

makeup of Malaysia that engage all Malaysian leaders. These issues have taken a more cogent turn since the March 2008 general elections and the transfer of leadership from Tun Abdullah Badawi to the present incumbent. Time will tell how he fares, but – in spite of the inter-ethnic disturbances of January 2010 – early indicators seem to promise positive changes and a consistent pattern of progressive leadership for Malaysia under Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Hans Küng – *Islam: Past, Present and Future*

Trans. John Bowden (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008; reprint paperback 2009). xxx+767 pp. ISBN: 978-1-85168-612-4. US\$29.95 [German original: *Der Islam: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2004)]

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The historian-theologian Hans Küng is best known today for his passionate pursuit of inter-religious dialogue and understanding within a global perspective. Since the 1960s he was professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Eberhard-Karls-Universität of Tübingen in Germany and Emeritus Professor there from 1996. This dissident Swiss Catholic priest is a controversial theologian and prolific author in the inter-faith industry.

Since 1995, his primary occupation has been President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic¹ (*Stiftung Weltethos*). He described what world religions share in common, not what separates them, and compiled a minimal code of moral rules everyone might possibly accept. From 2001 onwards, the exhibition “World Religions – Universal Peace – Global Ethic”, conceived by *Stiftung Weltethos*, has been displayed around the world.

Islam completes his trilogy on “The Religious Situation of Our Time”, treating the three monotheistic religions of Southwest Asian provenance (Küng employs the expression ‘Near Eastern’, a Eurocentric designation). The first two volumes were *Judaism: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (1991; English trans. New York: Crossroad, 1992), and *Christianity: Its Essence and History* (1994; English trans. 1995). In the course of his project, Küng made long filming trips around the world for the television series *Spurensuche* (aired in Germany in 2000), which then appeared as an illustrated volume and a DVD.² All these remarkable efforts by Küng are the fruit of extensive research conducted between 1989 and 1997, forming the basis for his life project: ‘No World Peace without Religious Peace’.

His is a massive scholarly undertaking whose successful completion should be a cause for gratitude and relief. Concerning the structure of this trilogy, Küng states: “The view expressed in this book is the end-product of a long course of

thinking which has matured over decades”, and confidently asserts that “my view is comprehensive and well-founded” (p. 664 n.1). (The table of contents is available online at <http://www.weltethos.org/dat-english/00-books-islam.htm>.) The blurb for *Islam* on this website reads:

For more than two decades, the world’s religions have been a central topic for Hans Küng. As one of the best-known pioneers of dialogue between cultures, his books have been a source of inspiration for millions of people. In this extraordinarily comprehensive book, he gives an in-depth account of Islam’s history and core beliefs. Describing paradigm shifts in its 1,400-year history, outlining the various currents and surveying the positions of Islam on the urgent questions of the day, few present-day Christian theologians could have written such a complete analysis.

Such advertised competence and self-assured claim to authoritative expertise (“deft and assured”) inviting serious attention from interested non-Muslims, provides a stark contrast to Küng’s former academic colleague in Tübingen Joseph Ratzinger, whose September 2006 Regensburg speech as Pope Benedict XVI revealed serious flaws in his own appreciation of Islam.³ Recall that in December 1979 Küng had been formally stripped of his licence to teach as a Roman Catholic theologian by the then Vatican’s Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (a post later held by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, from 1981 to 2005). Küng carried on as tenured professor of ecumenical theology at the University of Tübingen and is still a catholic priest.

Küng exploits the best occidental scholarly resources on Islam which perhaps only German academia may best supply the modern researcher. Yet this does not spare Küng from a number of obvious errors and mistaken judgements (e.g. pp. 194ff. his treatment of early Shi’ism relies overly on the tendentious work of H. Lammens, ignoring the very important revisionist contribution of Wilferd Madelung’s *The Succession to Muhammad*); as well as minor infelicities over dates (e.g. pp. 190, 198, 200...).

