

**Hans Küng in the Theology of Religions.
From Revealed Dogmatic Truth to Interreligious Syncretism**

CONTENTS

Preface.....	p. 5
<u>1. Biography and theological development of Hans Küng</u>	p. 8
1.1. Preliminary methodological consideration.....	p. 8
1.2. Origin, childhood and youth.....	p. 11
1.3. His Study of Philosophy and Theology in Rome.....	p. 17
1.4. The theological doctoral thesis.....	p. 28
1.5. Church practice and science on the way to professorship.....	p. 35
1.6. The professorship in Tübingen.....	p. 41
1.7. The young professor's participation in the Second Vatican Council.....	p. 46
1.8. On the way to the withdrawal of the church teaching permit and the consequences.....	p.55
1.9. Conclusion.....	p. 65
<u>2. Hans Küng's view of Christianity and the Church</u>	p. 71
2.1. Preliminary methodological considerations.....	p. 71
2.2. Sources of the Knowledge of God: Bible, Tradition and Christian Life.....	p. 75
2.3. Doctrine of God and Trinity.....	p. 80
2.4. Christology, Pneumatology and Anthropology.....	p. 88
2.5. Ecclesiology.....	p. 99
2.6. Soteriology.....	p. 103
2.7. Cosmology.....	p. 105
2.8. Eschatology.....	p. 108
2.9. Ethics.....	p. 109
2.10. Conclusion.....	p. 118

<u>3. The view of the world religions by Hans Küng</u>	p. 123
3.1. Preliminary methodological considerations	p. 123
3.2. A First Approach: Tribal Religions	p. 129
3.3. Hinduism as a Syncretic Religion	p. 138
3.4. Buddhism as a Challenge for Christianity	p. 149
3.5. The Chinese religion in dialogue	p. 164
3.6. Focal points of Hans Küng's Judaism view	p. 186
3.7. Küng's view of Islam as an example of his interreligious syncretism	p. 193
<u>4. Results, conclusions and contours of an answer</u>	p. 199
<u>5. Bibliography</u>	p. 210
5.1. Sources	p. 210
5.2. Secondary literature	p. 212
5.2.1. Monographs and collections of essays	p. 212
5.2.2. Articles and essays	p. 229
5.3. Internet resources	p. 236

KEYWORDS: *Jesuan and Jesuit piety, Apostolic and Ecclesial tradition, Church, Christianity, World religions, Soteriology*

Summary

Leaving aside the details discussed above, this conclusion offers a short review of the development of our study, sketches the major results and derives the contours of our response to the immense oeuvre of Hans Küng and the uniquely syncretist vision of Christianity and the church and its voice in the concert of world religions expressed and successively unfolded in the course of his publications. As described above, Hans Küng was raised in a by no means narrow minded Roman Catholic environment in Sursee (Switzerland), was exposed as a youth to important inspirations from Jesuan piety and turned his attention to issues in religious studies already during the final years of highschool in Luzern. His Jesuan mindset was significantly deepened by the Jesuit environment of his university studies in Rome. Here, going beyond

roman catholic theology, he absorbed the most important philosophical traditions of modernity (Hegel, Marxism, the Existentialism of Sartre), subsequently turning to the exegetically disputed question of the “historical Jesus”, which later informed his work in religious studies.¹ Taking account of the relevant literature in the field he compares the „historical“ Jesus with „Krishna“, the „historical“ Buddha, the „historical“ Confucius as well as with the „historical“ Muhammad and develops the criterium of „authenticity“, or rather of “canonicity” for evaluating the truth value of any religion in terms of its faithfulness with its respective founder or with its original canon. Such a criterium, of course, is not helpful in cases where no founder exists or where no written canon is available. Yet (even though Küng himself insists on its validity even in such cases) the criterium is problematic also in cases where the structure of a religion does not necessarily refer to any „historical“ founder, as for example in Buddhism and perhaps also in the chinese religion. Even with regard to Christianity and the Church Küng’s way of posing the question about the „historical“ Jesus was problematic: For one, it takes up Bultmann’s formula of a „Jesus who ascended into Kerygma“ and thus, following Protestantism’s characteristic methodology, targets the question concerning „who Jesus is for believers today“, on the other hand, taking up a trend that marked the turn to historical-critical exegesis of the time, prioritizes the oldest texts and textual fragments in order to “trace the historical Jesus”, an “original apostolic witness” or an “originally authentic character” of the church, - a decision with little plausibility today. The underlying inspiration derives from a theory of „deviation from the ideal of the origin“, as introduced by Matthias Flacius into an important strain of Protestantism,. This theory had lead to a criticism in view of the development of „early catholic structures of church offices” which now gets radicalized insofar as a corresponding deviation is stipulated as having distorted already the canon of New Testament texts themselves. In a similar way Küng develops Adolf von Harnack’s Hellenization theory into a wholesale dis-qualification of basic elements of the Christian and Church Tradition as „non-authentic“, as „distorted“, or as „merely derivatory apostolic witness”.

