

INFALLIBILITY: RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN KÜNG AND THE OFFICIAL CHURCH?

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WHEN HANS KÜNG wrote his challenging work on infallibility over ten years ago,¹ he invited the theological community to a dialogue on the points he had raised.² Unfortunately, the response to his work was generally more polemical than dialogical. There were many peers who were deeply critical of his historical accuracy, his harshness towards Rome, his misreading of Vatican I, etc.³ There were also supporters of Küng, but they did little to advance the debate and to follow up on his leads.⁴ A number of theologians did manifest renewed interest in the infallibility question, and as a result the seventies saw an increase in books dedicated to examining the historical and philosophical bases of infallibility.⁵ However, a dialogue beginning with Küng's efforts and seeking an advance in the understanding of the received teaching has not taken place.

In the light of Küng's having been relieved of his canonical mission as a Roman Catholic theologian, I believe it is time to come to grips with his treatment of the infallibility question.⁶ Thus this article is written neither to attack Küng nor to defend him; it is an attempt to see what can be done to promote a rapprochement between Küng's view of infallibility and the teaching of Vatican I by utilizing insights furnished by Küng himself. I believe he can be criticized on a number of points; I also believe he has uncovered principles and ideas that can lead not to the destruction of the teaching of Vatican I but to its deeper penetration.

This article has five sections. The first takes up the notion of infallibility which Küng finds in Vatican I and to which he is strongly opposed. The second presents my own interpretation of the official teaching on infallibility as set down at Vatican I and expanded at Vatican II. The third attempts to present in orderly fashion the various elements which constitute Küng's proposal of what the Church's teaching on infallibility

¹ H. Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971). The German edition came out in 1970.

² *Ibid.* 249-50.

³ K. Rahner, ed., *Zum Problem Unfehlbarkeit: Antworten auf die Anfrage von Hans Küng* (Freiburg: Herder, 1971).

⁴ See H. Küng, ed., *Fehlbar? Eine Bilanz* (Zurich: Benziger, 1973).

⁵ For a convenient listing and evaluation of the literature on infallibility in the seventies, see J. T. Ford, "Infallibility: A Review of Recent Studies," *TS* 40 (1979) 273-305.

⁶ For an account of the events leading to Küng's loss of his canonical mission, see J. J. Hughes, "Hans Küng and the Magisterium," *TS* 41 (1980) 368-89.

ought to be. The fourth contains my evaluation and criticism of K \ddot{u} ng's view. The fifth indicates that a combination of many of the elements of K \ddot{u} ng's proposal will, if developed and made more explicit, lead to a view which converges with one possible development of the basic view proclaimed by Vatican I and II. This last section thus invites both K \ddot{u} ng and the holders of the official view to move toward a reconciliation.

THE DOCTRINE K \ddot{U} NG OPPOSES

K \ddot{u} ng implacably opposes what he calls a priori or in-principle infallibility. Because he does not define what he means, we must construct such a definition from indications scattered through his work. Three pertinent indications are given. First, a priori infallibility is a capacity by which Church officials, in particular the pope, are made immune from error prior to the utterance of certain kinds of doctrinal decisions.⁷ Second, this immunity from error prior to a dogmatic definition derives from the special assistance of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Third, such infallibility ensues whenever the holders of ecclesiastical office desire it and pray for it.⁹

There emerges the following notion of the a priori infallibility which K \ddot{u} ng opposes and which he believes was defined by Vatican I and reaffirmed by Vatican II. A priori infallibility is a prerogative granted to Church officeholders (the pope alone or the pope united with the universal episcopate) by which they can obtain from the Holy Spirit whenever they wish an immunity from error which guarantees that any subsequent definition will necessarily be the very truth of God.¹⁰ Hence, whenever popes or general councils declare that they have called upon the Spirit to guide them infallibly, their subsequent statements are a priori infallible and must be accepted by all the faithful as God's truth.¹¹

⁷ *Infallible?* 140–41. Cf. *ibid.* 150, 151, 175, 203. The same denial of a priori infallibility appears in different terminology in a later work. "Inerrancy is not guaranteed to any ecclesiastical authorities either permanently or in certain cases" (H. K \ddot{u} ng, *The Church—Maintained in Truth* [New York: Seabury, 1980] 7).

⁸ H. H \ddot{a} ring and K.-J. Kuschel, eds., *Hans K \ddot{u} ng: His Work and His Way* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 99.

⁹ *Infallible?* 206. This notion that infallibility is guaranteed to officeholders whenever they desire it comes out clearly with regard to the pope in several places in the same work; cf. 101 and 104.

¹⁰ K \ddot{u} ng's acknowledgment that Vatican I stipulated many limiting conditions for the exercise of papal infallibility (*Infallible?* 100–103) does not in any way contradict his basic claim that the pope can be infallible "whenever and wherever he wishes" (*Infallible?* 104). The reason for this is that, according to K \ddot{u} ng, Vatican I said that the pope alone decides when and if he has fulfilled all the limiting conditions. In other words, the pope has merely to declare that he has desired to fulfil all the conditions and *ipso facto* he enjoys the exercise of the infallibility with which Christ endowed the Church. This all boils down to saying that "the pope, of himself, at any time . . . can claim ecclesiastical infallibility" (*Infallible?* 101).

¹¹ K \ddot{u} ng has been criticized for attributing infallibility to statements, although this quality

Küng's opposition has at least four causes. First, this kind of infallibility is absolutistic and leads to an absolutistic pope.¹² Second, no one has ever satisfactorily proved theologically the existence of such an infallibility.¹³ Third, this kind of infallibility demands that persons in the Church have a control over the Holy Spirit which is given to no one.¹⁴ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Küng is opposed to this kind of infallibility because it tends to petrify the Church, to make it unable to change and to adapt to new circumstances, to make it unable to admit its own errors.¹⁵

THE DOCTRINE OF VATICAN I

Did Vatican I define that the pope is endowed with the a priori infallibility described by Küng? I shall attempt an answer by exposing the Council's teaching in two parts: (1) conditions given by the Council

is properly attributed only to persons. Statements are true or false; persons are infallible or fallible. On this see G. Dejaifve, "Où en est le problème de l'infailibilité?" *NRT* 100 (1978) 380-81, with the bibliography mentioned in n. 15. Further, Küng has been criticized for tending to identify doctrine with the verbal formula used instead of seeing the doctrine as the meaning expressed by the formula. He asserts that because of a number of semantic factors it is generally impossible for a given verbal formula to represent the teaching of Christ clearly and accurately over time (*Infallible?* 157-73). On this see Kevin McNamara, "Indefectible but Not Infallible?" *ITQ* 38 (1971) 326-37. I do not spend time on either of these points because I believe they do not affect the main thrust of Küng's argument regarding infallibility.

¹² *Infallible?* 103. The reader may think that Küng is exaggerating when he claims that the definition of Vatican I leads to papal absolutism. However, one has to realize that for Küng Vatican I defined that the pope could be the expresser of the Church's infallibility not just with regard to revealed truths of faith or morals but also with regard to "all truth connected with this" (*Infallible?* 100). In other words, he believes that the Council defined that the pope can be infallible even with regard to the so-called "secondary objects of infallibility." With this in mind, one can see why he thinks the definition opens the way to papal absolutism; for if Vatican I taught definitively that the pope (1) possesses the charism of a priori infallibility and (2) can exercise that charism with regard to anything he considers connected with divine revelation, then "if he wants, the pope can do everything, even without the Church" (*ibid.* 105). In the next section I shall evaluate the claim that Vatican I accorded a priori infallibility to the pope. Here I must state that Küng's notion that Vatican I defined the infallibility of the pope with regard to the secondary objects is mistaken. On this see the discussion in my *Infallibility: The Crossroads of Doctrine* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977) 141-42, with the references given there.

¹³ *His Work and His Way* 99; *Infallible?* 174. Note in particular: "We must agree . . . that the infallibility of the ecclesiastical teaching office must be proved from Scripture to be acceptable, but plainly cannot be proved" (*Infallible?* 198-99).

¹⁴ *The Church Maintained* 15. Elsewhere Küng says: "If then anyone in the Church thinks he can possess the Spirit by any means of law, justice, and power, he is bound to fail. The Church does indeed try continually to take over the Spirit, but it cannot 'possess' him, cannot control, restrain, direct, or master him" (*ibid.* 16).

¹⁵ This line of reasoning permeates Küng's whole treatment of infallibility. See *Infallible?* 47-63, 176-77; *The Church Maintained* 29.

for the realization of an exercise of infallibility by the pope; (2) the manner in which the factual achievement of these conditions is determined.

There are four conditions: (1) the pope must be in union with the faith of the Church universal, and he must be acting as the expresser of that faith; (2) he must be acting in his capacity of chief shepherd and teacher of all the faithful and not just as the bishop of Rome or in some lesser capacity; (3) he must be utilizing his supreme apostolic authority; (4) he must be teaching a revealed doctrine of faith or morals in such a way as to bind definitively all the faithful. When these conditions are fulfilled, the doctrinal decision of the pope is irreformable of itself and does not require some specific, overt prior or subsequent approval by the Church.¹⁶

How is the determination made that the conditions given above have actually been achieved in a given case? This is the crux of the difficulty. Two basic answers are possible. The first *assumes* without reflection that the pope himself decides when he has fulfilled the conditions. This assumption appears to have been made by the Fathers at Vatican I. Though they never debated this question, their discussions often appear to take for granted that the pope alone determines when he has achieved the conditions of infallibility. To my knowledge, there is no monograph on the subject. What is certain is that Vatican I did not decide definitively by whom and by what process the determination is made.

