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The quotation opposite comes from a speech delivered at Saarbrücken in January 1968

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Küng Examined

PROFESSOR KÜNG'S BOOK¹ has received considerable publicity in this country and has been honoured with many notices. It has provoked widely different reactions from its reviewers. Charles Davis predictably said that the author should have gone the whole hog and left the Church; Professor Cameron equally predictably thought the debate was much ado about nothing in comparison with the Church's duty to help in solving the problems of the modern world; Norman St John-Stewas predictably thought it a block-buster of a book; Douglas Woodruff quite unpredictably patted the author on the head, with the air of one who has seen it all before in the Church's history and is now quite incapable of being surprised. *The Times* gave the book space on the centre page; the C.T.S. banned it from its bookshops; Fr Flanagan is reported to have called the author a heretic; in Scotland a certain 'Karl Küng' was denounced from the pulpit. But apart from the fact that the author denies papal infallibility, the reviews and reports tell very little about what the book actually says. It therefore seems worth while to devote some space to this purpose.

It is a book written with passion by a man bitterly disappointed at the frustration of the high hopes raised by Vatican II:

The renewal of the Catholic Church willed by the Second Vatican Council has come to a standstill, and with it ecumenical understanding with other Christian Churches and a new opening out towards the contemporary world. Five years after the Council ended this is a situation that can no longer be ignored, and for churchmen and theologians to remain silent would be unwise and harmful.

Is it necessary to insist that what follows is an attempt, not to foster unrest and uncertainty in the Church, but merely to give expression to the unrest and uncertainty that already exist on all sides; that the author is not motivated by presumption, but wishes merely to help gain a hearing for grievances of the faithful to which it is impossible to be deaf; and that if sometimes, perhaps, the tone is sharp and the manner harsh, that is a reflection, not of the author's aggressiveness, but of his deep concern? (p.9).

The extent to which disappointment, a sense of paralysis, and actual defeatism and hopelessness, have spread recently, particularly among the best of our clergy and people, is indescribable (p.22).

1. Hans Küng: *Infallible?* (Collins, 1971); translated by Eric Mosbacher.

The author frequently attacks the 'Curia', the 'Vatican ghetto', and alludes several times to the 'inquisitional proceedings' that were taken against him in Rome. John XXIII is his hero; Paul VI a man of integrity but a disaster for the Church:²

It is impossible to go on shutting one's eyes to the fact that, in spite of his and his advisers' best intentions, the longer the teaching office is exercised by this pope and his curia, the more damage is done to the unity and credibility of the Catholic Church; and, yet again in history, this damage is done from within Rome itself (pp.12-13).

Küng lists thirty or more episodes in which the reforming movement initiated at Vatican II appears to have been abandoned in the present pontificate. This reversion to bad old ways, he thinks, is all due to the tendency in the Church to exercise authority in an authoritarian spirit, especially the authority to teach. This is a book, then, in which the author deploys all his technical skill — knowledge of scripture and Church history, logic, sarcasm, innuendo, tendentious interpretation of documents and historical facts — to expose 'Roman absolutism' ('The only absolutism that survived the French revolution intact') in its theory and practice, and in particular its acutest form, the claim to exercise infallibility. He is not, therefore, concerned principally with the infallibility of the pope: he diverts his fire against all claim to infallibility in the Church whether of pope, council or ordinary *magisterium* of the bishops.

For all the sharp tone and harsh manner, the author's aim deserves the reader's sympathetic attention. That there is a measure of pious skulduggery and apprehensive clinging to power at the Church's centre can hardly be ignored even by the most naively charitable. If infallibility could be shown to be an illusion, that central authoritarianism would lose all credibility. But for those who feel no sympathy for this aspect of Church politics, the book's theme is still of great importance for its ecumenical implications. For it is not only the infallibility of the pope, but the infallibility of the Church which many non-Catholics find unable to accept. They willingly admit that the Holy Spirit guides the Church to the truth, but believe it possible that at any particular moment the Church's pastors may fail to respond to the Spirit's guidance. The first four, or seven,

2. For a more sensitive plotting of Paul VI's reactions see P. Hebblethwaite: *The Month*, January 1970, pp.3-9.

General Councils in this view are authoritative for Christian belief, not because the bishops there exercised a collective infallibility *at the time*, but because *subsequently* the Church has recognised that the decrees of these Councils are in accordance with the teaching of the gospels. In short, the Roman Catholic and the Anglican (and still more the Protestant) interpretations of teaching authority are fundamentally incompatible. But if Küng is right, this disagreement, which is probably the biggest obstacle to the reunion of the Churches, is removed.

