

Hans Küng: Theologian with Feelers

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The headway of reform in English-speaking Catholicism owes a great deal to the intrepidity of Fr Hans Küng's publishers. The spectacular popularity of *The Council and Reunion*, the paperback which made his name, demonstrated his charismatic audacity in bringing out into the open what a vast number of reflective Catholics had long been nervously and fumblingly trying to articulate for themselves. Of course extravagant claims have been made for him: he is not the long-awaited new Aquinas nor the anti-Christ. He is a hardworking theologian with some good ideas, as the only two major studies he has so far written bear witness. The first of these is *Rechtfertigung* (1957), a confrontation of Karl Barth's doctrine of justification with Catholic teaching; and the second is *Strukturen der Kirche* (1962), an attempt to situate the papacy with regard to the episcopal college and the general Council inside the mystery of the Church. Neither of these books is yet available in English.

The Council and Reunion and its sequel, *The Living Church*,¹ are not works of academic theology. They are the pop-theological outcrop of the great process of reorientation which the Church is at present going through: something which certainly reverberates on the strictly theological plane but which is essentially the consolidation of a new Catholic sensibility. The explanation he himself gives of his recent triumphal lecture-tour in the United States is precisely that he was able 'to give expression to the new Catholic consciousness which has gripped the Church of the United States since Pope John XXIII announced the convening of a Council and since the opening of the Council itself'. His new book, it is interesting to note, carries the imprimatur of Cardinal Cushing, archbishop of Boston.

This is perhaps the most important point to be made in any review of Fr Küng's achievement. He is not talking about what *might* happen, far less of what *he* would like to see happening. He is talking about what is actually happening here and now. His work is simply part of the emer-

¹THE LIVING CHURCH, by Hans Küng; Sheed and Ward, 12s. 6d.

gence into print of a process which has been going on for a long time but came at last to a head under the inspired leadership of Pope John XXIII. It is that thorough routing out of things, that great convulsion, which Newman was dreaming of just a hundred years ago². 'We are sinking into a sort of Novatianism', he wrote, 'the heresy which the early Popes so strenuously resisted. Instead of aiming at being a world-wide power, we are shrinking into ourselves, narrowing the lines of communion, trembling at freedom of thought, and using the language of dismay and despair at the prospect before us, instead of, with the high spirit of the warrior, going out conquering and to conquer'. Newman's diagram of ecclesiastical funk and the intellectual terrorism and jargon of woe that always accompany it will not be unfamiliar to Fr Küng's readers. Perhaps it is a little more surprising, however, to find this prefigurement in Newman of Fr Küng's untiring appeal for a spirited and courageous outlook in faith on the world. And yet—is it really? For surely much of the delight people take in Fr Küng's insistence on frankness, honesty, courage, and an open way of doing things, is only the long-overdue surfacing in Catholicism at large of some of the most precious values of—how can one put it?—the north-west European mind? 'Do you recollect in *Harold the Dauntless*', Newman once asked³, 'how the Abbot of Durham gets over the fierce Dane? Since that time there has been a tradition among the Italians that the lay mind is barbaric—fierce and stupid—and is destined to be outwitted, and that fine craft is the true weapon of Churchmen. When I say the lay mind, I speak too narrowly—it is the Saxon, Teuton, Scandinavian, French mind'.

However all that may be (and it is certainly true that some pretty insalubrious efforts were made to deprive the German theologians of any effective presence at the Council, and also that the English-speaking world has scarcely begun to make a distinctive contribution to the richness of Catholicism), Fr Küng certainly succeeds in his new book in registering and objectifying for us something of the epoch-making *prise de conscience* which took place in Rome in the closing months of 1962. It is clear that the conciliar debates on liturgy and on doctrine were the most exciting; they are also intimately connected with the new Catholic consciousness, Fr Küng discusses them at some length, and it is to them that we should like to direct the rest of our attention. The third major topic to which he devotes detailed study is the structure of the Church (Church and council; papacy and episcopate; etc.); something

²Ward, *Newman*, vol. 2, page 127.

³*ibid.*, page 141.

which the very existence of the Council is modifying and on which theologians have scarcely caught up.