The textbooks and theologians after Vatican I until the present have generally continued to assume that the pope decides on the existence of these conditions. The evidence that they make this assumption is clear. On the one hand, standard treatments of the subject simply do not raise the issue of who judges with regard to the existence of the conditions.¹⁷ On the other hand, when these same treatments come to the conclusion that the Immaculate Conception and Assumption are infallibly taught by the pope, they cite as evidence that in the pertinent papal documents defining these dogmas the pope indicates that he intends to fulfil the conditions given by Vatican I. This is sufficient. Such a sufficiency can only be explained if these theologians assume that the pope is the one to decide when he has achieved the conditions.¹⁸

¹⁶ DS 3074. The conditions or criteria of the exercise of papal infallibility have been explained in many different formulae. The best treatment of the Vatican I definition is still Gustave Thils, *L'Infaillibilité pontificale: Source-conditions-limités* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1969). My own summary of the conditions appears in my *Infallibility: The Crossroads* 137-49. Küng's summary of the conditions appears in *Infallible?* 100. A well-balanced treatment may be found in J. Feiner and L. Vischer, eds., *The Common Catechism: A Book of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 644-50.

¹⁷ A. Tanqueray, *Synopsis theologiae dogmaticae fundamentalis* (26th ed. rev.; Paris: Desclée, 1949) 585-603; M. Nicolau and I. Salaverri, *Theologia fundamentalis* (2nd ed.; Madrid: BAC, 1952) 674-96.

¹⁸ For a more extended treatment of the assumption made by the authors of the textbooks

Küng himself takes for granted that the determination rests with the pope alone. It is this assumption that causes him to speak of papal absolutism and makes him say that "the qualifications of Vatican II do not prevent the pope in any way from issuing infallible . . . proclamations, whenever and wherever he wishes, exactly as Vatican I wanted and decided."¹⁹

However, there is another view that can be expressed in two propositions. First, it is not the pope who decides that he has achieved the conditions. The pope is not to make this decision on the general principle that no person should be a judge in his or her own case. The exercise of infallibility is a charism, and in the exercise of no other charism is the person involved the judge that she/he has exercised the charism faithfully. For example, the OT prophets certainly had an office set up by the Lord, but the guarantee that one of these prophets truly spoke out in a given case for the Lord was *not* his assertion "Thus says the Lord!" The actual fulfilment of the prophecy was the acid test, and even the great biblical prophets did not always pass that test.

According to this view, it is not an insuperable objection that the assumption has long existed that the pope is the one to decide when he has fulfilled the conditions. The history of theology is filled with assumptions which everyone took for granted but which were refuted when the questions underlying the assumptions were made explicit and then carefully investigated. Until very recent times it was assumed in the Church that the four Gospels were basically biographies of Christ. No one educated in the Scriptures holds that view today. At Trent everyone assumed that one man and one woman existed in the beginning. In fact, this assumption was the basis for many a textbook assertion that it was a dogma of the faith that all human beings are descended from a single pair. Today few, if any, theologians hold this to be a dogma. In short, the fact that some notion has been taken for granted without reflection by most Christians is not a proof that it belongs to the Church's enduring tradition.

The second proposition is that the proof that the pope has fulfilled the conditions is the recognition by the universal Church that his articulation resonates with the faith-life of that Church. It will be noted that all the conditions for the exercise of papal infallibility partake of the characteristic of universality: the pope must be acting as the head of the universal Church using the fulness of his universal teaching power; he must be defining for all the faithful; he must be articulating what pertains to the public universal revelation of faith or morals, not to private revelations.²⁰

and for an amplified explanation of the view I support below, see my "Infallibility: Another Approach," *HeyJ* 21 (1980) 376-92.

¹⁹ *Infallible?* 104.

²⁰ Vatican II indicated that the pope exercises infallibility only as representative of the

What better evidence can there be that he has actually fulfilled these conditions of universality than that what he says accords with the universal faith of Christians? This is the heart of the ancient doctrine of reception.²¹

Note, further, that this view does not contradict the teaching of Vatican I that when the conditions are fulfilled the pope exercises the Church's infallibility even if there is no overt consent of the Church. The pope is endowed with the Church's infallibility when he achieves the conditions. Reception by the Church does not make a fallible decision infallible. It manifests that the conditions for infallibility have been realized and that the decision reached before any reception by the Church was actually accompanied by those conditions which rendered it an irreformable doctrinal definition.

THE DOCTRINE KÜNG PROPOSES

The term "infallibility" carries for Küng overtones of a priori infallibility. Since he rejects such infallibility, he thinks, with reason, that it is best to eliminate the term "infallibility" from the theological vocabulary and to substitute for it a term which better conveys what he believes is the correct doctrine of enduring truth in the Church. That correct doctrine is more aptly named "indefectibility," a word which refers to perennality not only in being but also in truth.²²

What must be avoided is the characterization of Küng's view of indefectibility as some vague persistence in a path toward truth in which errors are constantly being corrected but in which no definite truth is ever attained. This view is simply false.²³ A more accurate account of Küng's position contains at least the following elements.

Revelation. For Küng, as for many modern theologians, the revelation of God is not a document or a series of documents but the flesh-and-blood Jesus of Nazareth who walked the land of Judea two thousand years ago.²⁴ In his whole life and activity Jesus was the good news personified, the living gospel, the truth enfleshed, God's word. As such,

universal faith of the Church; see *Lumen gentium* 25.

²¹ On this see my *Infallibility: The Crossroads* 239-42.

²² *The Church Maintained* 8-9.

²³ The impression that Küng holds only for a vague persistence in the truth comes from certain texts of his taken in isolation. Thus we read: "More important than one or another false step, one or another wrong turn or detour, is the basic trend . . . of the believing community in the truth and toward the ultimate truth" (*ibid.* 28).

²⁴ "According to the New Testament the man Jesus of Nazareth is in his whole person the genuine revelation of the one God and Father. . . . Who sees Jesus sees the Father, says the gospel according to John. In Jesus, therefore, God himself is present to me, God is at work, God speaks, God acts, and this in a unique and definitive (eschatological) way" (*His Work and His Way* 166). Cf. *Infallible?* 218, 219.

he is the "*norma normans*, the absolute standard" to which all "individual theologians" as well as "the community of the Church and its representatives and councils" must conform.²⁵ As such, too, he and the message which reflects who he was is the sole locus of infallibility in creation.²⁶ In short, Jesus in all that he did and said is the revelation of God. In him and in the gospel message which unerringly reflects who he was is found the only infallible norm to which all other personal and written norms must conform.

Scripture. But how does one gain access to Jesus and to the gospel message? There can be only one answer: through the Scriptures. However, "Scripture is not revelation: it attests revelation."²⁷ The Scriptures have a unique place in the Church because they are "the sole testimonies that have been recognized and acknowledged by the Church as sound, original tradition."²⁸ Although Küng admits that the Scriptures contain errors, he sees them as partaking in a derivative sense of the normativity of the gospel message they reflect.²⁹ In summary, Jesus Christ and the gospel message which unerringly reflects him is the primary *norma normans*. The Scriptures are a secondary *norma normans* to the degree that they reflect the primary *norma normans*. As such, they ground all subsequent ecclesiastical tradition.³⁰

The noninfallibility of Scripture. Precisely because Scripture is a secondary *norma normans*, it lacks the perfection of the primary *norma normans*, Jesus Christ. First, there are no texts in Scripture that are a priori infallible³¹ and without error because the authors had the right to call upon the Spirit to preserve this or that pronouncement from error. "The Bible is not like the Koran, a compendium of infallible propositions dictated by God or by an angel."³² This does not mean there are no true propositions in Scripture; obviously there are.³³ However, these true propositions are not true because they flow from some purported charism of infallibility given to the author prior to his writing the text. They are

²⁵ *His Work and His Way* 162.

²⁶ "To which therefore does infallibility belong: to the Church or the Bible? As it does not belong to the Church, neither does it belong to the Bible, but in the strict sense to God alone and to his word: to his word that became flesh in Jesus Christ: to the gospel message as such, which is the unerringly faithful testimony of this salvation-event" (*Infallible?* 218-19).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 217.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 77.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 76; cf. *ibid.* 219.

³⁰ As Küng concisely puts it, "The primary norm is Jesus Christ, and the Church with its authorities and documents is only a secondary norm" (*His Work and His Way* 162). Note that in this context the Scriptures constitute a document (the chief one, no doubt) of the Church.

³¹ *Infallible?* 220.

³³ *Infallible?* 220.