Not infallible in practice

The first chapter of Küng's book sets out to prove from examples that the Church has in fact not been infallible. 'The errors of the Church's teaching office have been numerous and grave; nowadays, when open discussion can no longer be forbidden, they cannot be denied even by the more conservative theologians and Church leaders' (p.27). Among such commonly-admitted errors he lists the excommunication of Photius; the prohibition of interest on loans; the condemnation of Galileo; the settlement of the rites controversy in the Indian, Chinese and Japanese missions; the defence of the pope's temporal power; the ban on critical biblical scholarship, which was included under the comprehensive condemnation of modernism; the inclusion of orthodox books in the Index for insufficient reasons; the case of the seventh-century Pope Honorius I, who in a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople held the view that Christ had a single will, and was subsequently condemned, probably wrongly, by the Third Council of Constantinople for Monothelism, and by his successor Pope Agatho for encouraging heresy by his negligence; and Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis*, which condemned various 'new theological tendencies' which have since been commonly adopted as orthodox teaching. Of course, most of this is a battle-ground that had been repeatedly fought over before Professor Küng was learning his catechism; the files of the (now extinct) Bellarmine Society at Heythrop bulged with correspondence on every one of these examples. As he well knows, a Catholic strategy of defence was easily devised: if there was error, then it must have been an instance in which the Church's infallibility was not engaged. This defence is unbeatable, and, though suspiciously facile, is not in fact without some historical justification. Of course, Küng is right in saying that 'such theological manoeuvres often create a painful impression' (p.28), but Church history is too complicated a subject to be left to the judgment of the plain, blunt man — a convenient persona which controversialists are all too often tempted disingenuously to assume.

But, according to Küng, the latest instance of an infallible fallacy allows no such evasion — the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The author, of course, rightly refuses to turn aside from his general theme in order to make a detailed study of the morality of birth-control. But in view of the weakness of the arguments put forward in the encyclical, and of the widespread opposition it has encountered in the Church, even though in guarded terms from national hierarchies, Küng feels justified in adopting the presupposition that the encyclical is in error. Well, let us for the sake of argument accept his presupposition, and see where his logic takes us. It is no use defending infallibility by saying, as the papal spokesman Mgr Lambruschini did at a press conference, that the Pope was not speaking *ex cathedra*, for the infallibility that is involved is not that of the extraordinary *magisterium* of the Pope, but that of the ordinary *magisterium* of the Church. As the conservative minority on the papal commission put it: 'The truth of this teaching derives from the fact that it has always and everywhere been put forward with such constancy, such universality, and such binding force, as something to be believed and followed by the faithful' (p.47). This was in fact the decisive issue with Paul VI himself: he could not adopt the 'progressive' view without admitting that the ordinary *magisterium* had been in error.

The progressive majority had argued that since *Casti Conubii* medical, psychological and sociological changes had taken place which made the situation in 1968 so different from that in 1930 that the Church could now offer a new answer while at the same time maintaining that Pius XI had given the right decision for his own time. In other words, the progressives appealed to the concept of a development of doctrine, but Paul VI rejected this appeal. It is here that Küng makes a brilliantly unexpected dialectical move: the Pope, he holds, was *right to reject the progressive argument*. For the situation had not changed fundamentally by 1968: whatever reasons were decisive for a judgment in the time of Paul VI had already been brought to light by the statement of the Lambeth Conference of 1930, to which *Casti Conubii* was the Roman Catholic Reply. It was impossible to show that a progressive decision favouring responsible artificial birth-control would simply have been saying more explicitly what Pius XI had said implicitly; on the contrary, such a decision would have simply contradicted *Casti Conubii* and the tradition of centuries. The traditional teaching, the ordinary *magisterium* of the Church, was simply wrong. The Church is therefore not infallible.