From such a perspective, the possibility of still being able to rely on the New Testament canon can be conceived in terms of four options. The first variant engages Ernst Käsemann’s question about the „canon within the canon“ but fails to solve the problem: it subjects whole

¹ Paul F. Knitter criticises Küng’s conception - with regards to ‘Christ sein’ - as the lasting universal significance of Jesus and the resulting renunciation of a genuine pluralism of religious studies. Cf. Paul F. Knitter, *Die Weltreligionen und die Endgültigkeit Christi. Eine Kritik von Hans Küngs „Christ sein“*, in: *idem*, *Horizonte der Befreiung. Auf dem Weg zu einer pluralistischen Theologie der Religionen*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, Otto Lambeck, Frankfurt/ Main, Bonifatius, Paderborn, 1997 , p. 108-121.

portions of the text (as e.g. the letter of James) to the suspicion of poor quality apostolic writing. A second option consists in a pragmatic approach which simply discounts the question, - a solution which is not very satisfactory either. The third variant is the one preferred by Küng of preferring the oldest texts and fragments, a solution which cannot very well be accepted as “catholic”. Finally, the fourth variant recognizes - in short - the Christian canon of the Bible as the canon.

At this point Küng takes a crucial decision.² Already in his trailblazing doctoral dissertation on the theory of justification by Karl Barth, as placed in the context of a discussion of Josef Rupert Geiselmann’s studies on the concept of Tradition within Roman Catholicism, and of a distinction emphasized (and also recognized by the Roman Catholic Magisterium) by Oscar Cullmann (who, together with Louis Bouyer, was Küng’s “Doktorvater”) between “apostolic” and “post-apostolic” or also “church” Tradition, Küng qualifies even the “apostolic” Tradition itself as “purely human and church-related” Tradition. Indubitably, this decision subsequently weakened his assessment of the Church as the Divine-human reality of the body of Christ. Quite apart from succeeding to establish the convergence, or rather agreement of Barth’s theory of justification with the one affirmed by the Council of Trent, Küng’s dissertation (defended 21. February, 1957) would encourage his fundamentally critical attitude against „church-based traditions and authority“ and thus the subsequent foundational change in his vision of the Church. While e.g. Karl Adam and Karl Rahner still conformed to the Magisterium when speaking of a „church of sinners“, Küng, invited by Karl Barth to give a guest lecture at Basel university (19. January 1959) would speak about the necessity of „reforming the doctrine“, thus encouraging the notion of a “sinning church.” This revision of his concept of church would of course have important consequences for his understanding of church doctrine and tradition, a change which surfaces especially clearly in his Christology: Here Küng assumes a reserved position in view of the church doctrine of Christ’s two natures as well as of the classical view of the three offices of Christ. Disregarding His kingly and priestly office, Küng accepts only his prophetic one.³ But we must of course keep in mind that in this respect Küng finds himself in remarkable agreement with leading Protestant theologians, - a fact which significantly influences his theological answer to the challenges

² Cf. Wolfgang Wünsch, Überlieferung, Lehre und Glaube der Kirche. Überlegungen zu ihrer Einheit und Mission in orthodoxer Perspektive, in: Mihai Himcinschi/ Dumitru A. Vanca (ed.), *UNITATE ȘI MISIUNE ECLEZIALE. 100 de ani de la comuniunea spirituală a tuturor românilor*, Școala Internațională de vară a doctoranzilor teologi, 4th edition, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, Alba Iulia, 15-17 mai 2018, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, p. 447-457.