³² *The Church Maintained* 3.

true a posteriori, that is, because they happen to agree with the gospel message and Jesus Christ whom that message reflects.³⁴ Secondly, there are errors in Scripture.³⁵ Küng dedicates a whole section of *Infallible? An Inquiry* to a denial of the notion of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.³⁶

How do the fallible Scriptures give access to the revelation of God, Jesus Christ, and to the gospel message? "In the original Christian testimony, on which we are dependent for the definition of what is Christian, truth is promised to the Church."³⁷ But what is the gospel, the Christian message, the original Christian testimony which is without error? Not the whole NT, because the NT contains errors, according to Küng. Rather, the gospel is the basic understanding of the meaning of the earthly Christ which was communicated to the first witnesses of his life and preaching. Since they confronted *the* revelation of God, the earthly Christ, they experienced him and reflected him before "Jesus' own words and deeds" were mixed with subsequent "interpretation, supplementation, paschal exaltation or glorification by the community or the evangelists."³⁸ According to Küng, this gospel, this initial understanding and testimony which is the Christian message par excellence, is contained within the Scriptures amid distortions and errors. It is not contained in this or that text but in the NT as a whole.³⁹ Moreover, it is possible to extract from the NT with high probability that basic conviction which is the gospel, the original testimony. This can be done through the use of the modern historical-critical method.⁴⁰

The function of the gospel message in the Church of all the ages. The gospel is the very heart of Küng's teaching on infallibility and indefectibility; in fact, it is the heart of his theology as a whole. The function of the gospel, the original testimony about the reality of Jesus, is to be the *total* criterion of enduring truth in the Church of all the ages.⁴¹ Since Jesus of Nazareth, the primary norm and infallible standard of truth, is no longer with us, the gospel now mediates him to us; for that gospel, as we have seen, is "the unerringly faithful testimony of this salvation

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. 209-21.

³⁵ Ibid. 221.

³⁷ *The Church Maintained* 6-7.

³⁸ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 154. I have described and evaluated Küng's view of the original message and its subsequent mixture with interpretations, supplementations, etc. in "Hans Küng's Christology: An Evaluation of Its Presuppositions," *TS* 40 (1979) 256-72.

³⁹ "What is not contained in a single proposition . . . [is] the basic conviction running through all the New Testament writings . . . the Christian message itself" (*The Church Maintained* 4). Cf. *Infallible?* 215-16, 219.

⁴⁰ *The Church Maintained* 32.

⁴¹ See n. 40 above and *The Church Maintained* 6-7. Note that for Küng "gospel" is synonymous with "original Christian testimony."

event" which was his life.⁴² Accordingly, for Küng, all NT interpretations and teaching,⁴³ all ecclesiastical tradition,⁴⁴ the sense of the faithful,⁴⁵ and even the most solemn decisions of the Church's magisterium⁴⁶ must be understood, criticized, and corrected by the one standard of the gospel. Hence there can never be any new definitive Christian truths which were not contained in the original gospel message and Jesus Christ whom that message accurately reflects.⁴⁷

Gospel truths. "Gospel," "the original Christian message," and "the original Christian testimony" all refer to the same meaning. That meaning is not vague; it has a definite content. Here and there Küng indicates elements of that content. Thus he asserts

that the historical Jesus of Nazareth is more than merely one of the prophets, is not simply different from other prophets;
that in him God's ultimate, decisive call, God's definitive truth about himself and man, found expression;
that Jesus was and is therefore rightly called the true Lord, God's word made flesh, the way, the truth, and the life;
that for believers—allowing for all genuine progress and all development and involvement—he cannot be surpassed or replaced by any new Lord, any other word, any better truth.⁴⁸

In addition, "the indefectibility of the Church as the whole community of believers is in itself a truth of faith."⁴⁹ It is obvious, therefore, that Küng believes there are specific gospel truths which can be known with certitude. Further, he believes in the existence of true propositions, that is, propositions which convey gospel truth in a verbal formula.⁵⁰

Indefectibility as a truth of faith. Regarding indefectibility, Küng makes two basic points: its meaning and the way in which that meaning

⁴² *Infallible?* 219. Küng strongly brings out the uniqueness of the mediatory power of the gospel, the Christian message, the original Christian testimony. "Only [italics mine] the Christian message itself—whoever preaches it—confers certitude of faith. It is Jesus Christ, given us in the Christian proclamation, who bestows faith" (ibid. 190–91).

⁴³ For appropriate texts of Küng which make the gospel normative even for the content of the NT, see my "Hans Küng's Christology" 259–61.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Infallible?* 111–12.

⁴⁵ Cf. ibid. 190.

⁴⁶ Cf. *The Church Maintained* 35 and *His Work and His Way* 100.

⁴⁷ In a section of his chapter on the Holy Spirit guiding the Church in truth (*The Church Maintained* 17–20), Küng insists that the Spirit does not provide new teachings but simply leads the Church into all the truth that was contained in Jesus.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 4.

⁴⁹ *His Work and His Way* 101. Cf. *Infallible?* 187; *The Church Maintained* 2–3, 28.

⁵⁰ Küng explicitly asserts the existence of true propositions (*Infallible?* 220; *His Work and His Way* 99); what he opposes is the existence of a priori infallible propositions. He also denies that there can be a verbal formula which always and everywhere reflects gospel truth; for words tend to change their meanings over time. Cf. n. 11 above.

is evidenced in Scripture. First, the meaning of "the Church is indefectible" is *not* that a group calling itself the Church or verbally professing certain doctrines will persist until the end of time. Rather, indefectibility means that there will always be disciples who live in the spirit of Jesus.⁵¹ It means that there will always be persons who live out the gospel truths mentioned in the prior section, who believe "ultimately" not "in dogmas, statements or propositions . . . (but) in God himself and in Jesus Christ in whom God is revealed."⁵² Thus indefectibility or "remaining in the truth is more a matter of orthopraxis than of orthodoxy."⁵³ More in detail, indefectibility⁵⁴ means "that God will always continue to find faith through this Jesus Christ; that consequently there will always continue to be human beings who come to believe in him; that there will always continue to be also a community of believers, that is, a Church of Jesus Christ in the broadest sense of the term."⁵⁵ In short, indefectibility means that there will always be a community of disciples living out the gospel message of faith in God and Jesus Christ who reveals God.

Second, the evidence for the indefectibility of the Church appears in two ways. Most importantly, it appears in the gospel message as a whole.⁵⁶ Less importantly, yet still significantly, indefectibility is evidenced in various "classical" texts: Mt 16:18; 28:20; Jn 14:16-17; 1 Tim 3:15.⁵⁷

The relationship of indefectibility to official ecclesial statements. If indefectibility refers to the guarantee that God will keep alive until the end of time a community of persons who live out the gospel concretely, is there any necessity for ecclesial statements articulating the truth which is the gospel lived? Küng's answer is nuanced.

First, he does not believe in the existence of a priori infallible statements.⁵⁸ Hence such statements cannot be necessary for the continuance

⁵¹ *The Church Maintained* 23. It should be noted that indefectibility is an indefectibility in the truth—not the truth as conceptualized and formulated but the truth in its pre-conceptual lived form. This view of Küng's is consistent with his notions of faith and the certitude of faith. "Believing . . . does not mean accepting true or still less infallible propositions: believing this or that; nor does it mean accepting a person's trustworthiness: believing this person or that person; but it means, throughout all perhaps ambiguous or perhaps in particular even false propositions, committing oneself in one's whole existence to the message, to the person proclaimed: believing *in* Jesus Christ. It is this faith alone that can give certainty" (*Infallible?* 192).

⁵² *His Work and His Way* 101-2.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 101.

⁵⁴ Küng uses a number of synonyms for indefectibility: "unrestricted continuity," "perenniality," "indestructibility," "persistence in truth," "perpetuity in truth," etc. See *The Church Maintained* 2; *Infallible?* 175, 182.

⁵⁵ *The Church Maintained* 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 6. Cf. *Infallible?* 173.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 57.

⁵⁸ In *Infallible?* Küng specifically rejects a priori infallibility in Scripture (220); he also rejects such an infallibility with regard to general councils (206); finally, the main thrust of the book is an opposition to the a priori infallibility of the pope.

of the Church until the end.⁵⁹

Second, Küng holds that the Church will persist in living out the gospel despite innumerable errors by popes, councils, and even by the authors of Scripture.⁶⁰ Strikingly, he illustrates the persistence, despite errors, of the lived faith which constitutes indefectibility by a comparison with love.

If I love someone but have to explain suddenly why I love that person, I may stutter, make mistakes, exaggerate one thing and understate another, say something distorted or even false, stress what is unimportant and even forget what is important. But this is not necessarily detrimental to my love. Love is dependent on statements if it is to find expression. But love is not completely expressed in statements. True love persists even through untrue statements.⁶¹

Third, he holds for the necessity of a globally true articulation of the gospel in the NT as a whole, an articulation in which the original message can be clearly discerned. This is necessary in order that the Church be preserved against all possible subsequent distortions of the original Christian message. The truth of the gospel must shine forth enduringly in all clarity in at least one place, and that place is the NT.⁶²

Fourth, Küng asserts that in Scripture and in the proclamations of the Church in later ages there are to be found true statements of aspects of the gospel message. These statements are true and can be recognized as true, not because they follow from some purported charism of a priori infallibility, but because their meaning coincides with the gospel message enshrined in the NT as a whole⁶³ as that meaning is made clear by the modern historical-critical method. However, such true statements are only secondarily necessary for the continuance of the Church in gospel truth until the end. What is primarily necessary is the original gospel message and its preservation in the whole of the NT.⁶⁴

Fifth, the secondary but real importance of official statements of belief for the continuance of the believing community is twofold. On the one hand, the persistence of the Church community is dependent upon summary professions of faith in Christ. These solidify the common faith of Christians by bringing it to articulation. Examples of such summary professions are the classical creeds and terse biblical affirmations such as "Jesus is Lord" or "Jesus is God's Son."⁶⁵ On the other hand, "the faith of the Church is dependent on polemical demarcations from what is unchristian."⁶⁶ Küng believes that in order to preserve its identity in the face of beliefs and practices that go counter to the heart of its own being,

⁵⁹ Ibid. 175–78.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 175.

