

The following article was recommended at the same time as *Religious Life in the Age Of Facebook*, from the previous July submission. It expands one aspect of that article, addressing the reason that I heard most often from young people as to why they did not want to accept the call that many of them felt they had.

Celibate equals sexless equals an unholy mess

Robert Blair Kaiser

July 1, 2008

Barnstorming his way across America, the Sydney Bishop Geoffrey Robinson sounded at times like Martin Luther. "Here I stand," he told an audience in Seattle. "I can do no other." He said he knew he was quoting Luther, then announced with a twinkle in his eye to the overflowing crowd, "I am no Martin Luther."

Indeed, in manner, he is no firebrand. In a 15-city speaking tour before audiences clamouring to hear more about his bestseller, *Confronting Power And Sex In The Catholic Church*, Robinson spoke in a soft Cambridge accent; a tall handsome man in a grey suit and a Roman collar who was often honest enough to answer questions with "I don't know".

But the change-oriented Catholics who crowded into Robinson's talks applauded him for his bluntness. Months ago, Robinson had told an audience in Australia, "John Paul II could have stopped this scandal, and he did nothing." For this he was accused of heresy by a ranking cardinal in Rome and told to scrap his US tour. He came anyway, with a speech in his pocket that blamed the last Pope for contributing to the sex scandal that has shaken the church as seismically as Luther shook it more than 500 years ago.

Robinson told his audiences he had great admiration for much of what John Paul II did during his 26-year papacy. "But before they make him a saint, they ought to ask what he did to correct this scandal." He didn't know why the Pope was so silent about the scandal or why he failed to even ask questions about its cause and its cure. He explained, "It's very difficult - even for a Pope - to change the culture."

Robinson was talking about the aura of the sacred that surrounds the celibate priesthood, which Popes have encouraged for 1000 years by sticking with the celibacy rule, despite a good deal of evidence that mandatory celibacy creates what Robinson calls "unhealthy living conditions" in the priesthood. "Celibate" in this false equation means "sexless" and "sexless" means "holy". Trouble is that the people have been programmed to believe in the aura, and the church's leaders use that belief to keep the people in their place. Disaster comes when a few bad priest-seducers exploit their aura of holiness with vulnerable young people, even to the point of assuring them as they are played with that they are being played with by Jesus.

In his US talks, Robinson kept saying that "only the Pope" can change the cultural climate that nurtures such abuse, but he allowed that change could happen if the people could get to their bishops. "Engage your bishops," he said, "with conversation rather than confrontation."

A retired missionary priest in Robinson's audience at Costa Mesa, California, said: "That's nonsense. The bishops know what needs to be done. Theoretically, they have the power to do a lot of things. They could ordain married men tomorrow. But they won't because they're afraid of Rome."

About the fear, Robinson agrees. "Rome keeps us on a very short leash." He confessed that he was afraid to begin writing his book until he had resigned his post as an auxiliary bishop in Sydney.

Insofar as bishops are content to remain on that short leash, they remain so excessively papal as to ignore the needs of their own people. That need not be, and Robinson knows it. In his book, almost in passing, he suggests that Catholics in every nation could survive and thrive with a measure of independence from Rome, modelling themselves on the ancient autochthonous churches of the Middle East, who have their own patriarchs, their own priests (some married, some not) and their own liturgies. These "home-grown" churches are in communion with Rome (hence Catholic), but they have their own governance structures that tend to make for a church that is more accountable to its people.

Amazing how Vatican charges against Robinson mirror the church's case against Martin Luther almost 500 years ago. In 1521, a cardinal from Rome denounced Luther as a heretic, and put his indictment before the Diet of Worms in what is now Germany. After some debate and testimony by Luther himself, that body issued a decree that made Luther into an outlaw, banned the reading and the possession of his writings and permitted anyone to kill him without legal consequence. We can draw a lesson here if we pay attention to the rest of the story: public opinion in Germany forced the Emperor Charles V to stop enforcement of the Edict of Worms.

Is it too much to hope that public opinion - around the world and in Australia itself - will stay the execution of Geoff Robinson? It would help if a number of Australian bishops, taking another look at all those places in scripture where Jesus told the Apostles to fear not, were to tell Pope Benedict during his upcoming visit for World Youth Day to lay off Robinson. He is not another Luther, and he is more loyal to the Pope than many of the Vatican functionaries I have known.

Robert Blair Kaiser has been a journalist at the Vatican, on and off, since 1962. His latest book is *Cardinal Mahony: A Novel*.

Petition for the Admission of Married Men: Give us priests! Catholics petition their bishops

Over 2,000 Catholics have already signed a petition asking the bishops of England and Wales to take practical steps towards ordaining married men to the priesthood. It also calls on the bishops to encourage discussion of the role of women in ministry - and to

invite Catholic priests who resigned to marry, to return to active ministry. ...