³ Hans Küng, *Christ sein*, 2nd edition, Piper, München, 1974, p. 380.

which the diverse world religions present to Christianity and the church.⁴ An adequate analysis of God's incarnation from the perspective of Orthodoxy, which would permit a proper theological assessment of Küng's account, unfortunately is beyond the scope of this study and must be postponed for a future study.

As our discussions made clear, Küng's option for a „Christology from below“, and the implied emphasis on the „historical Jesus“ has implications for his concept of god, as evidenced for example in a remarkably thin or selective reception of the (dynamically conceived) negative theology of Nikolaus Cusanus. Looking first at the theological „bright side“ of the remaining residua of a christian concept of God, we can state that Küng assumes the same divine reality as present in all religions, even if that reality is approached in religiously diversified ways. From such a perspective, a dialogue with the various religions (excepting only some cases which resist such an approach) can expose certain structural similarities as inherent in the concept of god as affirmed by negative (apophatic) theology. Küng here engages in a kind of dialectical game when discussing the personality or a-personality of god and the related problem of monist or dualist systems and worldviews. On the plane of philosophical discourse, as one could say, this approach enables him to engage in a rather substantial dialogue with non-Christian religions, as for example in view of certain cosmogonic concepts in Hinduism about the „one“ which „is described by the Veda as the only existence present in the beginning, with nothing other beside it“ (Rigveda X, 129, 2)“, or in view of issues such as ‚Nirvana‘, ‚Dharma‘ and ‚Tao‘ etc. Still, Küng does insist on the particular closeness and relatedness between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in this regard and singles out these three religions as a „great religious current-system of semitic descent and prophetic orientation“, as evinced in „an extensively analogous basic understanding of god, man, the world and its history“.⁵

Remarkably, even in the face of the cruel tragedy of the ‚Holocaust, Küng affirms the possibility of a dialogue concerning the concept of god between Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism.⁶ Similar possibilities are affirmed for the interreligious dialogue about anthropology, even though Küng here insists on the Christian vision of an inalienable human dignity as ultimately grounded in man's divine likeness. As our analysis of Küng's biography and his views about Christianity and the church have made clear, the issue of „self realization“ is

⁴ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg's concerns about the doctrine of the Threefold office, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh, 1964, p. 218-232, esp. p. 227.

⁵ Hans Küng, *Der Islam. Wesen und Geschichte*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2006, p. 89. Highlighting in bold by Hans Küng.

⁶ Christopher Ives (ed.), *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness. A Buddhist, Jewish, Christian Conversation with Masao Abe*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1995.

over-emphasized. Still, in his discussions on religious studies this same issue, so it seems to this author, remains appropriately contextualized.

At the same time, however, it is especially in view of his anthropology that a Christian, or more specifically Orthodox assessment reveals an imbalance in his account. This mismatch derives from Küng's willingness, when engaging in interreligious dialogue, to adopt his dialogue partners' assumed or actual prejudices as valid and normative for his own approach, thus accepting the resulting loss of essential Christian commitments and the consequence of a foundational re-framing of the Christian faith.

In the area of anthropology this affects e.g. the ideal of man as „vicar of god“, - a construction which reduces the basic biblical message of man as created “in the image and likeness of God” to the needs of an Islamic-Christian dialogue. Admittedly, similar incongruities with the Christian account also hold for Judaism. Here as well a conception of god's essential opacity to „images“ or „embodiment“ and a resulting resistance to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation can be observed.⁷ Still, in spite of the fact that Küng retains the biblical doctrine of man's character as „image of god“, he fails adequately to take account of the implications of that doctrine. This failure, of course, is compounded by the foundational hostility to images which has marred occidental theology since the days of Charlemagne.⁸ This same hostility also surfaces in his Christology, as evinced, firstly, by Küng's proposal to replace Christ's sonship (Christ as son of god) by „Christ as vicar of god“, secondly by his recurring criticism of the „Hellenization of Christianity“ and, as a result, also of the „Hellenist councils,” a criticism which leads him into a fundamentalist, obsessively ideological and in addition insufficiently reflected critique of dogma (cf. his books: „Unfehlbar“, „Christ sein” etc.).⁹ The absurdity and contradictory character of Küng's theory in this regard is well illustrated by the decisive reversal of his initial enthusiasm for Karl Barth's ‚Kirchliche Dogmatik’. While his