⁶¹ *The Church Maintained* 37.

⁶² Ibid. 32.

⁶³ *Infallible?* 220–21.

⁶⁴ Cf. *The Church Maintained* 24.

⁶⁵ *Infallible?* 144–46.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 146.

the Church at times must issue polemical statements indicating where it stands. However, such statements must not be understood as being "*a priori* free from error and not open to correction."⁶⁷ Further, they should be issued only if three conditions are fulfilled: (1) there must be a major conflict of belief to occasion the statement; (2) all other means—discussion, exhortation, challenge—must be exhausted; (3) such "a definition may never be understood as a final judgment of damnation on men . . . but as a temporary measure with a view to the restoration of the peace of the Church."⁶⁸

Sixth, Küng gives two important cautions with regard to post-NT ecclesiastical statements. On the one hand, the continuance of the Church in the faith "is *not* dependent on a deliberately planned development of dogma, on *tendentious-explicating* propositions."⁶⁹ He bluntly opposes definitions which are issued "for reasons of ecclesiastical or theological policy (the two Vatican dogmas of the pope) or for reasons of piety and propaganda (the two Vatican dogmas of Mary)."⁷⁰ Legitimate unfolding of the faith takes place not by such propositions but "by a sound proclamation of the gospel, by the right administration of the sacraments, by prayer, love, suffering, personal knowledge."⁷¹ On the other hand, he warns that the Church must be wary of the dangers attending all definitions, even necessary definitions in extreme emergencies: they "may have thoroughly negative consequences: doctrinaire fossilization, new and worse misunderstandings, the arrogance of orthodoxy, theological unteachability, and increasing ignorance on the part of the *beati possidentes*."⁷² Küng points out that a polemically oriented condemnation of error often does not point out the core of truth in the error. As a consequence, those accepting the condemnation of the error as correct may slip into the tacit rejection of the truth intermixed with the error.⁷³

Seventh, Küng reminds us that the meanings of verbal formulae shift with time and circumstances.⁷⁴ Hence it is dangerous to hang on to doctrinal formulae at all costs. What is necessary is the gospel message and the one it faithfully reflects, Jesus Christ. They are the significant realities to which all the formulae are intended to point.

EVALUATION AND CRITICISM OF KÜNG

I have one basic criticism. Before I take it up, I wish to contextualize it by two preliminary considerations. On the one hand, I wish to state unequivocally that apart from the minor criticisms of the next paragraph and the single major criticism which will constitute the bulk of this

⁶⁷ Ibid. 147–48.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 148.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 148–49.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 149.

⁷¹ Ibid. 149–50.

⁷² Ibid. 149.

⁷³ Ibid. 170–72.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 157–62.

section, I agree practically *in toto* with all that Küng says about a priori infallibility and with the comprehensive teaching on truth and indefectibility summarized in the prior section of this paper.⁷⁵ In particular, I judge that a large number of the constituent elements of his position on truth and indefectibility are solidly in line with Roman Catholic tradition.

On the other hand, I do have three minor criticisms. First, although I agree with Küng's opposition to a priori infallibility, I have already argued that this kind of infallibility was not assigned to Church officials by Vatican I and Vatican II. Second, I question Küng's rather Barthian notion of error in Scripture.⁷⁶ I prefer a view which combines respect for the long theological tradition of inspiration and inerrancy with the modern recognition that Scripture is characterized by (1) various literary forms and (2) a process of development of understanding which can be traced from the earlier to the later books.⁷⁷ Third, I agree with Küng that the indefectibility of the Church does not require a deliberate plan of dogmatic development, a series of magisterial definitions of a tendentious-explicating nature issued for reasons of ecclesiastical or theological policy or for purposes of piety and propaganda. What I disagree with is his assertion that the dogmas of papal primacy, papal infallibility, the Assumption, and the Immaculate Conception were proclaimed *basically* for such reasons. Of course, part of the motivation for these definitions was policy, piety, and even propaganda (which can have a good sense). This is nothing new. These factors were at work in the early councils. The presence of such factors as *partial* motives for a definition does not vitiate the definition or make it unnecessary. Far more thinking has to be done about the meaning and value of the four dogmas dismissed as unnecessary by Küng.

Now for my basic criticism. For Küng, the only ultimate and certainly true criterion of all theologizing is the concrete Jesus of Nazareth as reflected in the original message of eyewitnesses and determined for us from the whole of Scripture by modern exegetes using the historical-critical method. This sentence enunciates the essential principle underlying Küng's conclusions in the area of infallibility. In fact, this principle

⁷⁵ There are a few minor disagreements that I shall disregard, most of them in terminology and in tone. Thus, I regret that Küng has used the term "a priori infallibility."

⁷⁶ Karl Barth preferred to speak of the "capacity for errors" of the biblical writers rather than of their "errors" (*Church Dogmatics* 1/2 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956] 508-9). Küng's treatment manifests a similar tendency (*Infallible?* 209-21). Instead of saying that the biblical writers have a capacity for error, he says that they "are never at any time made inerrant, almost superhuman" (ibid. 217).

⁷⁷ To my knowledge, the question of inerrancy has not received a comprehensive treatment by a modern Roman Catholic theologian. For a brief overview of the question and references to recent writing, cf. Avery Dulles, "Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views," *TToday* 37 (1980) 19-20.

underlies most of Küng's theology.⁷⁸ Once one concedes this principle, one is forced to concede much of what he holds in ecclesiology and Christology. I believe that it can be challenged theologically, philosophically, and historically. In the three following subdivisions I shall indicate the three areas of weakness in Küng's principle: the normativity of the earthly Jesus, the reliability and totality of content of the message of the original witnesses, and the ability of the modern practitioners of the historical-critical method to uncover the basic gospel message from Scripture.

The Normativity of the Earthly Jesus

According to Küng, the earthly Jesus is *the* revelation of God, the *norma normans* and *non normata*, the ultimate total created infallible standard to which all other standards must conform. I believe that one can seriously question both the infallibility and the totality of the earthly Jesus as the norm of Christian truth.

On the one hand, I question whether anyone who consistently accepts the historical-critical method (as Küng clearly does) can reasonably assert that the earthly Jesus is an infallible norm. Küng claims that we have access to the earthly Jesus through this method. However, that very method, in the hands of a number of eminent practitioners, indicates that Jesus believed that the kingdom of God was going to arrive in all its fulness in the near future⁷⁹—a mistaken belief. If the earthly Jesus was mistaken here, we surely have a right to question any assertion that he was an infallible norm of faith.⁸⁰

Now Küng puts his trust in this method; for him it is superior to the long tradition of the Church for determining the meaning of the original

⁷⁸ For an account and criticism of this basic principle insofar as it underlies Küng's Christology, see my "Hans Küng's Christology" 259-68.

⁷⁹ See Werner Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London: SCM, 1957) 25-29, 59-61, 141-55. A more recent summary of exegetical opinion indicating the problem posed by Jesus' expectations of an imminence of the end-time rule of God may be found in James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 13-14. Quite interesting is the view of the German Catholic exegete Rudolf Schnackenburg. He admits that the biblical evidence indicates that "Jesus announced the coming of God's reign . . . for a near future." However, he affirms that we need not assign error to Jesus (*God's Rule and Kingdom* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1963] 212). Raymond Brown (*Jesus God and Man* [Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967] 39-102) carefully treats the whole question of the limitations of Jesus' knowledge in general. In one section (70-79) he treats the problem of Jesus' foreknowledge of the Parousia. What emerges clearly from these discussions is that one cannot establish by the historical-critical method that Jesus reflected accurately during his life the time of the coming of the kingdom.

⁸⁰ One can argue that the time of the coming of the kingdom is not essential. However, even if one accepts this contention, the fact remains that such unessential error calls into question the global infallibility which Küng attributes to the earthly Jesus.

gospel message present in Scripture; it is also superior to the official Church magisterium. It is undoubtedly fallible, but it is the last court of appeals. That being the case, it is at least questionable that Küng should assert that the earthly Jesus was infallible when the very method which he relies on to identify the earthly Jesus casts doubt on his infallibility.⁸¹

On the other hand, the notion that the earthly Jesus is the *total* norm of revelation is not merely questionable; it is theologically and historically false. The earthly Jesus is a norm, but only partial. The total norm is the fulfilled risen Jesus. This can be demonstrated in two steps.

First, the basic confession of faith by Christians from the beginning has been the proclamation not of the earthly Jesus of Nazareth but of the risen Christ, the Lord. Christian faith began with the Resurrection. Before Christ rose, his followers were completely demoralized. "Then came the resurrection. Its first effects were to transform the band of disillusioned disciples, or many of them at least, into a community of believers, which would later become a Church."⁸² Further, the object of faith, that is, the revelation which is the correlative of faith, shifted. Whereas "the idea of the kingdom occupied a central place in the whole of Jesus' thought and teaching,"⁸³ the newly illumined disciples proclaimed not the kingdom expressed by Jesus but Jesus himself as risen.

