

Kung Matter Considered Closed

By Father Robert Graham, SJ

Vatican City (RNS)— Both parties to the Kung case have had their "last word."

The German bishops, with the personal participation of the pope judge Prof. Hans Kung's counter-proposals to be insufficient, as they put it, to justify a reversal of their earlier decision. The controversial Swiss theologian cannot therefore continue to enjoy the status of a professor in the Catholic theological faculty of the state university of Tuebingen.



Comment

Father Kung for his part, the first to be informed of the verdict, reached at a special meeting of five German bishops with Pope John Paul II at Castelgandolfo, reacted sharply with many accusations against the methods and motives of his adversaries, and with an appeal to other theologians to rally to his defense. Father Kung, declared not to be "a Catholic theologian," will probably be shifted to another faculty of the same state university. He can therefore continue to write and teach, in his own way and in his own name. The aggressive young priest-professor, no shrinking violet, will certainly continue to do just that.

Discussion in the Italian and German press before the ultimate decision brought out that Prof. Kung was asking the impossible. Could he, in all logic and honesty, expect to act as the authorized teacher of the young German clergy if in the judgement of the entire German national episcopal conference, after years of dispute, his views cannot be considered orthodox?

As one letter-writer in the Frankfurter Allgemeine, a secular journal of liberal persuasion, put it, at least Galileo had no teaching post in the church and was not an exponent of Catholic doctrine in the name of the national episcopacy in an official seminary. Another

correspondent wrote that every organization, religious or other, has a right to disavow those in its ranks who do not accept general policy. Only a while back, he recalled, the evangelicals dismissed a pastor who did not believe in God. And the socialists expelled a prominent member who was against their official line. Nobody complained about human rights, he said.

In Italy, the hard-crusted old 'laicist' jurist Prof. A.C. Jemolo, refused to take dramatically the fate of the Tuebingen scholar. Of course, he said, Prof. Kung, as an individual, should be able to write as he pleases. But a man who is a theologian of a church with definite tenets, above all a theologian with a special position, cannot write as he pleases. "You must distinguish," said Prof. Jemolo in the Stampa of Turin, "between the rights of a man, the rights of a theologian, and the rights of one who exercises the power of the teaching authority from the chair of a theological faculty."

Prof. Jemolo wrote this after a long introduction about the "bad old days" of Pius IX, who died a century ago, and St. Pius X. But these are different times, he said. These are not the time of the anti-Modernist crisis. Father Kung has not been expelled from the church; the bishops just don't want him teaching their future priests, representing views they cannot admit. "Let's re-evaluate the matter," wrote Prof. Jemolo, "We are far from the instruments that the church used in the anti-Modernist crisis."

Here in Rome, they regard as entirely lacking in seriousness Father Kung's claim he has already been condemned without a hearing, or his alleged "readiness" to dialogue. In fact, they say, Father Kung has refused to dialogue with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the "Inquisition," as he calls it, except on his own conditions.

Father Kung may now regret having accepted years ago the attractive post at the Tuebingen Catholic theological faculty. But he did so, with full knowledge of the responsibilities and limitations of this prestigious charge. This included the sense of a mandate from the

German bishops to act as their spokesman in the formation of the young clergy. Perhaps he thought these were formal conditions, outdated anyway by Vatican II, and capable at worst of being tossed into the breeze without ceremony. If he was mistaken, he should not hold the German bishops to blame.

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Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

The Water Of Life

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 3:15-16, 21-22. (R1) Is. 42:1-4, 6-7. (R2) Acts 10:34-38.

Sunday, the Baptism of the Lord, begins the Church Year. The first reading echoes God's words at the baptism of Jesus. "Here is...my chosen one with whom I am pleased." St. Luke in Acts (R2), implies that Jesus' ministry began with his baptism of John. The gospel narrates what happened at Jesus' baptism.

Jesus began His public life with baptism; and, according to Matthew, concluded it with a commission to go teach all nations, baptizing them.

Why this emphasis on baptism? God's gracious accommodation to our limitations. Man is not an angel, but an animated body. The normal avenue of communication with him is through his five senses. So

God became a man to get to man, so to speak. Because He had accepted the limitations of a human body, He chose to extend Himself down the ages by another "body" — His Church, the mystical body of Christ. He gave this Body seven sacraments, visible signs, through which He could continue to act in regard to each of us.

In baptism Christ can continue to give every man that which He came to give when He walked the earth. "I came that they might have life" (Jn. 10:10). Jesus was not speaking to corpses; His listeners already had life. What then was Jesus talking about? Jesus had two kinds of life: human and divine. He was talking about divine life — God-life, or what theologians call sanctifying grace.

Life and water are closely allied. When the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, the creation of the cosmos began. When water drenches the earth, it begets living things. When the mother carries her child in the womb, it is housed in a sac of "water." So Jesus chose water to signify the

giving of divine life by the Holy Spirit at baptism.

When a child is baptized, God who is everywhere becomes more present in the baptized child. The sun is everywhere, but it is not equally present everywhere, for instance, in New York and Florida. In baptism, the Holy Trinity changes the very being of the child. A small mirror reflecting the noonday sun becomes itself a miniature sun. A baptized child becomes so like God that he is a "son of God." Catherine of Siena once saw a child in sanctifying grace and said, "If I did not know there was but one God, I would have adored it as God."

Grace is simply God's love at work: God loves us and we are changed. The transforming power of love has been the theme of countless works of art. In La Traviata, Alfredo's love transforms Violetta, the lost one, into a heroic woman of glorious beauty. The kitchen slut, Aldonza, becomes Dulcinea through the love of Don Quixote in The Impossible Dream. Eliza Doolittle, in My Fair Lady, starts to change at the very moment Professor Higgins begins to show her tenderness and love.

All these plays resonate God's work in man long ago as told by Ezechial (ch. 16).

All simply illustrate grace. Grace is God coming to us in love at baptism (the Divine In-dwelling or un-created grace) and the effect, the transformation caused in our very being as a result of that coming (sanctifying or created grace). As the fairy godmother transformed Cinderella so she could wed

a prince, so we are changed at baptism by grace so that we can live as a child of God and one day be with Him forever. Life now is simply a striving to become what baptism has already made us be!

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More information is available from the NFP Office at 464-8705.

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