

Society for Ecumenical Studies – Book Reviews, May 2005

Kasper, Walter, *That they may all be one - the call to unity today*, Continuum, 2004, ISBN 0-86012-379-0, £12.99.

This significant work, by the genial and immensely competent head of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, is important both for understanding the current state of the Ecumenical Movement and the role of the Roman Catholic Church within it. Cardinal Kasper makes the important point that some of the current sense of frustration is, paradoxically, testimony to the genuine advances we have made; as we come closer, so we feel the pain of disunity more and the frustration of certain remaining obstacles.

He argues that key differences persist in the realm of ecclesiology. Simultaneously, he spells out the way in which the understanding of the Church as communion has become central to all the main dialogues. He argues that Protestants should not feel too wounded by the recent CDF declaration in *Dominus Iesus* that they are not “churches in the proper sense” since they do not claim to be church in the same sense as does the Catholic Church. There is, I think, a tension here within the Cardinal's thinking, and, perhaps more generally within Catholic ecclesiology, that he does not entirely resolve. If all the major churches are now agreed that being church means fundamentally our being graciously enfolded in the love of the Blessed Trinity and taken up into the divine mission and plan, there surely there is a fundamental agreement in ecclesiology at the most basic level. It is true, however, that we continue to disagree about the necessary structures of the Church and about the *range* of (rather than the *necessity for*) the Church's teaching office; nevertheless, even here there is progress as can be seen from the things that Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists have said in dialogue with Catholics about ministry, even about the Petrine ministry. We are, at root, agreed about the nature and purpose of the Church; what we are not yet agreed about are certain secondary issues of structure and necessary exercise of authority.

Despite this reservation, there is much to commend this book. There are excellent chapters on spiritual ecumenism, on the Joint Declaration on Justification and on the renewal of pneumatology where Kasper cites Aquinas on the primacy of the Spirit over the purely institutional: “What is essential is only the Holy Spirit itself” (p.99). This last assertion has key implications for future ecclesiological debate.

This is a book to be read and re-read.

David Carter