There can be no going back to the proclamation of Jesus as such. The kerygmata of Acts and Paul, and in a different way of John, demonstrate that *the first Christians were not concerned simply to reproduce the message of Jesus.* In the view of the earliest churches a decisive development had taken place which *itself* became the good news *par excellence*—that Jesus had been raised from the dead and exalted to heaven. It is this new development which forms the distinctive essence of the post-Easter proclamation, which gives it its distinctively *Christian* character. . . . In short, *the Christian Church is built round the post-Easter kerygma, not the teaching of the historical Jesus.*⁸⁴

Not only for the Church of the immediate post-Easter period but for the Church of all subsequent time, the Resurrection has been the central object of belief. Thus, in the liturgy, Easter has been *the* feast of faith. Sunday and not Saturday has become the day for the weekly celebration of the communal liturgy, because Sunday is the day of the Resurrection. Baptism is baptism not into the earthly Jesus but into the Christ who

⁸¹ As Fritz Buri ("Theologische Forschung und kirchliches Lehramt," *TZ* 29 [1973] 128-34) indicates, to accept a method is to accept its implications.

⁸² Bruce Vawter, *This Man Jesus* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Image, 1975) 37.

⁸³ *IDB* 3, 20.

⁸⁴ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity* 31-32. This summarizes the evidence Dunn has in pp. 11-31. I choose Dunn as a source because his work has been praised as a good summary of modern exegesis; see the reviews by Raymond Brown (*CBQ* 40 [1978] 629-31) and Wayne Meeks (*TToday* 36 [1979] 117-18).

died and is now risen (Col 2:12). In the Eucharist the one who is present and active is the risen Christ.⁸⁵ Finally, by utilizing the results of modern Scripture studies, systematic theologians have corrected the underestimation of the Resurrection once characteristic of theological manuals.⁸⁶

Second, the Resurrection is not, as Küng would have it, simply the attestation by the Father that the preaching and life pattern of the earthly Jesus were correct, that Jesus' life on earth did manifest in its totality the work of God.⁸⁷ Beyond this, the Resurrection is Jesus' entry into a new existence. He transcends the limits of his former life and becomes universal Lord and Savior, pouring out his Spirit and making it possible for us to rise also.⁸⁸ Hence it is that the one who reveals God to us, the one who is *the* revelation of God to humankind, is not just the earthly Jesus but the Christ who "completed and perfected Revelation . . . by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth."⁸⁹

The Original Witnesses

For Küng, the normativity possessed by the earthly Jesus is expressed in the testimony of the original witnesses. Their understanding and the proclamation which followed from it contain the gospel "on which we are dependent for the definition of what is Christian" and in which "truth is promised to the Church."⁹⁰ In short, this original witness is, like the earthly Jesus it represents, the total and infallible norm of all Christian truth.

To simplify the argument, I shall concede what I have just refuted, namely, that the earthly Jesus is the total ultimate created norm of Christian truth. Even on this supposition, the notion that the original witness to the earthly Jesus is or can be the *articulated* total and infallible norm of truth for all time is open to two serious objections, one philosophical, the other theological.⁹¹

The philosophical objection is based on an analysis of the process of human understanding. This process is such that (1) no understanding

⁸⁵ See Gustave Martelet, *The Risen Christ and the Eucharistic World* (New York: Seabury, 1976).

⁸⁶ The seminal systematic work is Francis Durrwell, *The Resurrection* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

⁸⁷ *On Being a Christian* 382.

⁸⁸ Chirico, "Hans Küng's Christology" 268-70.

⁸⁹ Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum* 4, in the Flannery translation. Also, Gabriel Moran (*Theology of Revelation* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1966] 71-76) treats the risen Christ as the norm of revelation.

⁹⁰ *The Church Maintained* 7.

⁹¹ For a more complete account of the philosophical argument, see my "Hans Küng's Christology" 261-63.

and no proclamation of that understanding of *any* concrete reality can ever fully capture that reality and (2) initial attempts to understand a concrete reality are especially vulnerable to being limited and one-sided.

1) The first affirmation follows from the fact that all things and events are concrete and multifaceted, whereas all understanding (together with its proclamation) is abstract and represents only a limited number of facets. To understand a concrete reality is to grasp it from one or at most a few perspectives, to see it from one's own limited concerns and sensitivities. Human understanding is by its nature partial and incomplete. The number of possible facets to be experienced, understood, and proclaimed is unlimited. No single group of observers and proclaimers could capture the reality that was Jesus of Nazareth.⁹²

Küng, however, tends to identify the gospel message as testified to by the original witnesses with the concrete Jesus of Nazareth. He does not explicitly say that the one equals the other. Nevertheless, he does say that the original testimony is unerringly faithful to the earthly Jesus. Beyond this, he claims that this original testimony, this gospel, is the ultimate *norma normans* and *non normata* to which all other Church teaching must conform. In effect, he says that the facets grasped by the original witnesses encompass all other possible facets; for all facets grasped at a later date are to be judged as reflecting Christian truth to the degree that they conform to what was grasped and testified to by the original witnesses.

Küng's view confuses a concrete reality and the totality of its facets with the few facets grasped by the original witnesses, the part with the whole. As a result, he makes the original testimony the *total* norm of Christian truth. In reality, that testimony can have at best only a limited negative normativity. This would mean that no subsequent understanding falling within the same perspectives as those of the original witnesses should be permitted to contradict the understanding of those witnesses.

2) Initial attempts to understand a concrete reality are especially vulnerable to being limited and one-sided. I make this point because one may concede that the testimony of the original witnesses does not totally reflect Christ and yet claim that this testimony gives the original comprehensive perspective within which all subsequent and narrower perspectives fall. I claim that just the opposite is true. It is not the original witnesses but the later interpreters who tend to view a concrete reality

⁹² From this analysis one can understand the difference between a pluralism of truth and a pluralism of error. A pluralism of truth results from the emergence of new perspectives and from an intelligent and reasonable grasp of reality within those perspectives; it is a pluralism which derives from the unfolding of further facets of a reality. A pluralism of error results from the giving of contradictory answers to the same question within a given perspective. In the concrete both pluralisms exist together.

from the broadest, most comprehensive, and most ultimate perspectives.

There are a number of reasons why this is so. First, later interpreters are able to compare various eyewitness accounts. Second, they know what subsequently happened and thus spot the salient causal factors hardly noticed by the original witnesses. Third, the development of the race adds new sensitivities to future observers; this enables them to detect aspects about persons and societies (e.g., defense mechanisms, the patterns characterizing the emergence of governmental structures, etc.) which could not have been grasped by much earlier eyewitnesses. Finally, the later interpreters have the opportunity to live out in a newer context the values proclaimed in the events described by the original witnesses and thus gain an understanding of these values which was not possessed by the first witnesses. Thus, Americans who have struggled through the problems of gaining equal rights for minorities and for women often have a broader sense of the meaning of the equality of all human beings than did many of the Founding Fathers.⁹³

Up to now I have treated the philosophical objection to considering the gospel or original Christian testimony as the total infallible norm of Christian truth. There is a properly theological objection. According to Roman Catholic tradition, it is the whole of Scripture which is normative, not one part or aspect.⁹⁴ However, the Küngian gospel is really but another form of the "canon within the canon" espoused by Käsemann⁹⁵ and modified by Marxsen⁹⁶ and Ogden.⁹⁷ The "canon within the canon"

⁹³ For denials that the testimony of the original witnesses constitutes some sort of all-encompassing norm, see Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 12, and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 53–54. For historical exemplifications of the fact that earlier views tend to be narrower than later views, I note that in the NT Jesus is not seen as God in the earliest strata but only in the later strata (Raymond Brown, "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?" *TS* 26 [1965] 545–73). I note, further, that in the subsequent Church the first creeds were particular and concrete and that only with Nicaea did the Church establish a creed which was universal and abstract (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* [London: Longmans, 1950] 205).

⁹⁴ Karl Rahner, "Bible," *Sacramentum mundi* 1, 176.

⁹⁵ Ernst Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960) 214–36. Küng himself summarized Käsemann's views in *The Living Church* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 239–49. Basically, Käsemann advocated that the justification of the sinner is the central meaning to which all other meanings in Scripture had to be subordinated. Although Küng rejected Käsemann's view (*ibid.* 257–83), even at this early date he was beginning to propound his own canon within the canon. "Every testimony in the whole of the New Testament has to be understood in terms of the message of Jesus and the original emphases" (*ibid.* 290).

⁹⁶ Willi Marxsen, *The New Testament as the Church's Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 64–128. Unlike Küng, Marxsen does not postulate that the apostolic witness unerringly reflects the historical Jesus.

⁹⁷ Schubert Ogden, "The Authority of Scripture for Theology," *Interpretation* 30 (1976)

principle exalts either certain books of the Bible, or one or more doctrines, or the earliest strata of traditional material to the status of norm to which all other aspects of Scripture and later tradition must be subordinated and by which these other aspects are to be judged and corrected. Although Roman Catholic thought recognizes that some books of the Bible are more important than others⁹⁸ and that some truths are more basic than others,⁹⁹ it has ever seen the Bible as a whole as a norm of truth. The modern recognition of the pluralism and evolution of views within the NT has not destroyed this wholistic Catholic principle. It has only necessitated that the exegete envision the NT as containing a series of partial views of the one revelation in Christ as seen from different perspectives and/or at different stages of development.¹⁰⁰ These perspectives must be respected in their uniqueness; they must be seen in tension with one another, straining toward the fulness of a truth that exceeds each of them and even all combined. The exegete may not so exalt one perspective or set of perspectives that it corrects all others and subordinates them to itself.¹⁰¹

The Practitioners of Historical-Critical Method

Once one makes the testimony of the original witnesses central, one is confronted with the question "Who is to determine the content of that message for the present-day Church?" Küng replies: the teachers in the Church.¹⁰² More precisely, since the gospel is imbedded along with errors in Scripture, the task of uncovering it belongs in the first instance to those trained in the historical-critical method which is appropriate for extracting the gospel from Scripture.

