation extends to the doctrine of the faith and not to doctrinal opinions which are the subject of free discussion, although the Congregation is quite familiar with this discussion in its international dimensions. The Congregation is not a theological faculty but an organ at the service of the pope's teaching office.

Responding to Küng's appeal to "the freedom of theologians," the CDF recalled the supreme principle governing this freedom: "Both the magisterium and the theologians are in the service of revealed truth. Hence the believing Catholic is not free to deny a revealed truth in the name of theological freedom."

The CDF reminded Küng that its Declaration *Mysterium ecclesiae*, which had been issued on July 5, 1973 to correct ecclesiological errors in Küng's book *The Church*, was "not simply a theological contribution like any other" but had been authorized and approved by the Pope. If Küng continued to support positions which contradicted this document, he must say whether he recognized any doctrinal authority in the Church

²¹ Küng had made payment of his expenses a prerequisite for his appearance before the CDF, which conceded this point on July 8, 1968 (*Dok.* 4).

²² *Dok.* 31.

superior to his own. "This question is not superfluous. For in fact in all your answers the dogmatic level appears to be simply nonexistent. It is as if the doctrinal opinions you advance were all subject to free theological discussion and did not touch those truths which are binding for a believing Catholic."

Küng had suggested that the Congregation abandon its investigation of his works and let history judge where the truth lay. The CDF explained why this suggestion was unacceptable. "In the Church there is another criterion than the judgment of history: this is the authority of the living magisterium, which is instituted to serve revealed truth."

In his reply Küng agreed that no one in the Church was free to deny a revealed truth. "To the extent that the Church's magisterium 'is at the service of revealed truth,' I too have always recognized 'a doctrinal authority in the Church.'"²³ Challenged by Cardinal Höfner on December 3, 1974 to answer "the crucial question: in virtue of what authority do you advance your views?"²⁴ Küng replied: "In virtue of the authority of God's word, which I have to serve as a theologian."²⁵

These exchanges support Karl Rahner's contention a decade ago that it was possible to debate with Küng "only as one would with a liberal Protestant."²⁶ Küng's view of doctrinal authority in the Church appears to be, at bottom, that of countless Anglican and Protestant theologians. To support their position, they advance cogent arguments which appeal not only to Scripture but to tradition as well. The question, therefore, is not whether this view is reasonable but whether it comes within any legitimate meaning of the term "Catholic," however broadly defined. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the approbation of the Pope, has now declared that it does not.

A decade ago Joseph Ratzinger wrote that we were witnessing the severance of the term "Catholic" from its historical roots and its transference into the category of national adjectives such as "French," "German," or "Swiss." One could be a citizen of those countries and still oppose everything they had stood for in history, for citizenship was a juridical category and did not imply assent to a set of beliefs. But it was nonsense, Ratzinger contended, to claim for one's self the term "Catholic" while giving the word a wholly new, private meaning which excluded certain fundamental elements of Catholicism (however loosely delineated) as it had come down to us through twenty centuries of history. Ratzinger called this process of "linguistic destruction . . . one of the most curious features of the postconciliar development."²⁷ The chorus of con-

²³ *Dok.* 32.

²⁴ *Dok.* 33.

²⁵ *Dok.* 34.

²⁶ Cf. J. J. Hughes, "Infallible? An Inquiry Considered," *TS* 32 (1971) 183-207, at 195.

²⁷ J. Ratzinger, "Widersprüche im Buch von Hans Küng," in K. Rahner, ed., *Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit* (Freiburg, 1971) 97-116, at 105.

cern (expressing everything from outraged indignation to fervent assent) which greeted the CDF's decision in the Küng case was understandable and justified. It reflected the realization, however unclear, that we have reached the end of the immediate postconciliar era in Catholic theology.

