

3rd Sunday in Easter – Year A 2023

Act 2:14.22-33; Psalm 15; 1st Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

The Catholic Theologian and priest, Hans Kung, died around this time in 2021. He was world renowned: serving as an advisor at the Second Vatican Council; writing extensively and teaching prolifically on inter-religious dialogue; amassing 15 honorary PhDs from around the world, and being awarded numerous peace-prizes, honours and freedoms. He had an asteroid named in honour of him: Asteroid 190139 Hansküng¹

He was also an outspoken critic of the church and some of its teaching, although he viewed himself as a loyal one. In my view, he was a bit like an asteroid himself, orbiting around the sun but erratic and prone to be drawn to the gravity of large objects. He, like so many people, theologians especially, came to believe that he knew better, even than scripture, even better than the Gospels which he said the church should return to. It is evident from his works that he did not accept the divinity of Christ, and that he saw in the incarnation ‘spiritual’ truth, and ‘pious legends’ rather than the actual act of God.² The inevitable result is that he did not believe in the resurrection either. How could he? Many people in the Catholic church continue to think that he was a theological titan. He insisted that he was a priest in good standing. Perhaps he had a clear conscience.

Speaking of conscience, last August Robert McElroy of San Diego was made a cardinal by Pope Francis. He recently stated in the Magazine ‘America’ that

For every member of the Church, it is conscience to which we have the ultimate responsibility and by which we will be judged. For that reason, while Catholic teaching has an essential role in moral decision-making, it is conscience that has the privileged place.’³

He went on to state that it was not for the Church to dictate conscience, but help form it. I agree. Conscience is the manifestation of ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Will’. ‘Knowledge’ is about matters that relate to God and is that which the church teaches, and ultimately knowledge is the ability to discern between good and evil. ‘Will’ is the action you take – or do not take – based on that knowledge. Conscience is not what you feel like what you want to do. If what is good is explained to you and you still refuse to do what is good because it does not suit you, either in temperament, taste or experience then you are not acting in Good Conscience. You are refusing the good, and it really *is* the church’s responsibility – clergy and layperson alike – to point it out. It is not possible to observe dishonesty, sexual misconduct, acts of violence, or heresy unremarked and leave it to someone’s conscience of choice. The church’s teaching on these matters – which is infallibly built on Sacred Scripture and the Holy Spirit - is the bed-rock of a good conscience. And this is why people – wise men – like Cardinal McElroy and the late Hans Kung, wish to undermine both. They want scripture to be used as a useful reference point, but not indispensable. They want the church built in the image of man not on Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel we have heard today, the resurrected Jesus reveals himself to two disciples who are walking to Damascus. One, Cleopas, says to the as yet

¹ Hans Kung https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Küng#cite_note-Geyer-1 accessed 20 April 2023.

² Cf Hnds Kung, *Essere Chistiani*, p 197 in Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, *Gethsemane*, p215

³ Quoted in Catholic Herald, ‘*Bishop accuses US cardinal of heresy*’ April 2023 p. 15

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unrecognised Jesus *'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days'*. He is not exaggerating. The crucifixion of Jesus was purposefully done so publicly that you could not have entered or left Jerusalem without seeing Him dying on the cross, or having in reported to you. When Jesus reveals himself, he does so by unfolding sacred scripture and explaining how it pertained to himself. When he breaks bread before the disciples, they recognise him as being the real person that they knew, who really had died and was now really standing before them. Both the act of teaching and of *being* are God's revelation in the person of Jesus. He is Revelation, he does not just point to it in a spiritual way. If He is God's Revelation - and if we accept the title 'Christian' we must that He is - then we must not presume to interpret anything sacred or profane other than by His will and His words and His Holy Spirit. A conscience that is formed in this way does indeed have a privileged place: at the heart of the Church which is preparing us for heaven. Other chosen paths simply lead in other directions and destinations.

In response to the 1st letter of Peter, which we also heard read this morning ⁴ I do remember the ransom that was paid for me; which is why I follow the Son, not an asteroid or the dictates of my own desires.

⁴ Peter 1:20