⁷ Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Jüdischer Glaube. Strukturen einer Theologie des Judentums anhand des Maimonidischen Credo*. Tübinger Vorlesungen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1979, p. 78-97, 304; *idem*, *Der dreidimensionale Mensch in Bibel und Moderne*, Paulinus-Verlag, Trier, 1971, esp. p. 11-26, and: Stefan Schreiner, *Kalif Gottes auf Erden. Zur koranischen Deutung der Gottesebenbildlichkeit des Menschen*, in: *idem*, *Die jüdische Bibel in islamischer Auslegung*, ed. Friedmann Eißler / Matthias Morgenstern, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2012, p. 19-31, who deals here above all with the Jewish-Islamic aspects of the subject matter.

⁸ On Hans Küng's critical attitude to images, cf. Hans Küng, *Das Christentum. Wesen und Geschichte*, p. 262-280. To discuss the problem cf.: Wolfgang Wünsch, *The image of the church in Martin Luther's Theology – an orthodox perspective*, in: Dumitru A. Vanca/ Marc J. Cherry/ Alin Albu (ed.), *Ars Liturgica. From the Image of Glory to the Image of the Idols of Modernity*, vol. 1, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2017, p. 401-411; and: Wolfgang Wünsch, *Ikone und religiöses Bild in der Theologie von Josef Ratzinger aus orthodoxer Perspektive*, in: Mihai Hincinschi/ Răzvan Brudiu/ Andrei Motora (ed.), *Icoană și misiune. Relația dintre chip și imagine în societatea actuală*, Școala Internațională de vară a doctoranzilor teologie, Ediția a V-a, Mănăstirea „Sfântul Mare Mucenic Dimitrie”, Sighișoara, 10-14 iulie 2017, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2017, p. 349-368.

⁹ As far as his criticism refers to Roman Catholic special dogmas, such as the ‘infallibility of papal doctrinal decisions ex cathedra’ or certain dogmas of Mary, Mother of God, specific to catholicism alone, one may discuss it, -although the church-historical way of working of Küng's is even here extremely unsatisfactory- but the professor from Tübingen goes decisively further and in fact questions the teaching of the one, holy, apostolic and catholic church itself.

choice of subject for his doctoral thesis was justified in terms of high praise of the way in which Barth's theology is rooted in and permeated by Holy Scriptures („completely centered on the core of Christ“),¹⁰ his opus magnum about Judaism merely acknowledges the impressive architecture of Barth's *Dogmatics*, while incisively castigating its chosen orientation from “a doctrine of the trinity and a Christology which exhaustively derives from the hellenizing councils of the early church”. Küng's approach is further characterized by a markedly weak reflection on the whole area of biblical hermeneutics. It seems as though Küng, when dealing with Holy Scriptures, never got beyond taking cognizance of selected samples of the classical doctrine of the four-fold meaning of scripture, the purpose of which he, in addition, failed adequately to understand, let alone compared with – at the very least – Judaic methods of Bible hermeneutics.¹¹ The many cases in which the author's quotations of Scripture betray additional failures to seriously read through the quoted lines may be covered by charitable silence. He surely did insist on the „historical critical“ method of Bible exegesis in its entire extent (including “criticism of texts, literature, formal and philological categorization, ...historical analysis of motives, traditions, editing and reception..., archeological excavations – Stratigraphics - ... surface analysis, ... social science and structuralist investigations”), advocating it against the “pre-modern literal” understanding of Holy Scriptures, which he claims to have been practiced by “medieval scholars and also by the reformers”.¹² Similar failures distort his account of the relationship between the „Jewish“ or “Hebrew Bible” and the Christian Bible, in particular the *Septuaginta*. We already mentioned his reduction of the “apostolic Tradition“ to a merely „human achievement“ and his identification with “church tradition”.

Here we must turn at least shortly to the problem of language: The diversity of languages as well as the problem of transition between linguistic milieus within a given language (e.g. Gen. 11 and Acts 2) belong to the basic issues to be considered when analyzing Biblical texts as well as the Apostolic and Church Traditions; these issues must also be considered in any adequate discussion of ekklesiology. Küng rightly castigates as a serious mistake in Church history, „that towards the end of the first millennium Germans (unlike the Slavs) celebrated the liturgy not in their native language but in the exclusively canonized Latin foreign vernacular,“¹³ – a practice which was justified by reference to a “theory of the three languages” claimed (with reference to Jn. 19:20) to establish three languages exclusively (i.e. Latin, Greek, and Hebrew)

¹⁰ Hans Küng, *Erkämpfte Freiheit. Erinnerungen*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2004, p. 168.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 291-294.

