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Hans Küng, *Can We Save the Catholic Church!?* London, William Collins, 2013, 345pp.

An Open Letter to Pope Francis?

or

‘Sleepers Awake!’

Hans Küng is a well-known, and harsh, critic of doctrine of Papal Infallibility declared at Vatican I, 1870-1871. It leads – he argues – not to transparent certainty, but away from it. A propos ‘Infallibility’ and the still-running scandals of child sexual abuse by members of the Catholic (and other) clergy he writes:

...While Rome no longer dares to proclaim formally infallible doctrines, it still envelopes all of its doctrinal pronouncements with *an aura of infallibility*, as though the Pope’s words were a direct expression of God’s will or Christ’s voice.

(Küng, p.47, Italic added)

Instead – that is – of getting a formal assertion as in the case of the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we now get *obita dicta*, cranky stuff about being silent on the matter of the ordination of women, and so on set forth as ‘“Almost” Infallible. So just shut up!’

Taizé is OK: but *taise toi!* will no longer do. We are all the ‘Priestly People of God’ according to Vatican II. Küng does not use the expression ‘creeping infallibility’ about the ‘*aura of infallibility*’ as the Australian Bishop Geoffrey Robinson¹ does, but the idea is the same. Same pathology: same diagnosis. Pathology and Diagnosis plus Prognosis is Küng’s own organizing model in the book. His aim is Therapy and that through Ecumenical dialogue.

Küng wonders how ‘Infallible’ Popes guiding the Church could fail successfully, or at least firmly, to handle the rabid scandal of the sexual molestation of children by its own clergy.

1 Küng writes, at some length:

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5 ... a paedophile scandal had come to light in America, where
6 trials of Catholic priests for sexual abuse of minors were being
7 reported in the press. In 1989, the American bishops sent canon
8 lawyers to Rome to seek permission to defrock paedophile
9 priests without a special procedure in Rome; John Paul II
10 refused. When, in the 1990s, the paedophile scandal literally
11 exploded in the USA, soon to be followed by similar scandals in
12 Canada and other countries in Europe and Asia, Pope John Paul
13 could no longer ignore the issue and issued an instruction
14 *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* (2001) that withdrew the
15 handling of such cases from the jurisdiction of the individual
16 bishops and required that they be referred to the Congregation
17 for the Doctrine of Faith, over which Cardinal Ratzinger
18 presided. Many regarded this, however, as a cover-up to prevent
19 action being taken directly by local bishops. In 2002, faced with
20 the ever-increasing scale of the alleged sexual abuse scandal in
21 the Archdiocese of Boston, John Paul II was forced to become
22 personally involved in the issue. However, his meeting with
23 American cardinals in April 2002 did not result in any clear
24 declaration concerning the responsibilities of the pope or
25 bishops. When, at the end of the year, Archbishop Cardinal
26 Bernard Law was forced to resign, the pope appointed him to a
27 sinecure in Rome.

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44 (Küng, p.216)

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47 Why should lay-Catholics not demand, absolutely, that the safety of their children be
48 assured in Catholic institutions? What confidence can they have in the Papacy under
49 these circumstances – confidence in other Papal doings or sayings, if such a grave
50 issue as pedophilia gets the under-the-carpet treatment? In Australia various Royal
51 and Parliamentary Commissions are turning over the floor-rugs, which is absolutely
52 proper in a secular world. The world in which the Church now finds itself, willy-nilly.