Success in Australia

This initiative follows the success of a similarly worded petition in Australia, which obtained over 17,000 signatures and has resulted in the bishops there putting the issue on their agenda. The possible ordination of married men has been raised as an urgent matter by bishops worldwide for over thirty years, and is becoming pressing now in this country as the shortage of priests worsens, parishes are merged and the average age of the clergy rises. We note with concern that the number of active priests in England and Wales has declined by over one third since 1958 while the number of retired priests is five times what it was then (A.E.C.W Spencer, *Digest of Statistics of the Catholic Community of England and Wales, 1958-2005*. Vol. 1, Table 3.6.1, pp.100-101). A precedent has already been set in this country by the ordination of married clergy from the Church of England, many of whom were received into full communion with the Church following the ordination of women.

With this in view we wish to express our belief that Catholics have a right to participate regularly in the community celebration of the Eucharist and that our religious leaders have the pastoral duty (*Lumen Gentium* 37, [Second Vatican Council]) to ensure that they have a sufficient number of authorised presiders to ensure their full and regular participation in the Mass wherever there is a settled and committed Catholic community. We believe that the Holy Spirit may be telling us that we are not sufficiently open to the emergence of new forms of relevant ministries.

The opportunity to sign the petition online can be found at www.marriedpriests-ew.org

Further information can be obtained from:

Sister Myra Poole SND MyraPoole@aol.com religious sister, former headteacher
Simon Bryden-Brook brydenbrook@talk21.com secretary and press officer, Catholics for a Changing Church

Father Hans Küng submits the second installment of his autobiography. I haven't read it yet because, with the rate of exchange, I can't afford £30, or even the *Tablet's* discounted price of £27. But I look forward to its availability in an increasingly valueless native currency.

Theology's steadfast questioner

Book Review, 3 July 2008

Reviewed by John Wilkins

The Tablet (UK)

Disputed Truth: memoirs II by Hans Küng

CONTINUUM Press

Hans Küng is unique among Catholic theologians. He himself would attribute this quality in part to his refusal to be co-opted into "the Roman system," despite Paul VI's entreaty. He has been determined to avoid becoming a "court theologian." But in part it derives from his Swiss assertion of independence and freedom. He likes to quote Gregory the Great: "Better for scandal to be caused than for the truth to be abandoned." This stance has brought him, as documented in this second volume of memoirs, continual tension with Rome, ending in a titanic battle.

The book draws out the parallels and contrasts between his course and that of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope, seen as the last two active representatives of the comrades in arms who fought for renewal at the Second Vatican Council. The divergent currents that followed the council are mirrored in their subsequent careers.

Both were colleagues and professors at the University of Tübingen in Germany. Both had to face the student unrest of 1968, when Ratzinger was struck, says Küng, by "an almost apocalyptic anxiety". Whereas Küng weathered the storm, Ratzinger felt he had seen how the progressive cause could become a lie, and he now left Tübingen for Regensburg - it was like moving from Harvard to Idaho State University, said some American observers. He did not understand, wrote a contemporary, that "Küng was fundamentally on his side", and there was a parting of the ways. Yet their different paths continued to cross, and when Ratzinger became Pope, he responded warmly to an overture from his former Tübingen colleague. In 2005 they talked at Castel Gandolfo for four hours.

But as Küng brings out clearly in this book, their theological methods were almost at opposite poles. For Küng, the historical-critical exegesis of the Bible is the measure of all things. He sets out in this way to reach the "Jesus of history" who is in his person the Christian message. This approach became central to Küng's systematic theology - the bar of judgement before which all positions stand or fall. But there are many incompatible versions of the "Jesus of history" on offer, and Joseph Ratzinger, for his part, applied the same historical-critical method only within limits and with restraint, subordinating it to dogma and tradition. For him the marriage of the Gospel message with Hellenistic philosophy was providential, and cannot be discarded.

Rather than a doctrine of Christ "from above," however, Küng presents one "from below" - from where people are. As he does not fail to record, his books have been best-sellers and his lectures have been crowded out. This is because he is dealing head-on with issues that people want to hear about in terms they understand.

Reflecting in this book on the struggle, he accepts that at the level of power, the others may so far have won; but on the parish level "the opposition has by far the largest majority." He draws a comparison between the "glittering façade of papal demonstrations" and the "lamentable state of Church and clergy" behind it. Locally, "millions of people are running away." The "justified hopes and expectations" raised by Vatican II "have not been fulfilled." The Church had all the tools of renewal to hand, only to shrink back. The reforms "were stifled both in the public arena and behind the

scenes." He draws attention to the downgrading of the council's doctrine of collegiality - that the Church is governed by the college of bishops, with and under the Pope - and focuses on John Paul II's reconstruction of "an imperial papacy." The bishops had walk-on parts. Küng cannot think of a single decisive reform emanating from the bishops' synod. Can anyone?

Paul VI, who had seen the collegiality doctrine through the council, himself began the process of attenuating it, above all when he issued his 1968 encyclical letter, *Humanae Vitae*, reaffirming the traditional ban on contraception. This non-collegial act sparked off a crisis in the Church. The huge debate quickly shifted from the question of birth control to the question of authority. The Pope had set aside the advice of his commission because he felt unable to go against the teaching of his predecessors. His spokesman at the time made it crystal clear that the encyclical had no claim to infallibility, but Küng maintains the opposite; he argues that it was in line with the constant teaching of the world's bishops up to that time, and they also are considered infallible when in such unison. The vast majority of theologians do not agree with Küng, but believe the encyclical can be revised. There is no sign of that happening, however, and certainly the influential conservative ethicist Germain Grisez in the United States is one who has argued for its infallibility precisely on the ground of its congruence with constant episcopal teaching.