Interpreting Pastor aeternus

Critics of Rome's decision in the Küng case ask why it was necessary to have such a disastrous bloodletting over a theological issue of only secondary import. Hans Küng himself assesses the significance of the infallibility question differently. In a 1978 interview he stated: "The question of infallibility is, at first sight, a purely formal question. But it decisively influences the way in which theology is pursued, and touches virtually all statements of the Catholic Church in matters of faith and morals."²⁸ The German bishops agree.

Is the Church's infallibility not a peripheral question? It is crucial for faith and for theology that we know the legitimate and necessary basis for the obedience of faith which we owe God. Therefore it is not unimportant to know whether God promises the pope and the bishops in their teaching office that assistance which excludes errors in fundamental questions of belief, and thus gives us the assurance in faith on which to base our lives and our hope. Naturally, all human statements, including the statements of revelation and of the Church, are limited. But limits and error are two different things.²⁹

Even if we accept this assessment of the importance of the Church's infallibility (which, according to the Vatican I constitution *Pastor aeternus*, is the only infallibility possessed by the pope, and that only under strictly defined, and correspondingly rare, conditions), it is arguable that the term itself is unfortunate. It gives rise to endless misunderstandings. In the century since Vatican I, these have been as common within the Catholic Church itself as without. These misunderstandings are rooted in the one-sided definition of Vatican I. *Pastor aeternus* is a classic example of the "incomplete but not false" expression of dogmatic truth which, according to *Mysterium ecclesiae*, is a recurrent feature of dogmatic history.³⁰

²⁸ Hermann Häring and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *Hans Küng: Weg und Werk* (Munich, 1978) 168; a slightly different translation in the American edition, *Hans Küng, His Way and His Work* (New York, 1980) 174. This modestly produced work (a Doubleday Image paperback) is valuable for evaluating Küng's theological position.

²⁹ "Pulpit Statement," no. 3 (i.e., "Kanzelwort," Jan. 7, 1980).

³⁰ "... it must first be observed that the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect expression" (AAS 65 [1973] 402 f.).

Küng rejects all interpretations of *Pastor aeternus* which do not come up to his own maximalistic reading. This alone, Küng contends, is faithful to what was said and done at the Council itself. Two quotations are typical.

Anyone who faithfully interprets the conditions and limits of the Vatican I dogma as they were understood by the Council fathers themselves cannot be deprived of a maximalistic interpretation simply because the exact meaning of the dogma does not suit many people today.³¹

We shall get no further in the discussion by striving merely for an interpretation of the Vatican definitions, albeit with a more refined apologetic and dialectic.³²

With these views Küng has stood increasingly alone. In an article entitled "Infallibility: Recent Studies," John T. Ford contends that Küng has attacked an "ultramontane summary" of infallibility "characteristic of many outmoded theological manuals, but one which few theologians after Vatican II care to defend." In common with many other critics, Ford also faults Küng for polemicizing against terminology not used by the magisterium.

Küng's repeated attack on "infallible propositions" is basically a repudiation of a popular misconception of Vatican I. . . . *Pastor aeternus* did not use the expression "infallible propositions" but spoke of "irreformable definitions." Insofar as the former expression is philosophical and theological, and the latter is juridical, Küng's questioning of the former leaves the latter untouched.³³

The centenary of Vatican I in 1970 occasioned numerous studies of the Council and its definition of papal infallibility. We now review the fresh insight these studies have brought.³⁴

The Conciliar Background

The composition of the Council fathers at Vatican I shows that the Church in 1870 was still a predominantly European institution.³⁵ It looked out upon a largely hostile world, dominated by the political, social, and intellectual movements which followed in the wake of the French Revolution. With this world few of the Church's official leaders were prepared

³¹ H. Küng, *Fehlbar? Eine Bilanz* (Zurich, 1973) 349; see the whole section, 347-62.

³² H. Küng, *Infallible?* (New York, 1971) 139.

³³ J. T. Ford, "Infallibility: Recent Studies," *TS* 40 (1979) 273-305, at 281.