¹² *Idem*, *Das Judentum. Die religiöse Situation der Zeit*, Piper, 2nd edition, München/ Zürich, 2001 p. 50.

¹³ *Idem*, *Das Christentum. Wesen und Geschichte*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 1994 p. 417.

as “holy languages, fit for the praise of god”.¹⁴ Küng is right when he identifies this theory as responsible for the regrettably rigorous division of clerics and laypeople, of hierarchical magisterium and believers within Roman Catholicism,¹⁵ - a division he deplores again and again in his contributions to religious studies. Indeed, while Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible had significantly contributed to solving the language problem, it offered a very unsatisfactory attempt to solve the second problem that had arisen within occidental church tradition, i.e. the problem of a proper relationship between clerics and laypeople.

The way in which Küng initially, as it were un-reflectingly assumes an „Inneranz der Bibel“ and subsequently, while exposed to encounters and events during the Second Vatican Council, distances himself – step by step – from the concept of the integrity, or verbal inspiration of Holy Scriptures makes clear that the course for his later characteristically interreligious syncretism is set already in his dissertation on Barth’s justification theory.

This development was triggered by Barth’s own – exemplary catholic – question „about the relationship of the one word of god to the other words which, regardless of their created state, are, or can nevertheless be true words,¹⁶ as raised towards the end of Küng’s dissertation. As our discussion has made clearer, Küng recognizes other religions as „possible paths of salvation.“ While initially supposing only one uniquely „true religion“,¹⁷ he later restricts himself to pragmatically sketching the „three great- individualism-surpassing, international and transcultural religious system of currents“ within „ankind’s religious history (Wilfred Cantwell Smith)“,¹⁸ and to taking his bearings from Thomas Kuhns science-focused “theory of paradigms”¹⁹ in order to distinguish, within each specific religion, between its religious substance and the variety of paradigmata which they assume or in terms of which they in a way simultaneously subsist.

In the final analysis the combination of his profoundly problematic religious studies categorization of the different world religions under three religious current-systems (i.e. the current of semitic descent and of prophetic character made up from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the current of Indian descent with its mystic character made up by Hinduism and Buddhism, and the current of Chinese descent with its wisdom orientation, made up especially

¹⁴ Hans-Dieter Döpmann, *Die Orthodoxen Kirchen*, Verlags-Anstalt Union, Berlin, 1991, p. 39.

¹⁵ An illuminating and concise example is the fatal, etymological connection of “Hokuspokus“ and “hoc est corpus meus“.

¹⁶ Hans Küng, *Rechtfertigung. Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung. Mit einem Geleitbrief von Karl Barth*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 1986, 2004, p. 344; with reference to Karl Barth, *KD*, vol. IV/ 3, first half, p. 122-188, the quotation brought by Küng (without page reference) can be found on p. 122.

¹⁷ The discussion of this issue at: Hans Küng, *Theologie im Aufbruch, Eine ökumenische Grundlegung*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 1987, p. 274-306.

¹⁸ Hans Küng, *Projekt Weltethos*, Piper, Zürich/ München, 1990, p. 159, with reference to: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a world theology. Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, Orbis Books, New York, 1981.

¹⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *Die Struktur wissenschaftlicher Revolutionen*, Suhrkamp, 24th edition, 2014, Frankfurt/ Main, 1967.

by the Chinese religion and its manifestations in shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism and Chinese Buddhism) with Küng's engagement of an analysis of paradigms, as situated in the context of a still maintained commitment to the "one true religion", presents the crucial vehicle of Küng's unique variety of syncretism. Thus Küng claims that each religion encompasses a mixture of faith and superstition, keeps invoking the subject of „folk religion“ and insists that religion, unlike superstition, does not acknowledge as unconditionally valid anything merely contingent or relative, but, on the contrary, always highlights in diverse ways

„that original-ultimate reality which is worshipped not only by Jews and Christians, but also by Moslems, and which the Hindus locate in Brahma, the Buddhists in the Absolute, and of course traditional Chinese in heaven or in the Tao.“²⁰