What, then, of Church leaders, the pope and the bishops? Their primary task is the proclamation of the gospel.¹⁰³ They may also possess the charism of teacher, but this is not the rule.¹⁰⁴ In the ordinary case, then, they will learn the gospel message in a collaboration with the teachers.¹⁰⁵ In effect, Church leaders are to proclaim the gospel which is

242-61, esp. 258. Ogden locates the canon within the canon in "the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition" (ibid. 258).

⁹⁸ The Constitution on Divine Revelation at Vatican II acknowledged that the four Gospels have a special place in the NT (*Dei verbum* 18).

⁹⁹ The Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio* 11) articulated the now famous notion of the "hierarchy of truths." This notion had roots in the tradition in the idea that certain truths were essential to salvation.

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, is an excellent summary of pluralism and development in Scripture.

¹⁰¹ The exaltation of one perspective to the position of judge of all other perspectives has the effect of ruling out in advance the possibilities of a development of dogma. This is so because the primary factor in the development of dogma is the emergence of new perspectives.

¹⁰² *Infallible?* 230-31.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 229.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 232.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 233.

extracted from the Scriptures by the teachers, especially the exegetes trained in the historical-critical method. For Küng, the Christian exegete is thus the final, though fallible, living determiner of what the gospel message really is.

I believe that Küng is on the track of an aspect of the truth which Catholic thought has tended to neglect in recent centuries. There is a charism of teacher and it is not identical with that of bishop or pope. Further, it is a charism which must be respected, listened to, and consulted by Church leaders when they proclaim the gospel; for the ability to teach is not conferred automatically upon bishops at their consecration. Having said this, however, I believe Küng is mistaken in thinking that the trained Christian exegete is the final arbiter of what the basic gospel message is. A more nuanced position is demanded.

Küng's view suffers from two flaws. On the one hand, he overestimates what the trained Christian exegete, solely on the basis of his technical training in the historical-critical method, can do in the matter of recovering the gospel message from Scripture. On the other hand, he overlooks the fact that bishops who are not trained in exegesis have other means of knowing the gospel truth.

The first flaw stems from Küng's failure to grasp the nonexegetical factors that influence all interpretation. The exegete's native ability and training are necessary but by no means sufficient for the task of properly interpreting the text. One must not only know the background of time and place, the language, the literary customs, but must also be in profound contact with the reality described in the text.

Let me illustrate. Suppose I wish to interpret a text by an Oriental mathematician of the Middle Ages. Certainly I need to know the language of the period and the symbols used by the author. However, the most important qualification is knowledge of mathematics. All other things being equal, the more mathematics I know, the better I shall be able to grasp what the medieval writer meant. It will enable me to fill in what is cryptic, to surmise what is only implied, to make explicit the connections the author took for granted. If I know no mathematics, I may be able to learn how to manipulate the symbols the author used, but I will not be able to appropriate the thought processes and the understanding which these symbols represent.

The same is true for the theological exegete. If he or she has not deeply grasped and internalized the reality articulated in the text, the mere acquisition of technical skills will not be sufficient for the appropriation of the reality seen by the original writer. It is true that the exegete will be able to grasp the significance of things known by all—eyes and ears, arms and legs, seeing and breathing, etc.; for the exegete has experienced and understood these realities. But suppose that the exegete's faith experience

has no reference to the living risen Christ, that he or she has never participated in a liturgical tradition in which one prays to Christ, consciously receives him as living in the Eucharistic bread and wine, really experiences that where two or three are gathered in his name he is there. Such an exegete can easily read the NT text as speaking in symbolic language about an existential encounter with God; can easily believe that there is no present actual Christ whose risen being and power extends to the far corners of the universe, one who in his humanity is Lord of creation; can honestly believe that the NT uses mythological language in order to convey to us the existential conditions of salvation which always prevailed—even before Christ. The reason for this belief will not be the exegete's native ability or training in the historical-critical method; it will be the basic presuppositions coming from an experience of faith.

What does all this mean? Not that we can dispense with the skills of exegetes; only that it is foolhardy and methodologically unsound to put one's trust solely in the exegete. What is also necessary is an immersion in the living faith experience of the Christian community in such a way that there emerges to consciousness the *universal faith elements*, the elements common and significant to the faith life of the ages, the elements whose continuing existence in unarticulated form constitutes the essence of the indefectibility of the Church as Küng describes it. True, such an experiential immersion may pertain to this or that exegete; yet there is no guarantee that this will be so.

Let me make this need more concrete. Suppose that, for the sake of argument, we accept Küng's notion that the earthly Jesus is the ultimate norm of Christian truth, not just in what he said but in the way he lived, in the concrete living out of his life in Palestine in a specific culture and with specific persons. This means that he manifested in his deeds and words aspects that necessarily pertained only to *his* time and place; for he lived concretely and particularly and was not solely an incarnation of principles and values having universal import.

If this is so, how can what is universally binding in the earthly Christ be made accessible to us? Certainly he did not make the effort to point out to his hearers just what values in his life were of significance to everyone. Rather, he spoke in concrete terms, used images and parables that were grounded in the experience of the unsophisticated persons who surrounded him, and performed actions that made sense only in the context of specific circumstances. Further, even the original witnesses did not make a concerted effort to generalize from the life of Christ, to extract the core values of his life and teaching which would then have to be reapplied to new circumstances in new ways. These early witnesses had no conscious notions of cultural conditioning. They saw no need to separate the concrete aspects that pertained to one place and time from

the universal values which these aspects incarnated for their time. If they had been able to do this, the struggles about whether one had to keep the Jewish law or not would not have been so persistent.

Now if what is universally significant in early Christianity was not consciously filtered out and preached by the first Christians, then who did such filtering? The answer can only be the subsequent Church. I submit that this is what the great ecumenical councils attempted to do. Moreover, this task is precisely the one which Küng assigns to the modern exegete. That exegete, not the first Christian communities, is given the task of uncovering the initial witness as the general drift of Scripture.

It is here that I believe the exegete's skill is not enough. The determination of what is universal and crucially important for all depends largely, if not exclusively, upon the reader's internalization of the broad range of the reality in question. This must in some way be codetermined by a comprehensive experience and living out of the reality proclaimed in the biblical Church.

This leads to my second criticism: Küng underestimates the ability of the episcopal leader unskilled in exegesis to unearth the gospel message. I shall not attempt to refute Küng by the simple restatement of the traditional teaching that the bishop is *the* witness of the faith. Rather, I shall give the rationale behind that teaching.

Every Christian is a witness of the faith. However, many Christians have a narrow faith lived out in confined circumstances and/or understood by persons unable to grasp what is valid in the different concrete faith of another. The Church has had to wrestle from the beginning with legitimate pluralism because many individuals, like the current fundamentalistic dissenters to the reforms of Vatican II, have been unable to accept a different culturally conditioned understanding and expression of Christianity. Many have tended to identify their own concrete understanding and expression of faith or that of their local communities with *the* Catholic faith. They lack the background and the ability to grasp that all faith life is lived concretely, that the concrete is inevitably culturally conditioned and constituted by elements which have validity for only one or a few places and times, that a pure unconditioned and timeless concrete life of faith has never existed and never will exist, and that their own concrete faith life necessarily contains elements destined to pass away.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ It is one thing to say that all concrete faith is culturally conditioned and unique and that it possesses elements which are destined to pass away, quite another to say that one can never grasp anything universal in the faith life of the Church. The first statement is true, the second false. Within the context of differing concrete faith experiences it is possible to grasp what is universal to faith even though that which is universal in faith can never exist in some pure concrete form. An analogy may help. No one has ever seen a perfect

There are persons, however, whose faith, though not necessarily deeper, is broader. It is a faith which can grasp the validity of certain differences, can recognize more explicitly what the universal abstract elements of faith are, can understand and appreciate the diversity of faith expression which is the richness of unity, and can distinguish a legitimate culturally conditioned expression of the true faith from an expression which deforms it. It is among such persons of broad faith that one finds those who are called by God to the episcopacy. They are the ones who can unify persons of diverse concrete faith lives, because they can appreciate the values of a faith life different from their own. They have the God-given charism of tuning in on the faith life of others, of being enriched by it, and of seeing further aspects of the risen Christ in it than is furnished by their own experience of faith.

The consecration of a bishop is meant to recognize such broad faith, to symbolize the commitment of the individual to live out such faith for the unity of all, to express the community's pledge to communicate its various faith expressions to the bishop and to be guided by his more universal grasp of the total needs of faith. If a person truly possesses this kind of episcopal faith, then his undertaking of the office of bishop will furnish him with the challenge and the opportunity to broaden and deepen that faith. This flows from his relationship not only to his people but also to the bishops around the world and to the pope. The key result is that, more than any others, the bishops of the world have the ability to represent what is universal in the lived faith of the Church.