³⁴ In what follows I am indebted especially to H. J. Pottmeyer, "Die Hypothek eines Dogmas," *Rheinischer Merkur*, Feb. 1, 1980, 27.

³⁵ Fewer than 200 of the approximately 700 bishops at Vatican I came from outside Europe, and many of these were European missionaries serving overseas. With the exception of the Oriental-rite bishops, there was in 1870 not a single native bishop in Asia or Africa. Cf. R. Aubert, *Die Kirche in der Gegenwart* 1. Halbband: *Die Kirche zwischen Revolution und Restauration* (Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte 6/1; Freiburg, 1971) 778 f.

to cope, save by way of reaction. To survive and prosper, they considered it necessary to strengthen the authority of the papacy, at almost any price. This remedy for the evils of the day was first proposed a half century before Vatican I, in France. By the 1860's it had become the overriding concern of Pope Pius IX and his supporters. They were opposed at the Vatican Council of 1870 by a minority representing, as we now recognize, most of the wisest heads in the Church of their time.

In the atmosphere of crisis surrounding the Council, however, its majority, including the Pope, was unable to perceive the force of the minority's arguments. They regarded suggestions of a limit on papal power as dangerous concessions to the rampant anti-Catholicism of the day.³⁶ Moreover, the intellectual atmosphere was not favorable for the appeal to history on which many of the minority's strongest arguments were based.^{36a} The result was a dangerously one-sided definition, burdened additionally by the absolutist monarchical ecclesiology on which it was based, in which the pope was assumed to be a sovereign over and above the Church which he ruled.

The extreme ultramontanes who controlled the Council strove to wrest from it an unqualified acknowledgment of the pope's claim to unconditional sovereignty. That they failed to achieve their aim, despite high-handed tactics of which we read today with embarrassment,³⁷ was due to

³⁶ In the eyes of Ignaz von Senestrey, Bishop of Regensburg and, with Manning of Westminster, one of the two principal champions of infallibility, "not only was the minority's concern about the opportuneness of the definition construed as obstructionism, the minority's theological problems were viewed as a devious plot to debilitate in advance any definition that might be adopted." The Jesuit editors of *Civiltà cattolica*, as revealed by the diary of one of their number, viewed the Council "as a battleground between the forces of good and evil" (Ford, "Infallibility" 297).

^{36a} Some of the Council fathers "were apparently oblivious to historical criticism and felt that infallibility should be treated 'dogmatically, not historically.' Similarly, others felt that once the dogma was proclaimed, it was the task of theologians to explain (away) any apparent historical problems. . . . [P]roinfallibilists at Vatican I [claimed] that their presentation of infallibility was ahistorical; they could thus discount the real historical problems about the papal exercises of infallibility as irrelevant" (ibid. 286 f.).

³⁷ Manning and Senestrey appear to have operated behind the scenes as if they were deeply afraid of embarrassment should their efforts prove unsuccessful." The *Civiltà cattolica* staff "was not above employing the same type of intrigue and manipulation for which it eloquently reproached its opponents" (ibid. 297). Newman wrote that the definition of infallibility had been "done with an imperiousness and overbearing wilfulness, which has been a great scandal" (C. Dessain and T. Gornall, eds., *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* 25 [Oxford, 1973] 262). The most complete documentation of Newman's contention is provided by A. B. Hasler, *Pius IX. (1846-1878), päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit und 1. Vatikanisches Konzil. Dogmatisierung und Durchsetzung einer Ideologie*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1977). With many other critics I believe that serious defects in Hasler's methodology vitiate his conclusions. On this point cf. Ford, "Infallibility" 298-301; Klaus Schatz, "Totalrevision der Geschichte des I. Vatikanums?" *ThPh* 53 (1978) 248-76; and J. Hoffman, "Histoire et dogme . . . à propos de l'ouvrage de A. B. Hasler," *RSP* 62 (1978) 543-57 and 63 (1979) 61-82.

the stubborn and courageous opposition of the minority, assisted by moderate elements in the considerable centrist portion of the Council fathers who, like the majority in all such assemblies, were more passive than active.