This is a spectacular piece of advocacy, but it is doomed to failure from the very start as far as this writer is concerned, because I happen to subscribe to the teaching that artificial birth control is morally

wrong. But even if one accepts Küng's presupposition, his argument is still lacking in cogency, because it rests upon a rationalistic view of the development of doctrine. This is a point of such importance that it needs to be discussed at some length.

Logical development, such that a new doctrine follows logically from earlier ones, is only one form of development, and a very rare one. A more common type of development arises from the use of new conceptual forms: for example, if I follow an ontology which makes the purpose of a thing a part of its deepest reality, I will come upon a formula to describe the eucharistic presence which is certainly not a logical development of the doctrine of transubstantiation, but which the Church could in principle canonise as a definition of faith on the ground that this use of the terms expresses Christian faith. This apparently is what the Church did at Chalcedon; the doctrine of the two natures and one person of Christ is not logically entailed by the words of Scripture or earlier tradition.

In the matter of moral definitions, however, (which are in point of fact extremely rare), a third kind of development is involved. Dogmatic definitions are always subject to the limitations of language, especially of analogical language about God: theological propositions cannot have the hard outlines, the cold absence of subjectivity, that is expected of statements of physical fact; I cannot define God as I can define a Morris 1100 or a fracture of the tibia. But moral statements can have a perfectly sharp focus, because they deal with concrete acts: marriage is indissoluble, artificial contraception is wrong, and so on. How then can there be a development of doctrine in morals? One way in which the Church's teaching can develop is in the application of accepted moral principles to a new situation, for example, the judgment that an act is moral in one situation need not preclude the later judgment that the same act is immoral in a different situation. (Thus, declaration of war in defence of a right may be justified in the age of bows and arrows but not in the age of nuclear and biological weapons.)

Now is Küng right in saying that the situation with regard to birth-control was essentially the same in 1968 as it had been in 1930? (One is entitled to ask why he picks on the year of *Casti Conubii* as his standard of comparison if his argument depends on the moral unanimity of the ordinary *magisterium* over the centuries — but let that pass.) The answer is clearly 'No' in one particular, namely man's awareness of the urgency of the threat posed by the population explosion. There was sufficient *mutatio materiae* to establish a *prima facie* case for a change in the Church's teaching, just as moralists have taught that in periods of national disaster polygamy might be permitted. But the case for the new situation can be

made in another way. It could have been argued that what was new in 1968 was a new popular awareness that contraception did not necessarily involve the selfish avoidance of the responsibilities of parenthood, that the use of marital rights implies the duty of parenthood, but not necessarily in every exercise of it. Of course, this principle was taught by non-Catholic moralists in 1930, and a rather more restricted version of it was embodied in the Lambeth resolution of that year. But, it might be argued, the popular mind was not yet ready, the mind of the Church was not yet formed on this point. Therefore the admission of artificial contraception, whatever is said about the duties of parenthood, would have led to abuse in 1930 (as, it could be argued, in fact happened outside the Catholic Church), whereas by 1968 the popular mind was ready for the new teaching.

I am not, of course, stating this as my own judgment of the morality of contraception. I am simply trying to show how the case for a development of doctrine could have been expressed in an attempt to justify a permissive verdict in 1968. I think it likely that many Catholics were prepared to justify a change in this way; and, to be frank, before *Humanae Vitae* I did in fact think along these lines myself.

The position we have reached is this. Küng argues that the Pope was right on his principles to reinforce the prohibition on artificial contraception because there could be no development of doctrine; but the prohibition was wrong; therefore the Church, in her ordinary *magisterium* is not infallible.³ I do not accept that *Humanae Vitae* was fundamentally in error; but even if it was, that is to say, even if the Pope should have decided in favour of artificial contraception, it does not follow that the previous tradition of the Church was wrong, unless it is first shown, more convincingly than Küng has done, that the appeal to a development of doctrine was not well-founded.