The showdown came when Küng published his book *Infallible?*, proposing the substitution of a claim to "indefectibility." There is nothing in the Bible, Küng notes, to suggest that Peter had any charism of infallibility, and plenty of evidence to the contrary. But he had now opposed a defined doctrine. He discussed his position intensively with his peers but it is not clear how far he ever really took into account the criticisms they made. Karl Rahner as a dogmatic theologian voiced an anguished protest. "Your book," he told Küng, "is a deadly threat to my Catholic faith."

Küng was in the firing line as never before. There is room in the Church for only one Pope, and the massed guns overwhelmed the Swiss theologian. His account is very detailed, drawing on inside knowledge and documentation. The passage where he recalls his mood and behaviour in the subsequent "fearful" months - the worst of his life - is almost too painful to read. Clearly he came to the very edge of physical, mental and psychological breakdown. "Church of God, my mother," asked Yves Congar, arguably the greatest theologian of Vatican II, "what are you doing with this difficult child, my brother?" Despite losing his licence to teach as a Catholic theologian, Küng remained steadfast, and to this day is a priest in good standing.

His opponents expected that without his licence, he would be finished. He has proved them wrong. He is a prophet on fire with the message of Jesus Christ and driven to communicate it to everyone who will listen. Despite my deep reservations, I can say that when I have interviewed him in Tübingen or heard him speak in London, I have gone out believing in God more than I did when I came in.

John Bowden's translation from the German is superb. As is almost inevitable in a book of this size, however, there are some erroneous references and a scattering of literals; and the interesting photographs are not deployed in three sections, as announced in the index, but all appear in one chunk. Küng promises a third and final volume, if he lives to write it. In his ninth decade, as he says, that is "in the hands of Another."

A Final Act of Vengeance?

History is replete with stories of those in power who enact a final act of vengeance before they are deposed. History repeats itself in St. Louis as Archbishop Raymond Burke attempted to crush a faith-filled woman who has consecrated her life to serve the Church as a religious. Sister Louise Lears has served the inner city parish of St. Cronin as pastoral assistant for many years. Her work in the parish and as instructor at St. Louis University is well known city-wide. In his final days in office as Archbishop of St. Louis, Burke issued a Decree of Interdiction against this holy woman because she refused to repent from attending and supporting the ordination ceremony of two women priests.

This is yet another example, with ample evidence, of male oppression of women under the guise of ecclesiastical law. We might rightly decry the crude and disrespectful process that Sister Lears was forced to experience, as being the most outrageous violation of her right to due process. But topping the list of downright disregard for the rights of women in the Church and a demonstration of cold-hearted vengeance was this final act of a monarchical bishop as he is removed from power over this Archdiocese and 'promoted' to a desk job in the Vatican.

While many in St. Louis heave a great sigh of relief, we are nonetheless fearful that we have not heard the last of Archbishop Raymond Burke as he trades his rule over the Catholics of St. Louis for a future red hat and the possibility of wreaking more vengeance on those who oppose his rule. God have mercy on us all.

Please consider signing this petition <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/10/Take-Action-for-Sister-Louise> .

Your support of The Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC) is encouraging and helpful. Read more at ARCC <http://arcc-catholic-rights.net/>

America Magazine

Current Comment

By The editors | JULY 7, 2008



Tim Russert, Man for Others

In the midst of the avalanche of news coverage of Tim Russert's death came the inevitable references to his Catholic roots, including his Jesuit education at Canisius High School in Buffalo and John Carroll University in Cleveland. One commentator said he was "raised by Jesuits," which not only neglects his own parents, but also sounds suspiciously like "raised by wolves." Less known is the esteem in which the longtime host of "Meet the Press" was held within the Jesuit world. He was a recipient of honorary degrees from many of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the country. Russert embodied a certain ideal of Jesuit education: the working-class youth who, through diligence and faith, contributes to his family, his church and the common good, while keeping a sense of humor, even about his own past as a Jesuit alumnus. He delighted in recounting the comment of John Sturm, S.J., prefect of discipline at Canisius. When the young Russert asked Father Sturm for mercy after a minor infraction, the prefect said, "Mercy is for God. I deliver justice!"

"Man for others" (or "person for others") is a phrase often used to describe the ideal Jesuit alumnus or alumna. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., who popularized the expression, meant it to be a challenge: it is not simply about "being nice" but being a person of self-sacrifice in the cause of justice who strives to emulate Christ in his labors and loves. Russert exemplified this ideal in both his professional and personal life. We pray that he will now enjoy God's abundant love and, yes, mercy.

Please visit the Web site Globalgiving.com and consider some form of generosity to ease the pain of our brothers and sisters around the world.

“Arrogance is ignorance matured.” Martin Sheen

Should the Catholic Church become a refuge for people who are escaping the Anglican Church because of its inclusion of women and gays in ministry? What do you think?