A Limited Definition

The frustration of the ultramontane demand that the Council concede the pope's absolute sovereignty over the Church was providential. Such a concession would have violated a fundamental truth: the Church's magisterium, however defined and wherever located, is always bound to the word of God, as witnessed to by Scripture and as understood by the Church's living faith throughout history. The three conditions attached to the definition of papal infallibility in *Pastor aeternus* attempted, however imperfectly, to express this necessary limitation on papal power. The Council declared that the pope possessed "that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer endowed his Church when, discharging the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, he defines, with his supreme apostolic authority, a doctrine of faith or morals that must be held by the universal Church." This language limits papal infallibility with regard: (1) to the *subject*: only when the pope speaks in his capacity as supreme pastor and teacher (*cum ex cathedra loquitur*); (2) to the *object*: only when he proposes a teaching concerning faith or morals (*doctrina de fide vel moribus*); (3) to the *act*: only when the pope intends to bind the whole Church (*ab universa ecclesia tenendam*).³⁸

Hence it is untrue to say simply "The pope is infallible." An outstanding contemporary interpreter and exponent of papal infallibility writes: "The basic idea is that the pope is not habitually infallible but only at certain times and under certain limiting conditions."³⁹ The pope is not the recipient of special revelation, nor does he possess some special wisdom not available to others. It is not the pope's faith which is infallible, according to Vatican I, but only the faith of the Church. The pope, Chirico explains, "has no immediate pipeline to the Father which bypasses the whole Church. Rather, he is guided by the Holy Spirit to articulate what is already present in the Church."⁴⁰ It is part of the Church's faith that its never-failing ("infallible") Lord wills to keep his Church from falling away from the truth of the gospel. To this divine will Scripture bears clear witness. Hence the Church believes that God, who can and does accomplish what he wills, will prevent the pope or a council from finally binding the Church to a doctrinal decision which is contrary to the truth.

³⁸ DS 3074.

³⁹ Peter Chirico, *Infallibility, the Crossroads of Doctrine* (Kansas City, 1977) 231. The book is an outstanding contribution with a fresh approach, essential reading for all serious students of the question.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 235.

This is what *Pastor aeternus* attempted to say. The definition remains unsatisfying, however, because it says nothing about the process by which dogmatic statements are formulated. Whether emanating from pope or council, a dogmatic definition is a human decision about, and interpretation of, God's word. Those who formulate such decisions have to take the normal human means for discovering the truth: study, reflection, consultation of the Church's tradition and the living *sensus fidelium*. Discovering truth in matters of faith requires, additionally, prayer for the Spirit's guidance. Because of its desire to exalt the authority of the pope (the historical reasons for which we have indicated above), Vatican I said nothing about any of this. The result was a definition which seemed to suggest that the pope could define dogmas arbitrarily, simply by claiming to do so. Preventing this was one of the central concerns of the Council minority. Though historical research has now shown that they decisively influenced the definition, this was little noted at the time.⁴¹ For almost a century Catholic apologists were confident that Vatican I showed that the "one true Church" gave those who submitted to its pronouncements something that was painfully lacking to all others in the modern world, believers and unbelievers alike: certainty in the face of doubt, calm in the midst of confusion. A quotation from the late Fulton J. Sheen is typical.

The dominant note of the modern world is confusion. It has not only lost its way; it has even thrown away the map. . . . When brought face to face with the certitude a Catholic has in his faith, or the peace of soul and security and the feeling of "being at home" a convert has in coming into the Church, the confused modern attributes it to excessive credulity, to the surrender of reason, to priestcraft, in a word, to anything and everything except the real reason, namely, the discovery of Truth. . . . That Truth came to this earth nineteen hundred years ago and spoke through a physical body. . . . That Truth is now living on earth today and speaking in a new body, the Church. Whenever then the head of the Mystical Body, the Holy Father, teaches, I believe that Christ teaches. . . .⁴²

⁴¹ It did not escape the sharp analysis of John Henry Newman, however. After studying the text of *Pastor aeternus*, Newman assured a correspondent on Nov. 1, 1870 that "nothing has been passed of consequence" (*Letters and Diaries of Newman* 25, 224).