The definition of 1870

So far Küng has tried to prove from examples that the Church is *de facto* not infallible. His thesis, however, does not stand or fall by this argument. He now adopts a new line of attack and attempts to show that the proofs from scripture and tradition that were put forward in defence of the doctrine of papal infallibility in Vatican I and Vatican II are inadequate. Vatican II did little more than repeat Vatican I's definition of papal infallibility, adding half-hearted statements about collegiality which were not clear enough to provide a counterweight. Vatican I argued as follows:

3. But for the difficulties connected with the idea of an infallible ordinary *magisterium* see B. C. Butler, 'The Limits of Infallibility: I' in *The Tablet*, 17 April 1971, pp.372-5.

- 1) Peter's primacy among the apostles was inherited by successive popes;
- 2) this primacy implies the power to teach infallibly.

1) The Vatican decree offers proofs from scripture and tradition. From scripture: if the Church is to stand for ever it needs its foundation or Rock in later generations just as much as in the time of the Apostles; from tradition, by quotations from Leo I, Irenaeus and Ambrose. Küng has some justification, however, for the scepticism with which he greets the arguments from tradition. Of the three fathers quoted in the decree, the last two in any event refer to the Roman Church, not the Roman bishop (though perhaps he makes too much of this distinction, as the bishop embodies the local church); and, more importantly, the application of the Petrine texts to the Bishop of Rome was unknown in the first three centuries, and over particular issues bishops like St Cyprian did not hesitate to oppose Rome. The scriptural argument is no more satisfactory. An essential element in the role of the apostles was to be witnesses to the Resurrection: it cannot therefore be assumed that bishops succeed to the apostolic powers, or that, in particular, the Bishop of Rome succeeds to those of St Peter. Moreover, historians such as Von Campenhausen⁴ argue plausibly that there was an interval in the evolution of the Church between the age of the apostles and that of the 'monarchical' bishop who presided over the local Church, and in particular that at the turn of the first century there was no bishop presiding over the Roman Church.

Now these arguments of Küng's are powerful, though not all historians would accept them in full, but they do not demolish the case for infallibility. It could, for example, be maintained that the episcopal and papal offices were latent in the Church from the beginning, to emerge only in the second and subsequent centuries. A similar evolutionary process is, after all, attributed by some theologians to the seven sacraments.

2) The decree of Vatican I maintained that it had been the constant tradition in the Church that the Pope's primatial powers included supreme teaching authority, which in turn implied freedom from error. Küng's previous objections apply again here: first, it cannot be taken for granted that popes have inherited Peter's commission to confirm his brethren (Lk 22:32); secondly, it was several centuries before the Fathers began to apply the Petrine texts to the popes; thirdly, in practice the early bishops did not hesitate to reject papal teaching when they thought it mistaken — though Küng does not give sufficient weight to the constant concern of innovators in the early Church to gain papal approval for their innovations.

4. Cf. H. Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, 1969.

Küng then proceeds to examine the origin of the doctrine of papal infallibility. He refers to the work of Congar and J. Langen for evidence that from the seventh century to the twelfth the popes were not regarded as infallible. St Thomas Aquinas played a major part in obtaining general recognition for the teaching, but his treatment of the subject 'teems with quotations from forged documents', such as those of the pseudo-Isidore (p.96). From St Thomas the belief in the teaching authority of the pope (though without explicit use of the word 'infallibility') passed into conciliar definitions at Lyons II (1274) and Florence (1439), where they were 'imposed' on the 'hard-pressed' Greeks (p.99) (Küng is evidently not aware of Fr J. Gill's refutation of this old myth).

The doctrine of papal infallibility, then Küng concludes with surprising restraint, 'rests on foundations that cannot be regarded as secure and unassailable' (p.102). On the whole, despite a certain amount of special pleading, Küng makes his point: Vatican I is mistaken in saying that the Church's continual practice (*perpetuus Ecclesiae usus*, Dz 3065) proves that the pope holds supreme teaching authority. But by 1870 there was virtual unanimity among the bishops. Acton failed to persuade the opposition at the Council to shift their ground from the conviction that the definition was inopportune to outright rejection of the dogma. Küng admits that the real reason why bishops at the Council accepted the definition was that they believed it, and for the most part wanted it in order to strengthen the Church against rationalism and the Pope against Gallicanism.