Nevertheless, the richness and density of his survey, the diachronic attention devoted to a host of topics and themes over hundreds of pages, and the uniformly high quality of his acumen and judicious penetration into the gist of many complex issues, is really impressive. He deserves to be congratulated. Reading Küng’s *Islam* is an intellectual challenge replete with relevant insights (see his treatment of Jewish-Christianity in pre-Islamic Arabia on pp. 32–45, with which this reviewer is in complete agreement). He is sympathetic and participatory, and continually poses questions of himself and of his readers eliciting critical self-reflection (e.g., on Christology pp. 484ff.; on Qur’ānic criticism pp. 518ff.), and that keep true to his admonition “to say old things in a new way”. According to Küng, “[o]ur situation is not that of a theological dogmatic conversation, but of a modern, postmodern inter-

religious conversation” (p. 515). Frequently the presentation mediates perspectives acutely discomfiting and difficult for most unreflective Muslims to even contemplate (is the Qur’ān *literally* God’s Word?). Yet much of his presentation rings true as authentic statements immediately recognisable to Muslims once they get beyond his overly theological (Thomistic) terms.

The essential key to his entire approach throughout this trilogy is the influential notion of ‘paradigm change’ (also underlying his understanding of a new ‘Global Ethic’; see charts on pp. 145, 467, 477, 579, 582, 584). He means by ‘paradigm change’ a Copernican shift in the exemplary pattern or prevailing model of self-understanding (pp. 144, 160), the “macromodel of society, religion and theology” (p. 456) expressed in fresh, more adequate conceptions and discourse which meets human historical, social, psychic and ideological needs. Shifts in the dominant historical paradigm reflect the re-working of timeless values and essential principles in light of actual historical conditions. Interestingly, all three religions are assigned exactly five major paradigm stages – culminating in a sixth final shift yet to be achieved: his ‘postmodern’ Global Ethic! More importantly, older paradigms persist into the present alongside younger paradigms, which helps explain the diversity and contradictions among Muslims themselves, and between Muslims and Jews and Christians.

Here is an outline of the book. Following a brief sketch of his Aim, there are five major sections designated by roman letters A to E, each with many chapters with sub-divisions, consummated by his Epilogue and Conclusion (a total of 662 pages of text). The five sections are: A. Origin, B. Centre, C. History (the longest section pp. 143–429), D. Challenges of the Present, and E. Possibilities for the Future.

It is in section C where Küng presents his five ‘paradigms’ (designated by P) encapsulating the unfolding and development of the Islamic religion over the past millennium and a half:

- P I Paradigm of the original Islamic community
- P II Paradigm of the Arab empire
- P III Classical Paradigm of Islam as a world religion
- P IV Paradigm of the Ulama and Sufis
- P V Paradigm of Islamic Modernization

Finally, Küng suggests in section E that (like its brother prophetic faiths) the religion of Islam should be moving toward elaborating a fresh postmodern ‘Contemporary paradigm’. Yet this possible and hoped for enlightened transformation is couched in a series of questions with various alternative answers under contestation in the form of competing paradigms prolonged from the past. This final section is perhaps the most significant portion of this book, and certainly the most relevant for today.

I sincerely hope that intelligent Muslim thinkers make the effort to respond to Father Hans Küng's work *Islam*, and in particular to critique his influential theory of 'paradigm change' which appears to place a peculiar demand upon contemporary Muslims to think and speak in a different mode or manner – like Euro-Americans at ease with 'secularity'. In my understanding, Professor Küng is a true child of the Enlightenment, and his conception of what the 'postmodern' paradigm entails posits an instrumentalised mode of rationality that is a forced projection upon the true situation of many Muslims today. This is most evident in his untenable assessment of why Muslims repelled 'Arab Islamic' philosophy (i.e. Hellenic rationality) and lapsed into a prolonged Middle Ages of religious obscurantism, while Europe surged ahead into modernity. Yet this interpretation has now become ubiquitous among non-Muslims, and is even upheld by a number of prominent Muslim thinkers.

As so often, assertions through one-sided attempts at conversation directed by non-Muslims toward Muslims either fall on uncomprehending ears, or are passively ignored and marginalised as unworthy of response due largely to intellectual lethargy. The recent *Common Word* initiative involving Pope Benedict XVI is an important exception.

Notes

1. *Global Ethic Foundation for Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Research, Education and Encounter*, based in Tübingen. Their website is available at <http://www.weltethos.org/dat-english/index.htm>. See also Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds), *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (London and New York: SCM Press, 1993).
2. Published in English as *Tracing the Way: Spiritual Dimensions of the World Religions* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).
3. However, for a different evaluation of this matter see the Viewpoint in an earlier issue of this journal by Christoph Marcinkowski, "Religion, Reason, 'Regensburg': Perspectives for Catholic–Muslim Dialogue Today", *Islam and Civilizational Renewal* 1, no. 1 (2009), 159–67.