

Hans Küng. *My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Hans Küng has never been praised for brevity. Among his many books, *On Being a Christian* (1976) covers 720 pages, *Does God Exist?* (1980) lasts for 839, and *Christianity: Essence, History and Future* (1995) consumes 936. I should not have been surprised, then, after freeing large chunks of time for these tightly printed, 478-page *Memoirs*, to find that they merely constitute Volume I! (Küng anticipates only one more Volume – as of now.)

Lengthy as Küng's productions are, his writing style is smooth, engaging, often moving, and as readable as possible when the subject matter becomes complex. Nearly all readers, though, will find some sections too detailed and will want to skim or skip them. Yet the sections omitted by some readers will be interesting to others, who will welcome their wealth of information.

My Struggle for Freedom covers four main periods, linked by the author's growing appreciation of, and emphasis on, freedom: (1) Early years in his native Switzerland (1928-48), strongly shaped by its heritage of political and cultural freedom. (2) Study for the priesthood in Rome (1948-55), where his conscience gradually attained freedom. This period gave Küng surprisingly frequent contact with the leading theologians and officials of pre-Vatican II Catholicism, including Pope Pius IX. (3) Küng's increasing advocacy of freedom of thought, expression, and publication against conservative Roman resistance (1955-62), including a brief pastorate, teaching at Tübingen University, and early controversial publications. (4) The running debates, intrigues and shifting alliances experienced during Vatican II and shortly thereafter (1962-68), which brought the "universal Catholic Church" a measure of "modern freedom" from the "medieval Roman system."

The author aims to provide "objective" accounts of these events. Before long, however, the reader gets used to hearing about the "hell of the totalitarian Roman inquisition" that can burn deviants "psychologically" (99), or of Rome's "absolutist system like that of the French kings without the guillotine" (357). This is the Küng who often employs language like that of oppressed theological minorities (e.g., Black theologians), and frequently draws standing-room crowds, almost uniquely among theologians.

Küng's numerous, detailed, insider accounts of major events, persons, and processes provide invaluable insight into the volatile transition from pre-

to post-Vatican II Catholicism. Even those acquainted with much of this history will be surprised and enlightened by many specifics.

The author's comprehensive narrative also lends insight into where he stands theologically. Küng seeks to erect his theology from Scripture, interpreted in historical-critical fashion, which shakes many a treasured Roman teaching (e.g., papal infallibility). His emphasis on freedom, conscience, and reason are clearly modern, in contrast to postmodern. *My Struggle for Freedom* chronicles Küng's great admiration for, and reciprocal admiration from, the neo-orthodox Protestant theologian Karl Barth. Yet he begins his theology not with God's revealed Word, like Barth, but with a more general trust in existence accessible to all humans and in all religions. Küng often sounds more like a liberal Protestant than a Catholic theologian.

Apparently his Roman superiors have heard him similarly. Yet Küng insists that he does not "repudiate the pope, but papalism," not "the Roman center but its centralism, legalism and triumphalism" (426). He argues that this center has been misshapen by medieval hierarchalism for a millennium, and often contrasts it with universal Catholicism. Nonetheless, he still expresses hope that authentic Catholicism can be Roman. On the other hand, Küng evaluates Vatican II more negatively than many others, and almost seems to predict at times that Rome will inevitably keep turning back from the Council's reforms.

Küng's *Memoirs* (Volume I) close by detailing the author's relationship with Joseph Ratzinger, whose recent election as Pope has apparently fulfilled those dire predictions. Until about 1967, he and Ratzinger were allies in struggle against the Roman system. But then Ratzinger shifted course and became a chief Vatican spokesman. Küng tells us that he too might have attained high Church office, had he moderated his tone and become more obedient. He surmises that Ratzinger accepted those conditions. Looking back on his career in 1996, Küng concluded:

I could not have gone another way, not just for the sake of freedom, which has always been dear to me, but also for the sake of truth. . . . I would have sold my soul for power in the church. And I can only hope that my contemporary and colleague, Joseph Ratzinger, who took the other way, is also as content and happy as I am as I look back on my life . . . (461).

Thomas Finger, scholar and writer, Evanston, IL