1 The Papacy which cannot deal with sexual abuse of minors has strong – but less than
2 transparent – views on sexuality itself. Küng writes:
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5 *The Relapse: The Pill and the Campaign Against Modern*
6 *Medical Techniques*
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10 In Europe, the Papal States were considered synonymous with
11 hostility to progress. Their *monsignori* system of clerical rule
12 made them the most socially backward states in Europe. The
13 popes of the early nineteenth century rejected even technological
14 advances like railways, gas lighting and suspension bridges as
15 being unnecessary and even demonic when they promoted the
16 spread of liberal ideas, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the
17 curtailment of the privileges of the nobility and the overthrow of
18 the papal monarchy.
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27 Opposition to progress did not end there. In the twentieth
28 century, questions of sexuality and reproduction became the
29 litmus test for progressiveness. One of the most important
30 inventions of the twentieth century is without a doubt the birth
31 control pill, developed, ironically as the history of its Catholic
32 reception would show, by two good Catholics, John Rock and
33 Pasquale DeFelice. Within a few years, the Pill permanently
34 changed the patterns of sexual behaviour and social coexistence
35 between men and women. Since the 1920s, scientists had been
36 investigating the role of hormones in pregnancy, and wealthy
37 women financially supported the search for a pill that would
38 prevent women from becoming pregnant. On the part of the
39 Church, such research was at first ignored, but then, as it began
40 to bear fruit, the pope reacted with emphatic rejection.
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50 (Küng, p.164)
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54 As Küng writes a little later in the same chapter:
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57 In the same year that the [sexual, post Pill] cultural revolution
58 broke out in Europe and America, in 1968, Pope Paul VI
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1 published his famous encyclical *Humane vitae*, which reaffirmed
2 the tradition of Catholic ethics going back to St Augustine and
3 reinforced by Medieval physicalist notions of natural law,
4 viewing sexuality as morally justified only for the purposes of
5 reproduction. As I set forth at length in my book *Infallible?*
6 (1971), the issue for Paul VI was not so much the question of
7 human sexuality: it was the issue of papal authority and
8 infallibility. Could Pope Pius XI have been mistaken when, in
9 his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*, he contradicted the position
10 taken shortly before by the Anglican Lambeth Conference, and
11 condemned all forms of contraception as immoral? For Paul VI
12 and a small coterie of conservative advisors, it was unthinkable
13 that Pius XI could have been wrong. Thus, in 1968, Paul VI
14 extended his predecessor's prohibition of mechanical and other
15 forms of contraception to include the Pill. His decision flew in
16 the face of the convictions of a huge majority of Catholic laity
17 and theologians and even against the majority within the
18 commission he had called to advise him on the matter.

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De facto, this doctrine has been accepted only within
conservative Catholic circles, but it was repeatedly confirmed by
Paul VI's successors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Although
now worldwide some 120 million women, including many
Catholics, practise birth control using hormonal and other
devices, the Catholic Church continues to reject the Pill fifty
years after its invention. After the Galileo affair and the Darwin
affair, this was now the third example of an epic mistake, which,
this time, drove many women out of the Church or into silent
internal emigration.

(Küng, p.165-166)

Human sexuality is altogether worth serious attention. To make teachings about it turn
on the prestige of the Papal *obiter dicta* when these *dicta* seem out of date and ill-
considered is to subject an important human issue to the inner workings of – very
dubiously ‘Infallible’ – Papal consistency. The Popemobile has no reverse gear: it can
never get out of its last parking-spot.

1 'Internal emigration' leaves Catholics who resort to it mostly sore in conscience. But
2 such emigration on this issue of sexuality, is a moving-away from a Church which
3 favours the *diktat* of a Medieval-style Monarch over reasonable argumentation. One
4 was taught at one's Catholic school that Faith and Reason are reconcilable at the end
5 of 'A Comedy of Errors'. One don't see it here. So it is as Küng says it is: '... today
6 only a small but vociferous minority of Catholics take the official opinion on
7 bioethical matters seriously' (p.167). Note the word 'opinion'. Justly well-placed.
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16 'Infallible opinion' is – or ought be – an oxymoron. Küng deals in his section on
17 'Hostility to Sexuality and General Misogyny', with the Churches *réfarditaire* notions
18 of sexuality..
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22 23 24 **3. Hostility to Sexuality and General Misogyny**