Before we turn to liturgy and doctrine, however, it is good to recall the indissoluble bond which John XXIII forged between the reunion of Christians and the reform of the Catholic Church which the Council is engaged in promoting. This is something really new in Christian history. It is perhaps the most costing and daring step so far taken in the progress of ecumenism, as the active presence of the non-Catholic observers at the Council is perhaps the most trusting and generous. It is now accepted, in fact, that the Church must *change* ('The Church must be prepared for converts, as well as converts prepared for the Church'⁴). It is clear too that this is not a matter of *moral* reform: the purer Catholic life is of course the better, but this will not reunite Christians. No, the decisive contribution the Catholic Church can make towards Christian unity is, in Fr Küng's words, to carry out the *justified* demands of the others in the light of the gospel.

The moot point here, as has been noticed before,⁵ is the meaning of 'gospel'. Fr Küng's thesis, it seems to me, suffers from not being clinched. The 'others' are really only the Protestants. Doubtless it is to a particular milieu that Fr Küng is addressing himself; but, in the end, it is only a Catholicism sensitized to the valid reproaches of Orthodoxy that can ever respond authentically to Protestantism. For the problem of ecumenism, as Dom Clement Lialine said twenty-five years ago, is the problem of *tradition*. The same point has recently been stressed by Fr Yves Congar.⁶ Ecumenism does not mean presenting the Catholic position as clearly as possible and grinning amiably to dispel any soreness. It does not even mean adapting one's statement of the Catholic position to accommodate people who are deeply prejudiced or untrained in a certain theological style. It means, in fact, enriching the Catholic position itself in company with its (friendly) critics by returning together to the original sources of Christian revelation and the great Catholic tradition. Ecumenism is not the way of reducing and minimizing what we believe but just the opposite. It is the activating of the *whole* of the experience—the 'culture'—of the covenant-community. To carry out the justified demands of the Reformers in the light of the gospel would only be part of that much larger process of bringing into the service of the Church's

⁴*ibid.*, vol. I, page 584.

⁵Cornelius Ernst, 'The Gospel and the Church', in *Blackfriars* 43 (1962), pp. 301-313.

⁶*Informations Catholiques Internationales*, 15th December, 1962, page 3.

self-consciousness the plenitude of Holy Tradition.

The centrality of liturgical reform in this process is something of which Fr Küng is well aware. Liturgical celebration is only churchly existence at its most intense. How we worship affects everything else: how we work, how we play, how we feel, how we think. The problem is that of the worship due from us as rational creatures (Rom. 12. 1). It is 'a matter of rediscovering the limpidity, the absolute and fundamental transparency of the liturgical symbols and rites'.⁷ It is the whole question of mystery and intelligibility in worship.

This is a good deal more than the question of language in the liturgy. Fr Küng produces the usual case for the vernacular, but of course the problem is more fundamental than that.⁸ Indeed, at the stage we have now reached, it is *how* we are to get a vernacular liturgy, not *whether*, that is the pressing issue. This is a great deal more delicate and difficult than might at first appear; and the difficulty of it explains the best of the opposition to it. We have to recover the traditional conception of the liturgy as part of our *understanding of the mystery* (Eph. 3. 4; Col. 2. 2). For a start it would do to return to the perspectives of the classical tradition in western theology. It is odd that people should think that Catholic thought at present suffers from domination by medieval scholasticism and in particular by St Thomas Aquinas. One of the most striking features of current theology, in fact, is that, for all his enormous authority and prestige, the real influence exercised by St Thomas on the vast majority of Catholic theologians is peripheral. Anybody at all familiar with discussion in the field of moral theology, for instance, knows that his basic positions count for remarkably little. It is not that there are moral problems now that he never encountered. That is true, but it is not really important. What is far more decisive is the fact that the theological vision of the Christian mystery offered by St Thomas is simply not accepted by most theologians today. The most obvious example of this is the general embarrassment that he could compose his definitive treatise on charity without ever referring seriously to Christ. This 'failure' is not at all odd in a theologian whose commanding perspective on Christian life is, if we may be permitted the short-hand, much more that of the Greek Fathers (divinization) than that of the post-

⁷Peter Fransen, 'The Theological Implications of the Discussions of the Liturgy at the Second Vatican Council', in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16 (1963), pp. 1-20—an important article; the phrase quoted occurs on page 10.

