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Book Review of The Council Reform and Reunion By Hans Küng

Daniel Walther
Andrews University

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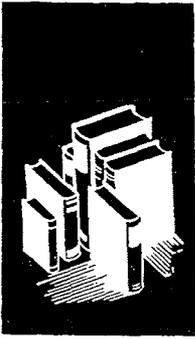
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BOOKS

An Appraisal by Daniel Walther of *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, by Hans Küng.*

One of the momentous events in our century was the Roman Catholic Vatican Council II. An enormous coverage was given this event in the press of the world. Many volumes have been published trying to appraise especially the theological developments. (The proceedings of the council have recently been published, *The Documents of Vatican II*: paperback, edited by Guild Press, New York, 1966, 95c.) This contains all sixteen official documents promulgated at the council 1962 to 1965.

One of the best works written before Vatican II met, was by Hans Küng, titled, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*. The original edition was published in English by Sheed and Ward, New York, 1961.

There are several reasons why Küng's book is of importance to the clergy in general, to the Seventh-day Adventist minister in particular:

1. Contemporary ecumenical developments should be watched very closely by the intelligent minister. The meaning of these developments is of great importance to a proper understanding of the Advent message.

2. We must be aware of the existing differences of Roman Catholic and Protestant concepts of ecumenism. While we as a denomination had no official "observers" at Vatican II, we nevertheless had several "onlookers" there who observed, sometimes, the observers. Several of our men had full access to the press section at Vatican City.

3. A Catholic council can teach a great deal. As far as the book of Küng is concerned, there are numerous observations, expressed penetratingly, that could profitably apply to our work.

Very seldom does the Roman Catholic Church call a council into session. Since Reformation times there were only three councils:

- a. The Council of Trent, in 1545, was called in order to readjust the situation of the church after the onslaught of the Reformation.

- b. Vatican I convened in 1869 in order to reappraise the role of the church as it faced the waves

of liberalism in science (evolution), in economy (socialism and Marxism), in theology (higher criticism).

- c. Vatican II met 1962-1965 under the pontificate of John XXIII, who thought in terms of an *aggiornamento* ("bringing up to date") of the church in a rapidly changing world. The succeeding Pope, Paul VI, appeared eager to put an end to the council.

Another trait of a Roman Catholic council is that ideas and teachings are discussed and not business matters.

Moreover, a Roman Catholic council takes all the time necessary: Vatican II lasted four years; the Council of Trent met for eighteen years.

In his book Hans Küng once again points to the permanent spiritual and moral needs of the Christian church. The church is in constant need of reformation. When we use the term "reformation" we usually think of that of the sixteenth century, such as the Lutheran Reformation and that of Calvin and Zwingli. In fact, Protestants are sometimes under the impression that the Reformation is an event of the past, and yet paradoxically subscribe to the idea that the church is in that constant need of a reformation (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*). Since its beginning in the first century, individual churches as well as the entire universal body needed constant "mending," renewing, reforming, updating. That thought of a constant reformation applies to our own denomination also. Remember the numerous appeals made by the Spirit of Prophecy, pointing to our basic needs, our dangers, mistakes, and also the remedies. Remember the constant calls for a reformation and a revival. That call was often heard; was it often heeded?

For one thing, says Küng, the Christian church, largely made by man, has forever attempted to make herself at home within her own walls, to regard her own organization as an end in itself (page 23). Another characteristic of all Christian churches is the fear to make changes (page 24). They feel snug and comfortable the way they are and they are afraid of basic progress, necessary changes, and experiments that might "rock the boat."

We must never lose sight of the fact that the church is not only made up of men but organized and led by men, i.e., sinners. On the other hand, we cannot, argues Küng, wait until we have a sinless person to make him a minister. We cannot wait until the church is perfect before we begin missionary work, and we cannot reach a state of absolute inner perfection before we begin to reform the church. Precisely because we are sinful, imperfect, and "unfinished" we need that constant reformation which renews all things. In spite of its shortcomings the church is Christ's mystical body, Christ's bride (page 30). The church is the Lord's (*kuriake*—from which we have the English word *church*). A reformation, therefore, is primarily the work of God, and imperfect man is merely God's tool. As Saint Augustine once wrote: "He [the Lord] will reform you who first formed you" (page 34).