Küng takes note of the „discovery of the ‚people‘ and of its ‚spirit‘ (Giovanni Battista Vico, Johann Gottfried von Herder) as relevant for a paradigm change in the history of scholarship,²¹ but avoids involvement with the sober sociological aspects of the issue (piety and religious practices in man's different lifeworlds such as the family, the profession, and the public). Instead, he attends to the polytheist manifestations of folk religion as suggestive of trinitarian structures affirmed even in Hinduism and Taoism.²² He does not fail to recognize certain structural similarities between the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the Jewish faith,²³ but does not (at least not explicitly) take account of the 'taoist trinity' proposed by Julia Ching, which an Orthodox Christian response to the challenge of the world religions would have to consider:

„The Tao begets the One.
The One begets the Two.
The Two begets the Three.
The Three begets all things.“²⁴

To be sure, Hans Küng observes considerable reserve in view of subjects such as „original revelation“, „original monotheism“ and „original religion“. But already in his account of the tribal relations he mentions the „on top of each other“ character, the simultaneity or rather

²⁰ Hans Küng, in: *idem/ Julia Ching, Christentum und Weltreligionen. Chinesische Religion*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2000, p. 85.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

²² Hans Küng, *Spurensuche. Die Weltreligionen auf dem Weg*, vol. 1: *Stammesreligionen, Hinduismus, chinesische Religion, Buddhismus*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2005, p. 120f., 209.

²³ *Idem*, *Judentum. Wesen und Geschichte, Die religiöse Situation der Zeit*, Piper, 2nd edition, München/ Zürich, 2001, p. 466-469.

²⁴ Julia Ching, in: Hans Küng/ Julia Ching, *Christentum und Weltreligionen. Chinesische Religion*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2000, p. 175, with reference to the 42nd chapter of Tao-te ching.

mutual permeation of different religious phenomena and phases, as underscored by recent research.²⁵ Surely one must understand Islam as starting out from an original monotheism (Adam as first Monotheist, or rather, Muslim). Even here however Küng assimilates Islam to Christianity by recognizing Muhammed as real Prophet, and his Koran as „word of god“.

From the ensemble of all religions, Küng claims to be able to distill an „original ethos“ as basis for his own project of a „world ethos“, an ethical minimal consensus, as it were, the basic principles of which can be summarized as:

„Renunciation of violence and awe in view of life: ‚not killing,‘ tormenting, hurting; Solidarity and a just order of the economy: ‚not stealing‘, exploiting, briging, corrupting; tolernace and truthfulness: speaking and acting according to truth, ‚not lying‘, cheating, falsifying, manipulating; equality of all humans and partnership between man and woman: ‚not abusing sexuality‘, not betraying, humiliating, disrespecting; the principle of humanity, the golden rule.“²⁶

Küng thinks that this minimal consensus could be sufficient for managing relationships between the different religions and for safeguarding peace on earth. He overlooks not only that the real challenge is to coexist precisely in the face of existing differences between the religions, but also that his reduction of religion to the principle of humanity („The will of god is human wellbeing“) is insufficient, and fails to do justice to the essence of religion, even if – under a best case scenario – practical orientation and mutual help surely are included in what that essence imposes.

Our biographical approach has taken careful notice of the way in which Küng’s position as a Roman-catholic priest, having been subjected by his superiors to a prohibition to teach ever since December 1979, and never revoked, has affected his account of the different world religions. It turned out that any unclarities or deficiencies in Küng’s perception of Christianity and church also surfaced in his relationship to the other religions.

Thus, for example, his incoherent (or un-reflected) assessment of the doctrines and their development in his own church affected his vision and presentation of religions which structurally lack any dogma. We also pointed out that the division between ‚doctrine‘, church life and ‚church magisterium‘ has ist own roots in the early history of Roman Catholicism.

For Küng, this division – understandably, led to a deep scepticism in view of any dogmatic positivism; it favored his openness to interreligious syncretist theology and practice

²⁵ Hans Küng, *Erlebte Menschlichkeit. Erinnerungen*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2013, p. 304.

²⁶ The text was summarized by me and offers the decisive keywords, *cf.* Hans Küng, *Der Islam. Wesen und Geschichte*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2006, p. 780.