25 *Findings: Denigration of Sexuality and Marriage*

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28 Even in the first centuries, women were increasingly being kept
29 away from positions of leadership in the Church. In the fourth
30 and fifth centuries, in his campaign against Pelagianism and its
31 emphasis on free will, Augustine, now Bishop of Hippo Regius,
32 sharpened the theology of sin and grace. In Augustine's
33 theology, everyone was born into sin, and Augustine accounted
34 for this inheritance by tracing it back to the biblical story of
35 Adam's fall. Following a false Latin translation that completely
36 misrepresented the original Greek text of Romans 5:12,
37 Augustine understood Paul to be teaching that sin came into the
38 world via Adam, because 'in him' – i.e. in Adam's own
39 'original' sinful act – all human beings descended from Adam
40 personally and formally became guilty of sin, not, as the Greek
41 text actually states, merely by 'following his [Adam's] example'.
42 With this interpretation, Augustine historicized, psychologized
43 and sexualized Adam's original fall. Reading St Paul's remarks
44 on human sinfulness in a tendentious manner, Augustine then
45 interpreted Adam's fall as a sexually coloured original sin that
46 enslaved human beings to their carnal, self-centred appetites.
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1 This sin was passed on through the act of sexual intercourse, so
2 that every newborn infant is doomed to eternal death unless freed
3 from original sin by baptism.
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6 Through this interpretation of the biblical teaching on the Fall,
7 Augustine, who had a brilliant capacity for analytical self-
8 reflection far exceeding that of any other author of antiquity,
9 effectively poisoned the entire Western Church with his doctrine
10 on original sin, which is rejected down to this day by the Eastern
11 churches. This doctrine has given rise to a fatal denigration and
12 denial of sexuality. In this view, even the slightest sexual desire
13 or overt action, even when meant as a token of affection,
14 becomes a grave sin, unless it is performed within marriage and
15 motivated by the intention to produce children. Human sexuality
16 becomes a demon to be repressed and if possible purged, since
17 carnal pleasure makes a person impure. The expression of
18 sexuality is permitted only as an instrument for propagation of
19 the race, and it should be accompanied by as little carnal
20 pleasure as possible. This attitude, only slightly mitigated in
21 secondary aspects, shapes papal teaching down to this day (see
22 the 1968 encyclical *Humanae vitae* of Paul VI, repeatedly
23 reaffirmed and elaborated on by Popes John Paul II and Benedict
24 XVI.
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38 (Küng, pp.120-121)
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42 As to Adam and Eve: one was brought up – at the bottom of the World – to believe
43 that ‘our first parents’ were real historical characters. Küng writes, looking at ‘the
44 Darwin Affair’ – postlude to ‘The Galileo Affair’ – has this to say:
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49 ***The Relapse: Charles Darwin*** 50

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52 The Darwin affair was a second Galileo affair. As late as 1941,
53 almost 100 years after the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin*
54 *of Species*, Pope Pius XII claimed, in an address to members of
55 the Papal Academy of Sciences, that the animal ancestry of
56 human beings was completely unproven and that it would be
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1 necessary to await further investigations. Nine years later, in his
2 reactionary encyclical *Humani generis*, Pius XII reluctantly and
3 condescendingly signaled that the Church did not forbid
4 scientific and theological investigation into the possibility (by no
5 means yet proven) of an evolution of the human body, but he
6 insisted that Catholics must continue to hold that the human soul
7 is created directly by God and that all human beings are
8 descended from one single original pair (*monogenesis*).
9 Moreover, in all matters touching faith, Catholics can submit to
10 the judgement of the Magisterium. Subsequently, numerous
11 Catholic theologians tied themselves in knots trying to give a
12 sensible interpretation to these assertions, which for scientists
13 were totally incomprehensible.

(Küng, pp.157-158)

24 One remembers the Newman Society in Wellington New Zealand in the 1940s
25 banging on, and on, about evolution. Undergrads studying zoology tended to look
26 glum and keep mum.

31 The first book to remove my fundamentalist belief in the historicity of Adam and Eve,
32 was by Küng.

37 The really useful thing which I took from Oxbridge was a small acquaintance with
38 what the Nineteenth Century called 'The Higher Criticism' *i.e.* 'Biblical Scholarship'.
39 About this Küng writes:

45 [1950] marked the beginning of the merciless purge, under Pope
46 Pius XII, otherwise so widely admired, of numerous theologians
47 who attempted to bring Catholic theology in line with the results
48 of biblical and patristic studies.

(Küng, p.158)

55 Obfuscation – even from 'Mother Church'. *Taise toi, mon enfant!*

1 The long and short of it is that the Catholic Church as an institution cannot yet face up
2 to the fact that: It is no longer the sole source/custodian of knowledge. Someone – I
3 think Ernst Cassirer – said of the key figures of Renaissance: ‘They thought that the
4 only adults in human history were the Ancients’. Well: the Church rests too much on
5 its own Ancients, Augustine and Philo of Alexandra and Co². Some things have
6 moved on since then: some adults have grown up since then. Küng’s excellent and
7 moderately-toned book is a necessary reminder of this fact.