* Paperback; Image book, Doubleday, 1965, New York, 85c.

An important question, which Küng tries to answer, is *how* can a church be reformed. Can we, with our imperfections, do something? What can we really do?

1. First of all, we can "suffer." (The Latin word for suffering is *patientia*, from which we get our word *patience*. When we speak of the "patience of the saints" the basic meaning is the "suffering of the saints.") We are to be aware of the self-righteousness, the poverty, the blindness, the nakedness as well as the apparent physical triumphs of the church. We are urged to suffer with those *not* of our communion; we are to suffer also with those of our communion. What is the purpose of suffering? Mainly to counteract denominational pride and self-satisfaction.

2. We must *pray*. There is little praying done by the clergy. To pray does not mean to pray against (or for) something, or against one another, nor like the Pharisees, to praise ourselves. But we ought to pray for one another within as well as outside the church: "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

3. We can *criticize*. The Christian rejoices over the good which the church does and which exists within the church. But there always were heard warning voices in the church to draw attention to the shortcomings. These voices are expressed already in the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. There is, to be sure, a careful, constructive type of fraternal criticism. That, in itself, is an act of love.

4. We must *act*. We must do God's will. Our right, our business, is not to act against, but to act with and for one another. At all costs we must act especially where pastoral charity is called for, and we must act with much patience. We must act by a renewal and a return to the sources of Christianity. It is significant (a point not sufficiently stressed in Küng's book) that reform movements have very often been motivated by a concern for re-emphasis of the "last things." When the church settles down in material comfort it thinks least of all about the return of Jesus, the end of the world, the judgment, et cetera. We have noticed that reform movements in the church are very often caused or accompanied by a deep concern and a firm preaching of the events of the last days, notably Christ's second coming.

The primary task of the church is to *witness*. Does the Christian minister really know what is going on, what is being taught? Is he so out of touch with realities of trends that his ministry tends to be stale, his message insipid, and his witnessing without impact?

While the book *The Council, Reform and Reunion* is written by a young Catholic theologian and primarily intended for Catholic readers to get ready for their council, all Christians, Seventh-day Adventist ministers in particular, may have their eyes opened and their understanding enlightened in reading open-mindedly Küng's attempts to analyze and improve the inner condition of the church.

GOSPEL TENTS

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Over 50 Years in Business

From Death to Life Through Christ, Robert G. Lee, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1966.

Those who have read anything from the pen of Dr. Lee are happy for another book bearing his name. This veteran in the ministry is well known as a forthright evangelist and revivalist, and in this book there are some very challenging passages. There are six chapters in 120 pages, and while these chapters do not aim to follow a sequence, or even to develop one special idea, yet they are all strongly evangelical. The last chapter, "If I Were a Jew," is in this reviewer's opinion worth all the rest of the book.

In the over-all evaluation of this book it could hardly be classed as the finest that has come from this author, but there is a note of freshness about it which is characteristic of this interesting and challenging preacher. He speaks with a note of authority, and that is always refreshing.

R. ALLAN ANDERSON

Revell's Minister's Annual, 1967 edition, David A. MacLennan, Fleming H. Revel Company, Westwood, New Jersey, \$3.95, 380 pages.

The Minister's Manual (Dorna's), compiled by M. K. W. Hiecher, Harper & Row, New York, \$3.95, 372 pages.

These are two well-known yearly source books of ideas, suggestions, and materials for sermons, worship programs, meditations, prayers, illustrations, messages for bulletins, communion services, and prayer-meeting ideas. These works are planned to stimulate thoughts that can be adapted for use in messages pertinent to the day and the hour in which we live. We will probably not wish to follow the yearly calendar of services suggested here. Nevertheless, we find in these volumes much to challenge us, to enrich our thinking, and to encourage us to become evermore creative as a "sermon builder, leader in worship, and transmitter of the glorious good news of the blessed God."

The Minister's Manual features one hundred contemporary questions asked by young people, with suggested answers. Also a junior pulpit, with emphasis on getting to this group without talking down to them. We suggest these two books not as a substitute for the minister's own preparation of sermons but as source books supplying materials fresh and new for all occasions.

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