⁸The finest statement of the problems involved in transition to vernacular liturgy to come my way is that by Aelred Watkin: 'Taina: Some thoughts on a vernacular liturgy', in *Downside Review* 80 (1962), pp. 26-40.

Reformation west (imitation of Christ). It is no part of our purpose to debate whether this is a good or a bad thing, but it is certainly incontestable that contemporary Catholic sensibility is not generally shaped and toned by St Thomas's sense of Christianity.

This is particularly true of his sense of the liturgy. It is perhaps in the shocking way that we perform the liturgy that one can best gauge our remoteness from the theological options of St Thomas. Bad liturgy is proof of bad theology. Of course there are two sides, or rather two 'values', to liturgical activity: the human and the divine. The crucial difference between his theology and our practice is that there we find these two values integrated in a sane equilibrium while here we so neglect one of them, the human one, that the whole thing is knocked out of focus.

Liturgy means above all the sacraments, and it is in his treatise on the sacraments that one finds St Thomas's theology of the liturgy. Now, we are accustomed to say that the sacraments are both 'causes' and 'signs'. When we speak of them as causes we are drawing attention to their place in the grand structure of what St Thomas calls the 'advent of mercy'; they are the 'organs' of God's saving mercy (*instrumenta divinae misericordiae salvantis*). This is the liturgy as part of the philanthropic descent of the living God into the midst of us to save and to sanctify us for final union with him in heaven. It is the sacraments as the divine holiness making its impact on men. It is our conviction of this that keeps us in England remarkably loyal to the liturgy we have inherited and to that highly developed sense of the eucharistic presence: we certainly respect the divine value of the liturgy; but it is this too, I think, that we use as an excuse for a liturgical practice which is humanly often very degrading.

The sacraments are the divine holiness making its impact on men—yes; and with the generous sense that St Thomas had of men as intelligent and responsible beings this impact had to be made in as fully human a manner as possible. Contact between God and man does not devalue man, just the contrary. The closer man gets to God the more human he becomes: the more understanding, the more loving, the more responsive. It is just this pattern which was realized most perfectly in the incarnation of the Logos: God came lovingly to men in the history of a man who went lovingly to God. The death of Christ was the most complete act of human love coinciding with the most manifest proof of God's love. In the liturgy too, God's sanctifying descent into our midst calls out and coincides with our response.

God makes his liturgico-sacramental impact on us, to paraphrase St

Thomas, in a way that is profoundly consonant with our particular kind of awareness and sensitivity. Given what we are, it is a way that involves knowing, meaning, intelligence and communication: above all, signification. The most important thing about the vision St Thomas has of the liturgy is that he puts the sacraments as causes into the context of the sacraments as signs. This is a theological option whose repercussions may not be immediately evident. It means, briefly, that though the celebration of the divine liturgy is the event by which we are exposed to the transforming impact of divine holiness it is this only by exploiting our powers and experience as symbol-makers. The creation of a whole world of signs, to paraphrase St Thomas again, is something that is particularly human because we are beings who *learn*, thus who *communicate*, and thus who belong to a *community*. It is along this line that he can say that the sacraments are the symbolic gestures which articulate the faith by which we are saved (*signa protestantia fidem qua homo justificatur.*)

Of course liturgy 'works' even when it is gracelessly gabbled against the clock. But that is depriving it of most of its value in terms of human experience. God's impact on us is not mere manipulation of inert bodies, but a relation which engages us in what is most deeply ours: in our capacity for intelligent response. Liturgy, in the traditional view, is an *education*. The whole point about a sign is that it is transparent; it shows something hitherto or otherwise unintelligible. But it is not itself unintelligible. If it is to fulfil its function as a kind of pedagogy, then it must be performed in as instructive and significant a fashion as possible. It must be celebrated visibly, audibly, sensitively, intelligibly, in a word, *decently*.