This universality of faith does not come basically through interpreting a text but by interpreting the faith life of the people. It comes from detecting what is common to the faith of many, despite all differences. It comes not because one is isolated in a unique personal faith but precisely

concrete circle made of wire or drawn on paper. No such circle constituted by a line with no width whose every point is equidistant from the center has ever been experienced. We can only experience with our senses the "culturally conditioned" circles of real life, all of which possess qualities which do not pertain to the ideal circle. Nevertheless, precisely through our concrete experiences of diverse culturally conditioned circles we are able to grasp what pertains to all circles. Similarly, within the context of unique culturally conditioned faith we can grasp elements which pertain to all faith life. We can grasp that Christ will always be with us, even if he will be with each individual in a unique way. We can even grasp with unshakable certitude that each of us is culturally conditioned, even if we come to that grasp from a uniquely culturally conditioned background. It is the fact (1) that there are imbedded within concrete unique lives factors which have universal import and (2) that these universal factors can be abstracted and grasped conceptually, which enables the Church to proclaim the irreformable doctrines mentioned in the definition (DS 3074) of the infallible magisterium of the Roman pontiff at Vatican I. Such irreformable doctrines are not merely true; they are irreformably true, because they represent enduring aspects of reality itself, aspects which are graspable within a series of ever-changing contexts. On this see my *Infalibility: The Crossroads* 51-65.

because one is open to the uniqueness of faith of many others, so that eventually one can detect what is common to all those unique expressions of the faith. This capacity is ordinarily nourished by reading Scripture and may even be enriched in rare cases by skill in historical-critical exegesis. But basically it is a capacity to deal with concrete living faith, the core of what Küng calls indefectibility or persistence in the faith.

I have no illusions that all bishops function automatically as excellent witnesses of the universal faith of the Church. To be such witnesses is one of their chief tasks and charisms. However, because bishops are imperfect as bishops—just as the rest of us are imperfect as teachers, politicians, and parents—they fail at times in the exercise of their task and charism. The same thing can be said of the exegetes.

The point is that there is an episcopal charism just as there is an exegetical charism, that both can be involved in detecting what is universal in the faith, that each charism can enrich the other, and that the Church is best able to grasp what the gospel means in modern contexts when there is a deep co-operation of the two charisms. If a bishop possesses exegetical skill, he has an advantage over the bishop who does not. In one person there then occurs the living conjunction of the two paths to the universal elements in the faith and a possibility of mutual enrichment and correction. It was this conjunction which made the great Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries and St. Paul before them *the* theologians of the ancient Church. Similarly, an exegete who possesses that living contact with the broad faith of the Church which is necessitated in a bishop is far better equipped to determine what is the enduring and hence universal gospel.

A Summary Critique of Küng

For Küng, the ultimate criterion of Christian truth is the concrete Jesus of Nazareth as he is reflected in the original message of the eyewitnesses and determined for us today from the whole of the Scriptures by modern exegetes using the historical-critical method. My own belief is not so much that this assertion is false as that it is incomplete. Its incompleteness shows up in each of its three components. First, the earthly Jesus is only a partial norm; the full norm is the risen Christ who carries forward and completes this earthly Jesus. Second, the original witnesses only partially and imperfectly reflect the real Jesus; what they witness has to be complemented by other and richer perspectives such as those which recognize Christ as Son of God from all eternity. Third, the skill of exegetes is only one of the skills necessary for the detection and interpretation in a modern context of what is normative in Christianity; it needs to be complemented by the episcopal charism which detects the

universal elements not in texts but in the living faith of present-day Christians.

In short, my principal criticism of Küng is that in the basic notion upon which all his theologizing rests he is too restrictive and particularistic. He is not catholic enough.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF RECONCILIATION

The function of this last section is to present the various elements in Küng's overall view and in the view emerging from Vatican I and II which can converge toward substantial agreement. I believe, on the one hand, that the magisterial teaching of the Church is a partial one which can be complemented by other rich elements of the Roman Catholic tradition (some of which have been highlighted by Küng's criticisms). I believe, on the other hand, that there are elements within Küng's overall view which can correct the shortcomings detailed in the prior section and help him move with consistency toward an expanded view of infallibility compatible with an enriched Vatican I and II position.

I shall (1) list some elements common to the position of Küng and to a view consonant with magisterial teaching, (2) specify the key difference between the two views, (3) discuss a possible rapprochement between a developed Küngian view and an enriched traditional view, and (4) provide a summary conclusion.

Common Elements

I call attention to six important elements of agreement in the views of Küng and in the magisterial view emerging from Vatican I and II on infallibility. First, in each view the truth, the revelation of God, is not primarily a series of statements but a person, Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ Second, faith is not primarily an assent to statements but the personal accepting of Christ as the truth incarnate with all that entails.¹⁰⁸ Third, the Christian faith response to the truth of the revelation in Christ will persist in the faithful until the end of time. This is Küng's indefectibility; it is part of the undoubted tradition of the Church. Fourth, in both cases there is a locus in the communal faith life of Christians where definitive Christian truth resides. For Küng, this locus is the faith response of the original witnesses; for the magisterial view, it is the faith life of all the members of the Church over the ages.¹⁰⁹ Fifth, both agree that under

¹⁰⁷ That this is true for Küng is evident from all I have said above. This same view is expressed in *Dei verbum* 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Dei verbum* 5.

¹⁰⁹ This is the classical *sensus fidelium*; see *Lumen gentium* 12. For a good treatment of the relationship between the *sensus fidelium* and the magisterium of pope and bishops, see Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer, eds., *Mysterium salutis* 1 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965) 551-55.

certain conditions the truth imbedded in faith life can be certainly grasped and expressed in propositional form in the Church. Thus, Küng affirms the truth of the statement that "the indefectibility of the Church as the whole community of believers is in itself a truth of faith."¹¹⁰ And Vatican I defined the doctrine of the infallible magisterium of the Roman pontiff. Sixth, in both views the process by which the truth of revelation is known without fear of error is a process of abstracting the universal from many particulars. Thus, in Küng the truth in the testimony of the original witnesses is scattered in the Scriptures amid errors; it is regained by extracting the basic drift, the meaning common to Scripture as a whole. According to Vatican I, the pope exercises the infallibility of the Church not by enunciating his own private opinion but by articulating the universal faith of the Church, the faith of all ages and times.¹¹¹

The Key Difference

One great difference separates Küng's view from a traditional view which reflects the teaching of the two Vatican Councils:¹¹² where to situate the locus of the infallible understanding and proclaiming of the revelation in Jesus Christ. For Küng, *only* the initial witnesses have the capacity to understand and proclaim *originally* the meaning of the truth which is Christ. Others can grasp and proclaim this truth in a derivative manner only, that is, by interpreting Scripture so as to regrab what was once grasped as the gospel by the original witnesses. For a traditional view which incorporates the insights of Vatican I and II, the locus of revealed truth is the total faith life of the Church since the beginning. In that faith life there was understanding in the initial epoch and that understanding is enshrined in the Bible and has a privileged place. However, that understanding did not and could not exhaust the meaning of that faith life, if for no other reason than that no understanding can ever exhaust the meaning of any concrete reality. Hence the Church can reflect on its faith life over the centuries and eventually arrive at a conscious recognition of elements in it which were not explicitly identified in Scripture. These elements, even if not part of the initial testimony, are part of the living faith which gave birth to that testimony. Hence they too can be definitively proclaimed.

¹¹⁰ *His Work and His Way* 101.

¹¹¹ I have indicated how the criteria of Vatican I for the exercise of papal infallibility all imply universality (*Infallibility: The Crossroads* 229–33). Cf. *Lumen gentium* 12.

¹¹² By "a traditional view" I shall mean a view which incorporates the elements of the magisterial position, although expanding it in some aspects. I use the word "a" to indicate that there can be other views which are faithful to the teaching of the magisterium while going beyond it.

Because Küng places the total locus of infallible understanding and proclamation in the initial witnesses, he restricts the object of their testimony to the earthly Jesus; the risen Christ only confirms what the earthly Jesus said and did. Further, because the total definitive understanding is in these initial witnesses, all other proclamations of the faith have validity only to the extent that they are reducible to the understanding of these witnesses. Hence the only way one can arrive at definitive understanding of the faith today is by means of scientific exegesis; for this alone permits us to tune in on the sole definitive proclamation of the faith, that of the original witnesses.

In contrast, because a traditional position recognizes that the lived faith of all the ages is a source of doctrine, it necessarily recognizes that the living risen Christ, not just the earthly Jesus, is also the object faith encounters in ever new ways. Moreover, precisely because the whole faith life of the Church is the matrix of ecclesial understanding, a traditional view recognizes that exegesis is not enough to grasp and proclaim the fulness of revelation. In such a view two skills are necessary; an expanded exegetical skill and a discerning skill. The expanded exegetical skill enables the present Church to tune in on the total faith life of the past—not just the scriptural past. The discerning skill enables the Church to tune in on the faith life of the present as it exists in concrete persons and not just in a textual representation. By the exercise of these two skills in a symbiotic relationship the present Church can understand and proclaim not only what was grasped by the original witnesses but also those universal elements of faith whose existence came explicitly to the Church's attention only after the biblical age.

There is a further difference between the two views. Küng appears to believe that the *total experience* of the earthly Jesus by *the original witnesses* is normative. Out of that total experience a portion is expressed and left to us in Scripture mingled with errors and subsequent interpretations. A traditional view, such as the one I have outlined, does not think that the *total faith experience of Christians over the ages* is normative. It recognizes that Christian faith in the concrete is truncated, warped, mingled with elements of nonfaith. Hence it sees that the only elements which can become part of the definitive faith are those which stand the test of time and place and culture, those which appear again and again under the most diverse of circumstances, the universal elements of faith life. This is a more realistic view, even for the faith of the original witnesses. The notion that they had total faith accuracy in their experiential response to Jesus seems highly unlikely not only from what we know about human understanding but also from what we know about the obtuseness of the initial witnesses.