14 **The Inquisition**

18 Küng calls for the total abolition of the Inquisition, now smoothly renamed the
19 ‘Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith’. It still works in secret, and does not allow
20 what the modern legal world calls ‘due process’. It is a rotten limb. Küng:

25 Its proceedings continue to be secret, which is one of the reasons
26 why the Vatican was not permitted to join the 1950 European
27 Convention on Human Rights, which demands compliance with
28 certain minimal human rights.

32 (Küng, p.290)

35 An Eighteenth Century Pope, Pius IV in 1791, had denounced ‘the abominable
36 philosophy of human rights’ anyway. (Küng, p.168)

41 Küng is equally unhappy with the Bishops’ oath. This reads:

45 I vow that I will always be faithful to the Catholic Church and to
46 the Pope as its supreme pastor, Vicar of Christ, successor to St
47 Peter the Apostle in the primacy and head of the college of
48 bishops. I will obey the free exercise of the primatial authority of
49 the Pope over the entire Church and diligently support and
50 defend his law and authority.

55 (Küng, p.222)

58 If Vatican II tried to make the College of Bishops count, this – virtually – counts them
59 out.

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2 There is more to the oath Bishops must swear to
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5 ... adhere, with religious submission of will and intellect to the
6 teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the college of
7 bishops enunciate, when they exercise the authentic *Magisterium*
8 *even if they proclaim those teachings by an act that is not*
9 *definitive.*
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13 (Küng, p.291. Italic added)
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17 Not only does Infallibility/‘Infallibility’ trump rational discourse but the ever-ill-
18 defined ‘Magisterium’ – vague but absolute – blocks any well-reasoned discussion.
19 ‘Can we save the Catholic Church!?’ – from *itself*?³ There is an email we can email if
20 we sleepers awake: see the end of the present review.
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26 Küng had earlier written:
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30 The asynchrony between the developments within the Church
31 and developments in modern society is striking. In 1864, six
32 years before the First Vatican Council, Pius IX published his
33 reactionary encyclical *Quanta cura*, together with a *Syllabus*
34 *errorum modernorum*, a syllabus of modern errors expressed in
35 eighty ‘condemned propositions’ citing earlier papal
36 condemnations. The *Syllabus* represented an uncompromising
37 defence of the Medieval and Counter-Reformation doctrine and
38 power structures and a general attack of the values of modern
39 civilization. It culminated in condemning the wish that the
40 Roman pontiff should ‘reconcile himself, and come to terms with
41 progress, liberalism and modern civilization’. On 18 July 1870,
42 after heated debate and against the protests of a substantial
43 minority, most of whom left Rome before the final vote, the
44 Vatican Council solemnly proclaimed the right of the pope ‘*ex*
45 *sese*’ (‘by himself’) to teach infallibly in matters of faith and
46 morals. In the subsequent public controversy, the document’s
47 limitations on the exercise of this right were at first overlooked;
48 only later would attention be called to them. In fact, the extreme
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1 papalists had failed to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, grave
2 damage had been done.

3 (Küng, pp.181-182)

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6 That the 'Syllabus of Modern Errors' was itself a set of errors still remains – although
7 self-evident – to be so admitted by Pope and Curia. Nevertheless it was quietly
8 scotched by Vatican II whose whole tone was one of opening up towards modernity,
9 and towards other Faiths. (See below 'Salvation outside the Church'.)

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12 Perhaps the most – notable – polemic of Küng's book comes in the section '*Santo*
13 *Subito*, which is worth quoting in full: long though it is:

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21 ***'Santo Subito'?***

22 [And it was so, too.]

