

Reviews

MY STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: MEMOIRS by Hans Küng, Continuum, London, 2003, Pp. xviii+478, £25.00, hbk.

This first volume of Hans Küng's memoirs takes us to the closure of Vatican II, in 1965. The German title, *Erkämpfte Freiheit*, suggests that freedom, to be freedom, is always something to be fought for. The English title highlights the author's struggles with ecclesiastical authorities, at the expense of the wider concern with freedom in the Church.

Born in 1928, Hans Küng is rooted proudly in centuries of Swiss intransigence, sharpened by early anxieties about the rise of Nazism across the frontier. He writes movingly of the traditional Catholicism in which he was brought up. His vacation home is by the Sempachersee, famous in Swiss history as the site where the Habsburgs were defeated in 1386. He remains close to his family. The last of the 65 photographs in the book are of himself with his five sisters (his one brother died of an inoperable brain tumour in 1954, aged twenty-two), and with his three beautiful nieces.

Aged eleven Küng decided to become a priest, influenced by the example of the energetic and (for those days) unconventional young parish priest. His schoolmates (girls as well as boys) were amazed when he told them, as they celebrated leaving school. Whatever the struggles to come, he seems always to have remained happily secure as Swiss, a Catholic and a priest.

In 1948 he went to the Collegium Germanicum: seven years of study. Clearly he loved Rome. He enjoyed wearing the red soutane which Germanicum students wore in those days, among all the black-clad seminarians. They attended lectures at the Gregorian University. Küng enjoyed the philosophy, recalling appreciatively lectures by Paolo Dezza and René Arnou. He took a course on Hegel, and was allowed to write his licentiate dissertation on Sartre. Morning lectures, all of course in Latin, were followed in the afternoons, back at the Germanicum, going over the material again, directed by Peter Gumpel ('no sense of humour'), whose style of neoscholastic philosophizing Küng did not find congenial.

In theology, Küng was subjected to the standard treatises *secundum mentem Sancti Thomae* ('This theology has to be learned by heart, not investigated critically'). Bernard Lonergan's 'dry traditional lectures on christology' the Germanicum students found very boring. The young Küng was not persuaded by Lonergan's thesis that Aquinas anticipated Einstein's theory of relativity. He was able, however, to 'learn much' from Juan Alfaro, Henri Vignon and Maurizio Flick.

Writing evidently from diaries, Küng gives a lively account of what it

was like to be a seminarian in Rome, in the years of Pius XII ('our Pope', always favouring the Germanicum and its alumni); with the dogma of the Assumption ('I am enthusiastically present'), the encyclical *Humani Generis*, the Pope's commissioning Riccardo Lombardi in 1952 to draft a 'project for the renewal of the Church', the closing down of the worker-priests in France, the 'purging' of Jesuit and Dominican theologians, and much else. Ordained priest in 1954, for his home diocese, Küng celebrated his first Mass with family and friends in the crypt of St Peter's (the day of the first intimation of his brother's illness).

He had decided to work on the theology of Karl Barth for his doctorate: one of the great Swiss figures whose name he had known since school days. This research was completed in Paris, supervised by Louis Bouyer. In 1957 the result was published, by Hans Urs von Balthasar, endorsed by Barth himself, the first major attempt to show that the doctrine of justification of the unrighteous by grace alone as defined by the Council of Trent was not so hopelessly incompatible with Reformed teaching, anyway as represented by the great Swiss Calvinist, as was generally supposed.

In 1960 the chair of fundamental theology at the university of Tübingen was vacant. Bernhard Welte had turned it down (the philosopher/priest who was to preach at Heidegger's funeral in 1976). Hans Urs von Balthasar also refused, no doubt knowing that his appointment would have been blocked by the Vatican. Though only thirty-one, Küng was appointed, paradoxically with approving noises from influential figures in Rome.

The second half of these memoirs tells the story of the theological battles at the Council. Küng was a *peritus* from the outset, and in the thick of it. Obviously, he writes from his own perspective, that of the German-speaking theologians: Christopher Butler appears only once, John Carmel Heenan only two or three times, the Melchite Patriarch Maximos IV no more frequently. On the other hand, Küng drafted the letter (in French), taken by the Patriarch to Paul VI, which triggered the introduction of the four moderators to co-ordinate the work of the Council (page 357). These memoirs are not only fascinating for those of us familiar with the names of the principal actors; they are also an important contribution to the history of the Council.

The important speech delivered in October 1963 on charisms in the Church by Cardinal Léon Suenens, which found its way into the text of *Lumen gentium* (§12), was drafted by Küng (page 361) — ironically, since 'an ignorant English Dominican', reviewing one of his books in 2001, accused him of passing over the charismatic structure of the Church.

I am not that Dominican. Nor, however, was I the 'kind chauffeur' (page 319) who drove him from Oxford to Cambridge in May 1963, a 'tense and time-consuming' journey: I have never had a driving license or lessons in my life. I remember his stay at the Old Palace, Oxford, in August 1962, however, when some of us visited him there and had him

back for tea at Blackfriars (page 265). *The Council and Reunion* had just been published by Sheed and Ward (he had his first gin and tonic at the launching party, 'still my favourite drink'). That autumn we read it at the evening meals. I remember shocked cluckings in the cloister afterwards; but the Prior, who did not like the contents either (he eventually left the Church, disillusioned by the 'changes'), would never have taken a book off which had been put on as refectory reading on his authority.

My Struggle, translated by John Bowden, doyen of translators, should have been copy edited by someone familiar with Catholic usage. Perhaps Küng wanted the Holy Office referred to throughout as the Sanctum Officium (never italicized); but Montini was not 'the substitute' (page 265); it is odd to call Ciampi 'Maestro of the Palazzo Apostolico' (page 266); to refer consistently to the great Jesuit church in Rome as 'Al Gesù'; to the spiritual director at the Germanicum as 'the Spiritual'; to the visits to the Blessed Sacrament as 'the *adoratio*'; and much else.

There are only five references to Pope John Paul II, two of which report that he studied with the Dominicans at the Angelicum only because the Jesuits at the Gregorian refused him admission on the grounds that his philosophical studies had not been completed satisfactorily. The paperwork was probably not in order: after all, his studies were abbreviated, in the underground seminary in the archbishop's palace in Krakow, in somewhat hectic years (1942-44). A different story is that Archbishop Sapieha hated Pope Pius XI, for several understandable reasons, who, as Nuncio in Poland, had directed clever young priests to the Gregorian: Sapieha was determined that none of his should ever go there, and, in any case, much admired the Dominicans in Krakow.

We shall hear much more about John Paul II in the second volume of these wonderfully readable memoirs.

FERGUS KERR OP

THE FUTURE OF THE ASIAN CHURCHES: The Asian Synod & *Ecclesia in Asia*, edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 2002, Pp. viii + 206, pbk.

In this book just short of twenty theologians, bishops and journalists reflect upon the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation signed by the Holy Father during his pastoral visit to India (5-8 November 1999). According to Thomas Menampampil, Archbishop of Guwahati (India), the Asian Synod was the 'most important ecclesial event for Asia from the time of the Great Councils.' He also believes that it helps us to 'look at Asia with Asian eyes'.

This four year project of Church reflection and renewal began with the publication of the *Lineamenta* (1996), continued with discussion on the *Instrumentum Laboris* (1998), reached its apex with the month-long synod in Rome (April 18 – May 14, 1998) and culminated with the proclamation of *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 6, 1998). Whether the Synod did in fact