Towards Rapprochement

Although there is a huge gulf between the central aspects of each view, there are a number of elements in Küng's overall teaching which, if developed, would bring him very close to what I have called "a traditional view." Basic to grasping such rapprochement is the recognition of the truth of Küng's notion that faith and its certitude are primarily aspects of concrete experience and only subsequently can they be thematized and expressed in statements. Put another way and generalized, concrete experience is the matrix of abstract understanding and subsequent expression.

With this in mind, let us divide the history of the Church's faith life into three periods: (1) the period of the original witnesses, (2) the NT period which followed the period of the original witnesses, and (3) the post-NT period to the present.

According to Küng, the lived faith of the Church within which genuine certitude is buried spans all three periods. This is what he means by the indefectibility of the Church. However, normative understanding and expression of the meaning of that living faith *in an originating way* is restricted to the first period. He does not accord to the second and third periods the capacity to grasp definitively aspects of the lived faith not grasped in the first period.

Now despite the fact that Küng *explicitly* rejects the idea that there can be originating normative understanding of revealed truth in the second and third periods, he *implicitly* concedes in varying degrees that the capacity to come to such normative understanding does extend to both those periods. Consider the following points in his exposition.

First, Küng notes that statements cannot express the fulness of faith.¹¹³ This, of course, is but an adaptation to the realm of faith of a commonplace of cognitional theory, namely, that no act of understanding and no series of acts of understanding can ever exhaust the truth of the content of a human experience.¹¹⁴ This is especially true of the experience one has of a person—above all, of the concrete person who was Jesus Christ. No number of statements in all the books of the world could contain the reality he was and is.

Second, Küng asserts as gospel truth at least one notion that the historical-critical method indicates was not known by the original witnesses but which came to be known only in the second period. I mean indefectibility. There are general and specific indications that this notion was originally grasped in the second period, not in the first. In fact, the historical-critical method's evidence points to the conclusion that the

¹¹³ *The Church Maintained* 37-38.

¹¹⁴ See my "Hans Küng's Christology" 261-63.

recognition of the indefectibility of the Church in the second period was a partial reversal of what was believed by the initial witnesses.

The general evidence for this is twofold. On the one hand, there is no hard historical-critical evidence that Christ believed that the end fulfillment was to be long delayed, but there is some evidence that he believed it to be quite near.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, there is strong evidence that the early Christians believed the Second Coming would take place in their lifetimes.¹¹⁶ If the probabilities are that neither Christ nor the early Christians thought that the consummation of the world would be long delayed, it seems highly unlikely that they would have proclaimed as a truth of faith the indefectibility of the Church. There is no need to proclaim that the faith will last until the end if that end is just around the corner. Indefectibility makes sense as a teaching only to those who need the encouragement that God will sustain their faith over great periods of time. This fits the conditions of the second period.

The specific evidence that indefectibility arose in the second period springs from the individual texts Küng points out as expressions of the doctrine. Each of these texts appears to have originated in the second period. None of them is seen by the majority of exegetes using the historical-critical method as being traceable back to Christ and the original witnesses.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ See n. 79 above.

¹¹⁶ When writing his early letters, St. Paul evidently assumed that the Second Coming would take place in the near future. This is a commonplace observation of exegetes. See 1 Thess 1:9-10; 4:14-17; 1 Cor 15:51-52. In his commentary on 1 Cor 15:51, Hans Conzelmann states: "Underlying what he [Paul] says is the expectation that he will personally live to see the parousia, as in 1 Thess 4:17" (*1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 290). See, even more strongly and in general terms, Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 41.

¹¹⁷ All four texts cited by Küng seem to derive from the second period. (a) "The Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). This text is not attributed to Christ by the author of the letter. Moreover, even conservative commentators who think St. Paul wrote 1 Timothy concede that this letter must have been written late in his life (ca. 65), before the Roman house arrest with which Acts closes. On this see *JBC* 57: 5. However, a considerable number of exegetes do not believe that Paul wrote 1 Timothy; they place the epistle in the early second century. For such a view, see Werner Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 387; Norman Perrin, *The New Testament* 265; Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 215. Such late datings make the attribution of this text to Christ and the initial witnesses unprovable.

b) "The powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). The consensus of modern scholarship sees this text as postresurrectional in origin. For the argumentation and appropriate bibliography, see Raymond Brown, Karl Donfried, and John Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1973) 83-101.

My point is that at least in this one case Küng's performance, if not his explicit principle, points to the origin of a truth of faith not in the first period but in the second. The evidence tends to say that from the experience that the Second Coming was obviously postponed the Church came to understand that Christ and his Spirit would be with it and preserve it in faith until the end, no matter when that end came.¹¹⁸

Third, there are even indications in Küng's overall theory which point to a recognition of definitive truth in the third period. He holds that the NT has errors and that one can obtain the gospel truths only from the whole sweep of the NT. This means that the recognition of such truths is possible only to those who possess the *whole* of the NT. However, we now know that the books of the NT were largely expressions of the faith by or for local churches, that each group possessed at most only some of

c) "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). The two parts of this verse seem to be the work of Matthew himself. The phrase "the close of the age" is found in Matthew alone in the NT (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20). The phrase "I am with you" appears to form an inclusion with the "God with us" applied to Christ in 1:23. A recent monograph asserts of this text and the surrounding verses that "the declaration of authority and the promise of divine presence are the work of Matthew himself rather than the pre-Matthean tradition" (Benjamin Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20* [Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974] 129).

d) "And He [the Father] will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:16-17). Any text in John faces the difficulty of being in a Gospel in which theological interpretation predominates over history. As Rudolf Schnackenburg puts it, "Historically speaking, probability is all on the side of the fact that Jesus never spoke publicly of himself in the way in which he constantly does in John" (*The Gospel according to St. John* 1 [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968] 22). Raymond Brown traces the origin of the emphasis of John on the continuing presence of the Counselor/Spirit in 14:16-17 and other texts to two late factors: (1) After the death of the last apostolic witnesses, the Church faced the problem of survival without the principal living links to Jesus. In this context Christians began to realize that even the apostles had misinterpreted the earthly Jesus and that it was only the postresurrectional Spirit who had enabled them to see Jesus aright. That very Spirit was now seen to function within all Christians, so that the later Christian is no more removed from the ministry of Jesus than the earlier one. (2) The delay of the Second Coming led the Evangelist to realize that many aspects of that coming were already present in the Christian life; Jesus has come back in and through the Spirit (*The Gospel according to John: XIII-XXI* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970] 1141-43). Hence both general and specific considerations tend to date this text in the second period.

¹¹⁸ A similar argument can be made with regard to Küng's view of charisms. He objects to the idea that bishops should have teaching authority in addition to their pastoral authority because such a "monopolizing of the charisms in a hierocracy of pastors clearly contradicts the New Testament message and the New Testament Church" (*Infallible?* 230). It seems that for Küng it is normative that the pastoral and teaching functions should be separated. However, this is a view that cannot easily be traced back to the earthly Jesus. It is, rather, the teaching of St. Paul. If Küng intends to make this normative—and I admit that the text is not clear—he is once more conceding to the second period the power to express definitively the meaning of the faith.

the texts of the present Bible, and that only after the NT period was there any opportunity for considerable numbers of persons to possess the whole NT and hence be in a position to extract the gospel truths which pertain only to the total sweep of the Scriptures.¹¹⁹ In fact, only with the inception of the modern historical-critical method can the Church with great certitude know the truths of the gospel, because only present exegetes have the tools to extract these from Scripture. The main point here is that only in the third period is the process operating of abstracting the general from the many particulars which for Küng gives rise to our knowledge of gospel truths. This may not be an infallible process; but it is one process which enables us to know gospel truth, and it was operative not in the first or second period but in the third alone.

Thus it seems that there are possibilities in Küng's view for his development toward a traditional view which incorporates the teachings of Vatican I and II. However, it must be admitted that for Küng to develop in this manner, he would have to reject (1) his canon within the canon and (2) his notion that the bishops as Church leaders are merely the present official proclaimers of what exegetes have determined to be the meaning of the testimony of the original witnesses. He would have to accept instead (1) the normativity of the whole of Scripture and (2) the further role of the bishops as the definitive witnesses not just of that area of faith experience articulated by the original witnesses but also of that area of universal faith experience which, though not articulated explicitly in the beginning, yet persists in the living faith of the Church over the ages.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Küng has made a number of significant contributions which can be incorporated into a traditional view of infallibility in order to enrich it. First, he has attacked a priori infallibility and has revealed the dangers of creeping infallibility and magisterial absolutism which can flow from its acceptance. His objections have made it evident that the Church will be well served if it makes clear officially that a priori infallibility is not the teaching of Vatican I. Second, he has stressed that the basic infallibility in the Church is not the conceptual infallibility of dogmatic decisions but the lived infallibility which can be called "indefectibility" from his perspective or the *sensus fidelium* from another perspective. Third, he has indicated the limitations and dangers attached to magisterial decisions as well as the cautions to be observed when such decisions are made.

¹¹⁹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

Küng is mistaken, however, in placing the criterion for judging all tradition in the initial witness to Jesus of Nazareth as determined by the modern historical-critical study of the NT. This "canon within the canon" is historically, philosophically, and theologically untenable. If Küng accepts the implications of a number of points in his own position, he may be able to shake this weak starting point and accept the normativity of the witness of the whole lived tradition within which the total NT has a privileged place. This would permit a development from his own position toward an enriched magisterial position which would be faithful both to the Vatican Councils and to the insights proclaimed by Küng himself.