⁴² F. J. Sheen, *The Mystical Body of Christ* (New York, 1935) 185 ff. The passage is from the chapter "Infallibility" and in the context of a detailed analysis of *Pastor aeternus*. Consistent with Sheen's apologetic stance was his advice to those instructing converts: "Never mention any sect in the course of instructions, nor make any reference to Protestantism unless an inquiry is made. If one presents the Church as the prolongation of the Incarnation, as Christ speaking His Truth through His Body, as He once spoke it through His human nature . . . then there is no need of refuting a sect that came into existence 1,600 years after the death of Christ" (Sheen, "Instructing Converts," in J. A. O'Brien, ed., *Winning Converts* [New York, 1948] 153-57, at 156). Sheen's apologetic stance justified the obituary comment: "He was a very convincing speaker and a most eloquent preacher, but contributed little to the council: he belonged to yesterday's church" (*London Tablet*, Dec. 15, 1979, 1228).

This triumphalistic apologetic, based on the simplistic and legalistic interpretation of *Pastor aeternus* given in pre-Vatican II seminary textbooks, has been the focus of Küng's attack. For a dogmatic statement to be infallible in the sense defined by Vatican I, however, it must faithfully enunciate the Church's authentic belief. *Pastor aeternus* contains an articulation of the Church's faith that the pope, in the responsible exercise of his office, will be preserved by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit from committing the Church to false doctrine.

Küng concedes that Vatican II supplemented its predecessor by emphasizing the infallibility of the whole episcopate acting in concert with the pope. But he faults the latest Council for failing to re-examine the basis for infallibility itself, which Küng maintains is too weak to bear the weight placed upon it.⁴³ Actually, Vatican II supplemented *Pastor aeternus* in another way: by speaking, as Vatican I had not, of the human means necessary for those who formulate dogmatic statements. The Constitution on the Church speaks of the pope and bishops "diligently striving by fitting means to inquire properly into revelation and to give apt expression to its contents."⁴⁴ And the Constitution on Divine Revelation says that though the interpretation of God's word in Scripture and tradition "has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church... this teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed."⁴⁵

"Ex sese, non ex consensu ecclesiae irreformabiles"

How can we reconcile Vatican II's doctrine that the teaching office is at the service of God's word, not above it, with the statement of Vatican I that the infallible decisions of the Roman pontiff are "irreformable of themselves, not from the consent of the Church"?⁴⁶ The belated insertion of this clause into the draft of *Pastor aeternus* was the straw which broke the camel's back for the sorely-tried patience of the minority. Fifty-five bishops left Rome in protest.

The pope's claim to be making a solemn dogmatic definition about faith or morals binding on the whole Church is only one criterion for the truth of what he says. The Church may still inquire whether his statement agrees with Scripture and tradition. Joseph Ratzinger has written:

⁴³ Cf. *Infallible?* 69-79.

⁴⁴ *LG* 25; a footnote refers to statements made by speakers at Vatican I.

⁴⁵ *DV* 10.

⁴⁶ *DS* 3074.

“Where there is neither consensus on the part of the universal Church nor clear testimony in the sources, no binding decision is possible. If such a decision were formally made, it would lack the necessary conditions, and the question of the decision’s legitimacy would have to be examined.”⁴⁷

The *ex sese* clause says something true and important. The authority of dogmatic definitions, whether those of a pope or a council, does not derive *either* from their source *or* from their subsequent acceptance by the Church, but simply and solely from their agreement with the Church’s “deposit of faith.” Part of that faith is the belief that, because of the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, this agreement will always be present as long as popes and councils act as conscientious custodians of the deposit. The moral unanimity of a council or of the universal Church, or the responsible decision of the pope, is accepted by the Church as a necessary formal *criterion* for the truth of dogmatic definitions. It is not, however, the *reason* why such definitions are true.