We must realize the symbolism and carry out the signification of the sacraments as richly and authentically—as significantly—as possible. This requires a certain spirit, a docility, a patience, a *sense* of liturgy, which are at present rare. But it requires too some structural alterations in the ceremonies themselves. One of the most evident of these, as Fr Küng observes, is the restoration of the sacred meal symbolism to the eucharist. The mass has tended to become a kind of passion play and in the minds of most of us, I think, is only very notionally connected with the Last Supper. And yet the human situation of a formal meal which Jesus chose as the natural basis upon which to institute the eucharist was already one rich with human significance, not to speak of its importance in the history of Israel. It is still of course there, but its force as encapsulating a wealth of human experience has atrophied. But the genial intuition of St Pius X in encouraging the faithful to go to communion—

the principal origin of the present turmoil in the liturgy—bears so closely on its importance as the feast of the worshipping community that we can (I think) expect, in the not too distant future, the revival in some form of the meal-symbolism of the mass.

The appeal for intelligibility in the liturgy, then, which has certainly been endorsed by the Council, springs from a conception of worship as something which expresses the experience of the believing community, something to which we must contribute, if it is really to have the effect on us that the God desires whose entire scheme of salvation is basically the training of mankind to live with him for ever. To celebrate the liturgy is to declare our faith and, in time, to deepen and steady it, to illumine and strengthen it. Pope Pius XI once described the liturgy as the most important organ of the ordinary magisterium of the Church. The liturgy is our school. It is this deeply felt need of the people of God to be *formed* by their worship—to have it pass from obligatory ritual to human experience—that the new Catholic sensibility has made urgent. It is this that Fr Küng's restless antennae have touched, and it is something most profoundly 'traditional'.

By enlarging Fr Küng's perspectives a bit and pressing his logic we have been able to regard the present reform in the Church as essentially the reactivation in Catholic sensibility of the fullness of Christian experience. We have seen that the most decisive element in this process is the recovery of liturgical worship as the privileged medium of mankind's growth in knowledge of God. We have begun to see too the sort of conception of the God-man relationship that this presupposes. It is time now to push this a little further. If what we are saying is right, liturgy is in fact only part of that great history of God's instructing mankind which is simply revelation itself. It is a larger view of Christian revelation, in other words, that the Catholic sensibility at present requires in order, particularly, to break the scripture and/or tradition deadlock.

'Doctrine' is in some peril of becoming a dirty word. Fr Küng rejoices, for instance, that the Council has disavowed 'doctrinalism', by which he apparently means that it is not going to be used as a platform for the solemn promotion of neo-scholastic clichés. Perhaps a more pungent English translation would have been 'doctrinairism', in the sense of blind adhesion to a certain statement of Christian doctrine without regard to pastoral and missionary considerations. But this is surely a pathetic travesty of the traditional conception of sacred doctrine.

The starting-point for recovering this conception of *sacra doctrina* is to recollect that Christian revelation is simply the (partial and enigmatic)

manifestation in history of something wholly divine: 'It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and bear our testimony; we here declare to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ' (I John 1. 1-3). The basic structure of Christianity is already all there. On the one hand we are confronted with the living *word*, something which is made manifest and revealed, something noetic, something which involves attention, recognition, pondering and understanding; Christianity, in short, as a message, as knowledge of God. And on the other hand we have the everlasting *life*, something which is communicated and shared in the fellowship of a common life, something vital and ontological, something which involves action, service, living and loving; Christianity as a phenomenon, as relationship with God. Knowledge of God, itself divinely revealed, is objectified in the *inspired scriptures*. Relationship with God is simply the *new testament*: everything that expresses and realises the *rapport* created between God and the human race by the death of Christ. Jesus was 'delivered' to us as Christ (suffering Messiah) and Lord (risen *Kyrios*) and thus we live our lives now in union with him (Col. 2. 6). It is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and thus we too have been brought to share in this fullness (Col. 2. 9). God's hidden purpose, the *mysterion*, has been put into effect: the universe has been brought into a unity in Christ (Eph. 1. 9-10). God's secret, Christ himself, in whom lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge, is in us (Col. 2. 2-3; 1. 27). The age-long plan is now achieved in Christ Jesus our Lord, and in him we have access to God with freedom, in the confidence born of trust in him (Eph. 3. 11-12).