Küng concludes from all this that Vatican I was in error, because the grounds alleged in favour of the definition were insufficient. His presupposition needs to be made clear: if the theological reasons put forward for a doctrine are not cogent, the definition is invalid. This presupposition in turn seems to rest on two other assumptions: first, that a doctrine which is not logically deducible from scripture is not validly based; secondly, that the Church evolves her faith by a strictly logical process (I have already referred to this point above in considering Küng's view of the development of doctrine). 'Since — as Vatican I itself declared — neither Pope nor Council are granted new revelation or inspiration, and since Vatican I described its infallible definition as divinely revealed dogma, the justification, on the Council's own showing, must be discoverable in the witness to that revelation' (pp.88-9). The Catholic view, it seems to me, is quite different: the mind of the Church is formed not so much by logical deductions from scripture as by a living experience of Christ in worship and service, an experience which is more fundamental than words, but which enables the Church to perceive new depths (not merely logical implications) in scripture. The New Testament itself is simply a canonised collection of

such reflections by the Church on her experience of Christ.

Küng has further misgivings about the 1870 definition: on the surface it represents a compromise, for it imposes limits on papal infallibility that were not at all to the taste of Ultramontanes like Manning, who in 1866 had expounded to his clergy a much wider interpretation of the Pope's authority: 'All interpretations emanating from Pontifical authority are certainly infallible . . . [Such] are the copious and luminous decisions of the Pontiffs, S. Pius V, Innocent X, and Alexander VII, in the doctrines of grace contained in the condemned propositions of Baius and Jansenius, and the like.'⁵

But in fact, Küng complains, the limitations exist only on paper, because only the pope has the power to judge whether a proposition constitutes a 'doctrine concerning faith or morals'; for as the decree on the Church of Vatican II explains, the pope's powers of definition extend to whatever is necessary to guard and expound the deposit of faith.⁶ Again, although the authoritative explanation of the definition given at Vatican I by Gasser states that the pope can define only as a member of the Church, and therefore needs to have recourse to consultation, it is up to the pope to decide what consultation is necessary, and in any event consultation, though it may be a moral duty, is not necessary for validity.

Küng protests against this absence of any explicit constitutional limitation on the pope's exercise of his teaching authority: 'presumably even the Roi Soleil would have had no objections to such theoretical and abstract limitations of his power' (p.86). But before we laugh him out of court as a legalist, we should remember, as he does, that there have been curial officials, — and who will say they no longer exist? — who make use of their expertise as canonists and civil servants to frustrate any Church reform which they conceive to be dangerous to the faith. I was grudgingly moved to write the words 'He's right' in the margin beside the following cynical observation:

If it is desired to meet the Romans on equal terms, collegiality in the Church will have to be given the same solid juridical base, with the aid of all the devices of ecclesiastical law, that the Romans have taken care for centuries to give the papal primacy (p.87).

Infallibility not needed

We have seen Küng, then, trying to show that the Church has in practice not been infallible, and that

5. *The Reunion of Christendom: a Pastoral Letter to the Clergy, etc.*, by Henry Edward, Archbishop of Westminster, 1866, p.37.

6. *Haec autem infallibilitas . . . tantum patet quantum divinae Revelationis patet depositum, sancte custodiendum et fideliter exponendum* (n. 25). Küng is following K. Rahner's exegesis of the text (*Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. H. Vorgrimler, vol 1, p.212).

the 1870 definition of papal infallibility was made on insufficient evidence, and can therefore be repudiated. His next step is to argue that the Church's possession of the truth, which was promised by Christ and is the gift of the Holy Spirit, does not require the existence of an infallible teaching office. The Church, Küng holds, is *indefectible*: by this he means that 'basically the Church remains in the truth that is unaffected by errors in particular instances' (p.149). (I have corrected the English translation which reads 'errors in detail', which seems to have slightly different implications from the German *Irrtümer in einzelnen*.) But the Church is not *infallible*; that is to say, there are no persons in the Church who can singly or collectively make statements of faith which cannot be mistaken. This is not, of course, simply a matter of words: what is at issue is whether there must be actual moments when the Church's charism of indefectibility can be known to be operating.