This is what Vatican II meant when it affirmed that “the teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it.”⁴⁸ When the minority bishops who left Rome in 1870 subsequently accepted the Council’s definition, they did so not from lack of steadfastness or courage. They had given ample proof of these qualities at the Council. What made their subsequent assent possible, in good conscience, was their realization that, however inadequate the Vatican I definition might be, it could not alter the truth stated a century later by Vatican II: the magisterium is not above the word of God but serves it.

An Emergency Provision

Pastor aeternus is one-sided because it envisages a situation in which division about a doctrinal question is so deep that only action by the pope can settle the dispute. In such a case, the Council declared, the pope’s *ex-cathedra* decision was sufficient and binding. Even after such a decision, however, it is still legitimate to inquire whether there is a basis for the pope’s statement in Scripture and tradition, and how adequate that basis may be. Chirico writes:

⁴⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes* (Düsseldorf, 1969) 144. Commenting on the *Nota praevia* to Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, Ratzinger writes that “the Pope is not accountable for his acts to any *outward* court to which men might appeal from his sentence; but . . . he is bound by the inherent claims of his office, of revelation, and of the Church. Now among the claims which his very office makes upon the Pope we must undoubtedly reckon a moral obligation to hear the voice of the Church universal. . . . Juridically speaking, there is no appeal from the Pope even when he acts without the college [of bishops] . . . ; morally speaking, the Pope may have an obligation to listen to the bishops, and the bishops may have an obligation to take the initiative themselves” (cited from Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1 [New York, 1967] 304).

⁴⁸ DV 10.

There is an acceptable Roman Catholic sense in which one can say that reception of a doctrine by the Church is necessary in order that a magisterial pronouncement should be infallible. . . . A mere declaration by authority that it is acting universally and infallibly does not suffice. . . . The only way the Church can be sure that a pope or council has spoken infallibly is by finding the meaning proclaimed actually present in the consciousness of the faithful. Only when the vast number of the faithful discover that the meaning of a proclamation resonates with the meaning of the faith within them and, further, make manifest this congruence of meaning explicitly by word or implicitly by action—only then can the Church be assured that its authorities have spoken infallibly.⁴⁹

Inquiring about the basis of an infallible papal decision is especially important for those whom the pope has overruled. For only by finding in Scripture and tradition the basis for the pope's decision can they incorporate the papal dictum into their own living faith on the basis not of blind "submission" but of obedience based upon genuine insight and recognition of truth. The same principle applies with regard to the reception of infallible papal statements by all the faithful. "The teaching of the pope must have the ring of truth in their minds and hearts if it is to achieve its saving purpose."⁵⁰

Pastor aeternus provided for an emergency situation. If we take seriously Vatican II's rediscovery of the ecclesiology of *communio* (the church as fellowship), it is obvious that ex-cathedra papal decisions cannot be the norm. This was one of the points which so deeply troubled the minority bishops at Vatican I. In fact, the exceptional situation envisaged by Vatican I has never occurred. One wonders, therefore, whether the definition was necessary at all.

Bitter Fruits—and Their Remedy

It is possible, with Peter Chirico, to "accept wholeheartedly the teaching of Vatican I on infallibility"⁵¹ while being convinced that the manner in which the definition was accomplished was unfortunate. For over a century we have been reaping the bitter fruits of the seed sown in 1870 in a climate of anxiety and fear verging, at its worst, on panic. This harvest began with the Old Catholic schism and the German Kulturkampf.⁵² It continued with a century of Catholic triumphalism. It includes widespread misunderstanding of the Petrine office and ministry, with

⁴⁹ *Infallibility* 240 f.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 242.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* xix.