This is not an exhaustive assemblage of the texts, far from it; it is only a brief recall to lead in a rapid outline of the vastly expanded conception of 'tradition' with which theologians are beginning to operate.⁹ The basic form of 'tradition' is nothing less than the delivering to us of the risen Lord himself. As well as a message God gives us a reality: the real presence of his Son in the Holy Spirit. This is the gift to us of the plenitude of the Godhead. It is a *presence* amongst us which brings with it a *wisdom*. It is a *form of life*, and a *message* (the 'gospel'); and, though this form of

⁹Cf. numerous recent works by Fr Yves Congar.

life, being 'evangelical', is itself a message, it communicates, instructs and edifies as an *environment*. It is the 'culture' into which the believer enters—not Catholic culture in the narrow or rather peripheral and exotic sense (whether it be Dali and Teilhard de Chardin or the medieval cathedrals or whatever), but culture in the sense of a whole complex of profound convictions and feelings, of a living deposit of common experience, in which one's believing and hoping and loving are cultivated and practised.

This is of course something quite kaleidoscopic, with every degree of efficiency and value. But that it is a reality no Catholic would wish to dispute. It is this 'culture' in which one's Catholic sensibility is formed—a culture which is the covenant-relationship of man to God in Jesus Christ finding its density and dimensions in human experience—that one wishes now to identify as 'tradition'. It is the medium by which Christian attitudes are transmitted; it is, in the concrete, a mother scolding her naughty child and a family saying grace . . . It is everything by which the Christian sense of things—the Christian sense of the Bible too—is communicated.

Christianity is a great process of forming or training the human race for communion with God. It is precisely this *disciplina* (training) or, from God's point of view, *doctrina* (teaching) that is the principal category which a theologian like St Thomas uses to understand the nature of revelation. *Sacra doctrina*, or knowledge of God, is the concept which commands the whole of his theological understanding of the Christian mystery (in which he is thus profoundly faithful to the vision particularly of St John but in fact of the Bible as a whole).¹⁰ God's knowledge of his own mystery is communicated to us by the Christian revelation—in part: enough now to prepare us at a pace that respects our meagre capacity for what is to come in the end. The whole thing is a *process*. It is an *education*. Only when we begin to see Christianity not as a fixed doctrine but as a merciful relationship of God to man issuing in a whole complex educative process and situation in which mankind is formed for its destiny can we place the major elements in it: scripture, liturgy, tradition, the Church. What their relations are exactly is not yet agreed. It is, however, much more important that we are on the point of recovering a deeper and fuller sense not only of the pedagogical value of the liturgy but also of the entire activity of God on men as something funda-

¹⁰Cf. Yves Congar, 'Traditio und Sacra Doctrina bei Thomas v. Aquin', in *Kirche und Überlieferung*, Freiburg, 1960, pp. 170-210; a turning-point in the understanding of St Thomas.

mentally pedagogical. On both scores it is a recovery too of a certain sense of man, of a real Christian humanism. Liturgy is properly educative only so far as we let it be significant; Christianity itself is our training to be with God only so far as we take in its 'doctrine' in the context of its cultural tradition.

We have pushed a little deeper in one or two places than Fr Küng does in his book, but it is always the same changing sensibility of the living Church we have been probing. That *something* is happening is much less open to dispute than what it is exactly. It is our contention, however, that Fr Küng's sensitivity to this change—his feelers—are essentially trustworthy and clarifying, and that the change itself, while indeed calling for a certain reform, is fundamentally only our becoming more responsive, in the concrete, to great areas and dimensions we have too long neglected of that great re-formation of mankind by the philanthropic design of God.

The Beginnings of Wisdom¹

MONICA LAWLOR

Two things prompted me to think a little more closely about the relation between fear and Christian belief; one was reading a book by Pfister on *Christianity and Fear*² and the other was a growing concern with the extent to which fear seems to rule the lives of many Christians and provides an apparent contradiction of the love and freedom which are formally acknowledged as the keystones of Christianity. I have taken this opportunity to offer you the result of some reflection on the subject in the hope that in discussion we may gain some further insight into the meaning of the psalmist's words:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
a good understanding have all those who practise it.

(Ps. III. 10).

¹A talk first given to the Southampton circle of the Newman Association.

²O. Pfister, *Christianity & Fear*, London 1948 (trans.).