One can perhaps consider a little fable. The day before a contest a boxer once met a fairy who promised him that he would be indefectible — basically he would remain in the fight despite particular set-backs. An encouraging promise, but how much could he count on? That he would win every round? That he would be winning on points at the end of the fight? Or simply that he would still be on his feet at the end of the fight? I think it is fair to say that similar ambiguities arise in Küng's appeal to the concept of indefectibility. Will the Church simply avoid being knocked out by error? Will it be more in truth than in error at the end of the world? Will it be totally free from error at the end of the world? Or will it soon correct any error as it occurs?

Apart from this ambiguity I am inclined to think there also lurk a gratuitous assumption and a fallacy. The assumption is that it is somehow harder or less appropriate for God to preserve the pope or the bishops from error on *all* recognisable occasions than it is for him to see that they are so preserved on *some* such occasions. The fallacy, as some reviewers have pointed out, is that the Church can be said to remain basically in the truth if particular teachings, issued with full consideration and solemnity, are sometimes false. I am reminded of a young religious who complained that his college bursar was the sort of man who thought poverty had to do with pounds, shillings and pence. (Those were pre-decimal days.) Küng seems to be saying something similar: that remaining in the truth is nothing so trivial as the putting forward of a teaching whose truth can be relied upon.

A similar fallacy underlies another part of Küng's thesis: that there are doctrinal definitions that are not infallible but binding (p.123). What this astonishing statement, which occurs more than once, seems to imply is that the Church's charism of truth is exercised in her proclamation of teachings which purport to be

true, which all members of the Church must believe, but which may be false. In other words, the Church shows herself as possessing the truth when she teaches people to believe falsehoods. You cannot defend Küng's position by arguing that in such cases the Church is failing to exercise her charism of truth; because Küng is expressly discussing cases in which 'it is necessary to mark off the gospel from false doctrine' (p.120). If the Church fails to exercise her charism of truth when it is necessary, she cannot be said to be indefectible.

The impossibility of infallible statements

And now we come to the last stage, which Küng regards as the central point of his thesis: there is no such thing as an infallible statement of faith.

Now it seems to me that some reviewers have indulged in displays of pedantry in this connection, asserting, for example, that the 1870 definition says that the pope and the Church are infallible, not that their pronouncements are. This is a trivial point; for even though the definition does not speak in **this** way, the term 'infallible pronouncement' would mean a pronouncement issued by a pope or a council in exercise of their infallible *magisterium*.

Küng's point is much more serious. He admits that faith must have a content which will need to be expressed in words. The Church has the right to put forward authoritative statements of faith, e.g. for catechetical purposes, or to guard against heresy. These formulas may be binding, although Küng wishes to limit these binding statements to cases of crisis. (His list of criteria for discerning such crisis reads like St Thomas's list of the conditions for a just war.) The Church, he believes, is not entitled to pronounce definitions in order to promote the development of dogmas; he concludes from this somewhat arbitrary axiom that the Vatican I papal definitions and the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950 were 'aberrations'. But binding formulas are not infallible, because no proposition can possibly be infallible. To think that 'the infallibility of the Church is tied to infallible propositions' is a 'naive misunderstanding' (p.150).

