

THE SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

***Leadership in the Church : How Traditional Roles can Serve the Christian Community Today* (Walter Kasper, Herder & Herder 2003)**

***Sacrament of Unity : The Eucharist and the Church* (Walter Kasper, Herder & Herder 2004)**

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It is always a joy to read a book by Walter Kasper. Amongst his many virtues is that of clarity. His meaning is unmistakable and he is easier to understand than many of his fellow-theologians, without losing anything in the way of spiritual profundity.

This brace of books contain many significant insights into and comments upon the current state of the Ecumenical Movement. The first deals with the traditional three ordained ministries of catholic order; in particular it commends the revived importance of the diaconate. On the episcopate, it argues that both Protestants and Orthodox will have insights and gifts to bring to the understanding and practice of episcopacy within a reunited Church. Thus he says that, though apostolicity in the sense of succession in episcopal ministry can only come from those churches that already possess it, "Catholics receive from the churches of the Reformation a richer expression of many substantial apostolic elements; and when Protestants enter the apostolic succession, this succession itself will be enabled to realise its catholicity in a fuller manner". He argues that the Orthodox emphasis upon apostolic continuity as "realised ever anew in the Holy Spirit" is also due for fuller reception.

The Cardinal deals with several current tensions within the Ecumenical Movement. He apologises for what he finds the "unnecessarily sharp tone" of *Dominus Iesus*, though he is even more critical of a recent declaration on *Church Fellowship in the Protestant Understanding* by the Evangelical Church in Germany, in which it was stated that "Protestants must oppose the Catholic position on the necessity and form of the Petrine

ministry, the understanding of the apostolic succession, the refusal to admit women to the ordained ministry, and

not least the role of canon law in the Roman Catholic Church". This particular Protestant reviewer has some sympathy with the Cardinal at this point. To attack the existence of canon law is fatuous, since all churches, presumably including the EKD, have to have rules (whether or not they denominate them by the name of canon law). Similarly, it is ungracious in the wake of *Ut Unum Sint* to harp on the Petrine ministry, since in it Pope John Paul II deliberately exposed himself and his church to a proper debate of the key issues. Questions of apostolicity and the ministerial roles open to women must remain issues on which we have to struggle together in charity, proponents of differing views recognising that each church must in the current situation act loyally and consistently with such light as it feels it has received.

However, we all need to remember in love the deep sensitivities and hurts involved, for example in the Anglican and Protestant churches, on account of the lack of full recognition of their ministries by the Roman Catholic Church. Once again, as in his book *May They All Be One* (2004), Kasper argues that *Dominus Iesus* does not deny all ecclesiality to Protestant churches. It merely holds that they are not churches in the sense in which the Catholic Church claims to be church. I have to say, however, that this overlooks the vital point that the Anglican and Protestant communions do claim to be church in the sense that participation in the one holy catholic and apostolic church is understood both within Scripture and the historic creeds.

In both books Kasper emphasises the importance of spiritual ecumenism and the healing of the wounds caused by the alienation of centuries. In his book on the ministries, he has a valuable chapter on the question of the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches, stressing that his concern in the famous debate with the then Cardinal Ratzinger was pastoral.

The Cardinal's book on the Eucharist is beautifully and clearly written and explains the Catholic position that the eucharist expresses and strengthens the already existing unity of the Church. One cannot pray the *Amen* of the prayers in the eucharistic liturgy with integrity, unless one holds the same faith as the bishop and Pope of the Church that are named in the intercessory prayers. Again, this does not perhaps totally address the point that Anglicans and Protestants would make that they share the same essential faith and that the additional things that the Roman Catholic Church insists on would be seen either as *adiaphora* or as incorrect additions to the one essential core of trinitarian truth.

Nevertheless, these are books to be read and carefully pondered by those who wish to understand the current ecumenical stance of the Roman Catholic Church and the head of its Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.