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26 In 1980, John Paul II visited Germany. At a mass rally in
27 Munich on 26 November, Barbara Engl, a representative of the
28 Association of German Young Catholics, broke with the official
29 protocol forbidding questions being put to the pope, and
30 addressed him directly:

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36 Holy Father, you have spoken in your sermon about things that concern
37 us greatly. But it is often hard for young people living in the Federal
38 Republic of Germany to understand the Church. They have the
39 impression that the Church is anxious to keep things as they are, that
40 the Church once again stresses the differences between the Christian
41 confessions instead of emphasizing what they have in common, that the
42 Church all too often reacts to young people's questions about
43 friendship, sexuality and partnership with mere prohibitions, that their
44 quest for understanding and their openness to dialogue meets no
45 response. Many are unable to understand why the Church so adamantly
46 insists on celibacy, in spite of the lack of priests. In view of the lack of
47 youth ministers many are asking whether women might not be allowed
48 to play a larger role in the ministry of the Church. (German Press
49 Agency report, 21 November 1980).

1 This young woman, who would later suffer greatly for her
2 courageous action, was simply expressing what most young
3 Catholics in Germany were thinking: 'We discussed these
4 problems at the annual general meeting of the Association of
5 German Young Catholics,' she added. 'Recently, we dealt with
6 issues of friendship, sex and partnership at such meeting ... It is
7 difficult to discuss such things with some of the clergy, but many
8 youth ministers are on our wavelength.'

14 The pope reacted with embarrassed silence. He offered no
15 answer, neither then nor later, to these fundamental questions of
16 Catholic religiosity so vital to the younger generation.

(Küng, pp.210-211)

23 Pope obviously trumped Pastor.

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31 'Can we save the Catholic Church?' This is a Question for Pope Francis, which goes
32 beyond a change of style to issues of real substance. How one man could answer it
33 even with the help of the Holy Spirit Himself/Herself one don't know. One can only
34 pray. But not: suffer in silence.

40 x x x

43 **Salvation Outside the Church**

47 Vatican II scotched 'Outside the Church there is no Salvation'. Küng reminds us:

51 Freedom of religion and conscience – condemned as late as 1953
52 by Pius XII – and human rights as a whole were unequivocally
53 affirmed. The Church's share of collective guilt in the matter of
54 anti-Semitism was admitted, and, in a positive about-turn, the
55 Church's relationship with Judaism as the root of Christianity
56 was redefined. A fresh, constructive approach to Islam and other

1 world religions was also initiated. The possibility of salvation
2 'outside the Church' for non-Christians, even of atheists and
3 agnostics, acting according to their conscience, was now clearly
4 admitted. The Council adopted a new, fundamentally positive
5 attitude towards progress and modernity – both so long
6 repudiated – and towards the secular world, science and
7 democracy.
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11 (Küng, p.201)
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15 For those in silent internal emigration, as well as for one's Hindu, Buddhist and
16 Protestant friends, this is good news. For Catholics it would seem to make
17 conscientious objection possible for the scandalized: to have an 'out' from the Church
18 Militant. As the Irish say, 'If the Church Militant were a decent regiment, a man could
19 be sending in his papers!' It may have got as bad as that? One hopes not, but the
20 subsequent life stories of victims of clerical pedophiles might very reasonably involve
21 a total withdrawal from the Catholic Church.
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30 Curiously the Marist Fathers at my secondary school in an utterly obscure country
31 had, already in the 1940s, reassured us that there was indeed salvation outside the
32 church. We were not thereby induced to venture out.
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The Küng book has an excellent Editor's Note at the end spelling out the Paradigm
Shifts, PI; PII; PIII the Medieval Latin Model, still in effect with us. Monarchial and
Absolute; PIV; PIV (the Protestant Reformation still not come to terms with) PV (The
Enlightenment still often called 'so-called'; PVI the hoped for new dispensation.
Consideration of these in turn serve as a kind of *précis* of Küng's whole book. Keep
an eye open for references to Innocent III (1198-1216) (see Küng pp.108ff), the snake
in the grass of the Church's 'Eden'.