Now this is an absolutely crucial point, which has scarcely reached the notice of theologians in the past. Küng's meaning is that, not only does the Church's indefectibility not entail the power to make infallible pronouncements, but the nature of human propositions is such that such pronouncements cannot be infallible. This latter point is established partly with a question-begging pietism: 'Can any human being who is not God be free from falling into error?' (p.113). 'What would be the state of a Church that

based its faith entirely on a number of clear propositions? The theologian in particular should remind himself and others that clarity (*doxa*) was originally, not a matter of method or even of consciousness, but an attribute of the Divinity' (p.139). But Küng also appeals to the evidence provided by linguistic philosophy. In this field of learning he is clearly ill at ease: witness his ill-assorted list of modern exponents of the subject — 'M. Heidegger, H. G. Gadamar, H. Lipps, B. Liebrucks, K. Jaspers, M. Merleau-Ponty, L. Wittgenstein, G. Frege, C. W. Morris, H. Lefèbvre and N. Chomsky' (p.129). (I would like to see what my friend Robert Butterworth made of this XI.) Küng argues that propositions fail to express the whole truth, that they often fail to express the author's meaning, that they are untranslatable without falsification, that the meanings of words change, that statements can be used as slogans which try to inculcate an ideology beyond the literal sense of the statement; he refers also to the Hegelian view of the dialectical nature of understanding. It follows that it is difficult to see how any proposition can be infallible.

This, to repeat, is the crucial point — so crucial that it is a pity that Küng has not developed the argument with anything like the force that it deserves. I hope to attempt to do so in the October issue of *The Month*.

For the time being it must suffice to suggest that Küng has fallen into an error which he himself accuses Catholic theologians of making — the error of rationalism, or the insistence upon dogmatic propositions of a Cartesian clarity. Küng maintains that Descartes's insistence upon clear ideas led theologians into thinking that the Church's truthfulness can exist only if she has the power to make infallibly true statements. But Küng has unconsciously fallen into the same error in assuming that statements can be infallible only if they correspond infallibly with the facts: I suggest that there is another sense in which propositions can be called infallible, namely if they can be relied upon to promote the personal relationship between Christians and Christ. One might call this view of truth pragmatic, but to do so is not to condemn it.

There is another systematic fallacy that vitiates this stage of Küng's argument. He takes it for granted that what is liable to change and therefore provisional cannot be infallible. Here again he betrays an inflexibly rationalistic view of the development of doctrine. Throughout the book, in fact, Küng's thinking seems strangely blocked on this point, and it is this that gives the book, despite the allusions to the pontificates of John XXIII, Paul VI, an archaic ring. He assumes that if the 1870 sense of infallibility is now seen to be inadequate the doctrine is false. One who, like him, protests loyalty to Catholic ecclesiology should have concluded instead that the

doctrine is ripe for development. But, ironically, his book will contribute to that development. And in the end no one will be more pleased than Hans Küng.

When all is said, it appears that with Küng, as with that earlier bitter opponent of papal infallibility, Lord Acton, the deepest reason for opposition to the doctrine is moral: overthrow the doctrine and you have overthrown its basis of Roman authoritarianism. But for all its pamphleteering tone, Küng's book raises two major points which Catholic theologians must face: first, the fact that history suggests that papal primacy and infallibility (and perhaps the papacy and even the episcopate themselves) were not known in the early Church: secondly, the philosophical difficulties involved in the notion of an infallible teaching authority. I have tried to show that these objections are not fatal to the doctrine: I must leave further treatment of them till next month.

The translation by Eric Mosbacher is adequate,

though he has been unable to shake himself free from the syntactical pattern of German sentences. As far as I could see the translation is generally accurate, though some of the author's more abrasive innuendos are quietly toned down or even omitted. One inaccuracy, which in fact recurs several times, has already been pointed out. There is a major error on p.150, where through the omission of a negative Congar is made to say: 'The universally shared basic belief was that the *Ecclesia* herself could err (Albert the Great, St Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, the Decretists).' The repeated mistranslation of *faktisch* as 'specifically' instead of 'in effect' gives rise to the surprising historical statements that Chalcedon 'specifically amended the decision of the First Council of Ephesus in 431' and 'specifically rejected . . . the idea of the one nature in Christ' (p.168). The English edition gives two wrong Denziger numbers on p.78.

E. J. Yarnold S.J.

Next Month

Priesthood : John Ashton

Justice and Development : J. F. Harriott

The Church's Fundamental Law :
Peter Hebblethwaite