⁵² The Kulturkampf had long-term consequences of grave import. By sensitizing German Catholics to the charge that they were not true patriots, it weakened the resistance of many to National Socialism, leading ultimately to the false but still widely-accepted charge of Rolf Hochhuth and others that Pius XII was coresponsible for Hitler's slaughter of six million Jews. Cf. J. J. Hughes, "The Silence of Pius XII," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 63 (1972) 80–85.

unhappy consequences both for Catholics and for ecumenical dialogue. And now we have experienced the painful repudiation (one hopes only temporary) of a brilliantly gifted theologian who has commended the faith to thousands of our contemporaries with a warmth, passion, and élan that make him unique among present-day Catholic apologists.⁵³

Hans Küng has called for a "revision" of the Vatican I definition and has asked the Pope to summon an international ecumenical commission to assist in this task.⁵⁴ This suggestion was doomed from the start—not merely for reasons of expediency or church politics but because Catholics believe that the dogmatic definitions of a council, however inadequate and open to misunderstanding they may be, however unnecessary and (by hindsight) regrettable, are nonetheless *not wrong*. That is what the Church's infallibility means—nothing more, but also nothing less.

Küng's suggestion was prompted by the praiseworthy desire to terminate the still continuing negative consequences of the Vatican I definition. If not revision, what then? Hermann Josef Pottmeyer has made an alternative suggestion which is consistent with Catholic principles. "Given the misunderstandings connected with this dogma, the Catholic Church should decide to give its own members, and its partners in ecumenical dialogue, an *authentic interpretation* of the dogma in the light of Vatican II. Such action is urgent and brooks no delay."⁵⁵

Küng's Tübingen colleague Walter Kasper has written that the questions posed by Küng remain on the agenda, even after Küng's own answers to these questions have been declared unacceptable for Catholic theology. It would be fatal to misunderstand the rejection of some of Küng's theses as meaning that his challenges have been met or that the topics he has treated are now taboo. On the contrary, Kasper urges, Küng's questions must receive more comprehensive, deeper, and more careful investigation than he has himself been able to give them. "The alternative to what many people are now criticizing as modernistic progressivism cannot be reactionary conservatism. The fight between conservatives and progressives has become sterile. We must transcend such battles by working for the breakthrough of a forward-moving Catholicism."⁵⁶

⁵³ *Christ sein* has sold over 130,000 copies in the original German; the American edition, *On Being a Christian*, is an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. For a book of this length (700 pages) and difficulty, this popular success is astonishing.

⁵⁴ This suggestion was made in the two publications from the spring of 1979 which precipitated the CDF's action of December 15: Küng's Foreword to A. B. Hasler, *Wie der Papst unfehlbar wurde* (a popular version of the work cited in n. 37 above, substituting pictures for the scholarly apparatus), and Küng's "Theologische Meditation: Kirche, gehalten in der Wahrheit." Both articles are printed in the German bishops' *Dokumentation* 55 and 56.

⁵⁵ "Die Hypothek" (n. 34 above) 27 (emphasis supplied).

⁵⁶ W. Kasper, "Kritisch reflektieren ohne auszubrechen," *Rheinischer Merkur*, Jan. 4, 1980, 27.

An important prerequisite for this breakthrough was identified nine years ago by Joseph Ratzinger, now Cardinal Archbishop of Munich. In a 1971 article sharply criticizing Küng's book *Infallible?*, Ratzinger wrote: "I should like to emphasize once more that I fully agree with Küng's distinction between Roman(-school) theology and [Catholic] faith. I am convinced that Catholicism's survival depends on our ability to break out of the prison of the Roman-school type."⁵⁷ Recent events have not altered the truth of Ratzinger's words nor diminished their importance.

⁵⁷ "Widersprüche" (n. 27 above) 105. The passage concludes: "But I must firmly reject the alternative which Küng borrows from Luther's Leipzig Disputation: a concept that undermines the fundamental decisions of the Catholic Church and its central conciliar tradition. Such a path has no right whatsoever to the label 'Catholic.'"

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