Lux & Lucre

1 There is a lot about the Vatican Bank, which Küng reckons to be not above reproach:
2 bankers will be bankers, after all. The somewhat abrasive Cardinal Archbishop of
3 Sydney George Pell has been summoned to Rome to deal with the bankers. As my
4 Irish Grandmother would have said: 'May they have the joy of it, altogether'.
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8 9 **Unkindness**

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12 As I was preparing to take this article to the typist, re-reading to see if any of my
13 expressions were immoderate, my eye fell on a report in the *Melbourne Age* (for
14 March 19 2014) headlined: 'Sex Abuse was Lord's Work: priest'. This cleric, a
15 multiple offender, who is before the secular court uttered the headline words to – at
16 least – two of the minors whom he sexually abused. One of them, a little girl confided
17 in a nun about her having been abused, only to be told 'Good little girls don't talk
18 about such things. Off you go!' So much for female solidarity. And too much of
19 clerical solidarity. The best that one can say of the two Catholic *apparatchicks*
20 involved is, *contemptible*. Of the prelates who tried to hush these events up,
21 *contemptible squared*! I have not gone on to soften anything in my MS. Why should I.
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37 *Index*, the word itself having for twenty first century Catholics an offensive odour,
38 William Collins have not provided one for Küng's book – or perhaps it was only a
39 cost-cutter. One is reduced to scribbling one's own index, of a sort, on the inside of
40 the book cover of the – paperback – edition.
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45 **CONCLUSION**

46 47 48 **The Vision Remains**

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52 This is the title of Küng's final chapter. If you read nothing but that you will have got
53 your money's worth out of the book. One cites this:
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58 Long ago, I summarized my vision of how the Church could be
59 saved in four contrastingly formulated propositions that apply
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not only to the Roman Catholic Church but also to all of the churches where similar problems prevail. Over the past decades, the overall view expressed in these theses has been repeatedly confirmed, and I see no reason to depart from it now:

1. A Church which continually looks back to the Middle Ages or to the time of the Reformation and is uncritically enamoured of the Enlightenment and classical Modernity can hardly be saved; but a Church oriented towards its Christian origins, while concentrating on the urgent tasks of our time, can indeed survive and flourish again.
2. A Church paternalistically committed to a stereotypical idea of women, to the use of exclusively masculine language, and to pre-defined gender roles can hardly be saved; but a Church based on partnership, combining office and charism and accepting the participation of women in all ecclesial offices, can indeed survive and flourish again.

This is a reasonable point, notwithstanding Pope John Paul II's 'be silent on the ordination of women'. The recent Canonization of John Paul II does not of itself entail that his *dicta* on this matter either are retrospectively, or were proleptically infallible. It will be interesting to see if this issue of the role of women in the Church can be disentangled from notions of infallibility, themselves so opaque as to be a shade beyond understanding. The would-be idea of infallibility-crisp-and-clear becomes, on inspection, amorphous. When applied it feeds as much doubt as it does certainty

3. A Church addicted to an ideologically narrow, denominationalist exclusivity and to an illegitimate exercise of usurped authority, refusing to recognize the need for cooperation and communion, can hardly be saved; but an

ecumenically open Church, which not only mouths ecumenical phrases, but also practices ecumenical deeds in matters such as recognizing ministries and removing the questionable excommunications of the past, and which goes on to give tangible expression to its ecumenical commitment by celebrating together the Lord's Eucharist, can indeed survive and flourish.

4. A Eurocentric Church, that maintains claims to imperial domination of other cultural expressions of Christianity by subjecting them to the oversight of a Vatican bureaucracy as the ultimate spiritual authority, can hardly be saved; but a tolerant universal Church:

- which is willing to respect the ever-increasing diversity of possibilities for expressing the one abiding truth;
- which is willing to learn from other religions and from people with no religion;
- which is willing to share its authority with national, regional and local churches following the principle of subsidiarity that allows the higher instance to intervene only when the lower fails;
- and in this way regains the respect of people – of Christians and non-Christians alike – such a Church can indeed survive and flourish!

If you do not trust the Curia and Co. to rise to the Vision you may try Bishop Robinson's email addressed to Head Office. After all *we* are part of Küng's "we" who might save the Church, so type in <http://www.change.org/en-AU/petitions/pope-francis-the-vatican-for-christ-s-sake-stop-sexual-abuse-for-good>

End Notes

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See the review of *Far Christ's Sake: End Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church...For Good* which the present reviewer wrote on in *Sophia*, Vol.5, No.1, April 2014 pp. ...

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See the review cited in Note 1 at p. ...

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One idly wonders whether the Bishops' Oath as it stands is equivalent to a Leonine Contract. Such contracts are of themselves morally not-binding.

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