(prayer, meditation), even while leaving his *subjective* claim to the truth of Christianity, as grounded in the universal significance of the ‘historical’ Jesus, intact. Similar observations also hold for Küng’s approach to the issue of ‘rite and rites’,²⁷ even though here his jesuan-Jesuit formation must of course be taken into account, and thus his basic preference for a simplicity in worship and rites which surely finds its parallel in the priest-less worship of Islam.²⁸ Nevertheless we believe that in the course of his study of the different world religions Küng’s appreciation of the relevance of „rite and rites“ has increased: We have observed an intensified awareness of the connection between the “inside” and the “outside” of religious performance. Clearly, neither merely external actions nor a pure internality are sufficient. For Christianity, an important consequence of Küng’s portrayal of the problems involved in dogma and rite lies in the insight that liturgy (worship of God), theology and the life of the Church are inseparable from one another. The Christian dogma is, as one could say, a matter of experience, even if such experience comes in obviously diversified degrees, as evinced by the fact that the symbol of faith was historically subject to an arcane discipline. Hans Küng does not attend to such issues, and we cannot pursue them in this summary.

From our account of Küng’s vision of a Christian engagement with the world religions an important conclusion can be derived: One should enter into the interreligious dialogue not from the position of a distorted Torso of Christianity, even if the remaining residua retain their value. Rather, such dialogue must be led from the position of Holy Tradition in all its fullness, as confessing the indivisible unity of Christ’s cross and resurrection.²⁹ We must therefore resolutely reject Küng’s obsessive insistence on Christianity as a ‚prophetic religion‘ which – as he stipulates – in the times ‚post Christum‘ has borrowed from other ‚great religious current-systems‘ of humanity and continues to depend on repeated such borrowings in order to supply its own deficiencies. While Küng’s continued attempts to argue his case might attract ‚the increasingly stupid individuals of our times‘³⁰, they have nothing in common with unprejudiced scholarship.

This verdict encompasses both his ideas about a specifically Christian mysticism, the extra-Christian origins of which our author untiringly, and with plagiarist appeals seeks to

²⁷ The topic is treated from the perspective of the history of religion by Louis Bouyer, *Mensch und Ritus*, Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, Mainz, 1964.

²⁸ Cf. Hans Küng, *Der Islam. Wesen und Geschichte*, Piper, München/ Zürich, 2006, p. 172ff.

²⁹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum. Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis*, 6th edition, Kösel, München, 2005, p. 215-216, who pointed out there that in Catholicism the moment of ‘resurrection’ had been more strongly preserved and in Protestantism the moment of ‘theology of the cross’ had been more strongly preserved.

³⁰ Hans Küng, *Projekt Weltethos*, Piper, Zürich/ München, 1990, p. 13.

advocate,³¹ and his betrayal of faith in the incarnation of God: Küng no longer recognizes this dogma as a basic tenet of the history of Christianity, the Church, and the world. Instead, he dismisses it as a mere hypothesis, developed from the particular experience of Jesus with ‘the ultimately original and final reality,’ to be assessed by theological experts, and invoked by Küng himself as transcendent foundation of the world ethos project which our Tübingen Professor undertakes in order to safeguard human survival on earth. Surely, the fact that Christians encounter the living, tri-une God also, and mainly, in the worship of the Church, in the Divine Liturgy, is an experience which, while describable in books, can be appropriated only through the life of the Church, as personally undertaken.³² Swimming also is not learnt from books about movements in the gym, but only in real water.

³¹ Küng's doctoral supervisor (‘Doktorvater’) Louis Bouyer has again demonstrated with admirable clarity that it is different: Louis Bouyer, *Einführung in die christliche Spiritualität*, Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, Mainz, 1965, p. 262-280.

³² Cf. Rudolf Schneider, *Vom Wesen der ostkirchlichen Eucharistie*, in: Ernst Benz, *Die Ostkirche und die russische Christenheit*, Furche-Verlag, Tübingen, 1949, p. 141-172, but also: Albert Klein, *Theologische Besinnung zur Neuordnung des Gottesdienstes*, in: *idem*, *Ein Leben im Glauben für Kirche und Gemeinschaft. Selbstzeugnisse*. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben von seinen Kindern und Enkeln zu seinem 100. Geburtstag am 16. März 2010, Hermannstadt/ Sibiu, hora edition, 2010, p. 358-387.