

THE SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

Reflections on *Enriching Communion* (Bill Snelson, CTE 2006) & *A Handbook of Spiritual Communion* (Cardinal Walter Kasper, New City Press 2007)

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In 2005, Churches Together in England conducted a training conference for County Ecumenical Officers and others on 'Sharing Communion in a Hungry World' (see Hilary Martin's report on our website, www.sfes.org.uk). The conference came towards the end of a long process of exploration by CTE's Theology and Unity Group (on which our member John Bradley serves) concerning issues around Eucharistic sharing, *communio* as it is seen in different traditions and the overall context and aim of restored, visible full communion – as well as the 'reconciled diversity' strategy of inter-communion in the meantime. This exploration has been written up by Bill Snelson, General Secretary of CTE in *Enriching Communion*. He has done us all a service with this beautiful and highly encouraging book, which is available direct from CTE for £4-95 (ISBN 1 874295 29 8). Helpfully, he separates out our two ways of speaking of *koinonia/communio* - into a consideration of the Eucharist itself (using two very different perspectives from Vincent Nichols, the Catholic archbishop of Birmingham, and Inderjit Boghal, the Methodist minister from east Yorkshire with penetrating insight from his past as a Sikh from India) and of 'fellowship' on the way, as we search for Eucharistic communion. This embraces the ways in which different ecclesiological cultures discuss their idea and experience of participation in the Church, without too much of the way in which *koinonia/communio* has become technical as terminology.

So he moves beyond discussing the fullness and richness of communion as we know it through baptism (the starting point which can be seen more as the limit of re-integration in some thinking) and relates everything to the objective, which is the completion of communion in the Eucharist. Talking of communion makes sense, to my mind at least, in no other way. As Cardinal Kasper points out in his own new *Handbook on Spiritual Ecumenism* (New City Press, ISBN 10 156548 263 8 - £5-95), when we declare our belief in the Communion of Saints in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, we tend to think of fellowship and belonging, rather the **company**

of the faithful, our sharing of the Bread of Life, belief in our Holy Communion. So the first 'eucharistic' section of *Enriching Communion* leads us, through the context of world hunger and justice and that of the re-creation in the world of a heavenly reality through the gift of Christ's life sacramentally, to the realisation of the sacramentality of the whole of life, in which the unity of the Church – and thus of all Christians – is integral, for the sake of the solidarity of humanity, the realisation of the Kingdom, and the Eucharistic completion of the creation in the unity of God with what, and those, he has made.

Christians' fellowship in the Word of God, in service alongside each other, in union with all our traditions' saints and (especially) martyrs, our mutual exchange and inspiration in worship and spirituality, and our sense of our sin and lamentation concerning the brokenness of our one Church, are not presented as 'all we can settle for' in a simply post-baptismal fellowship, or mere steps along the way towards the Eucharist together, or spiritual (in a strange sense of less than ideal) substitutes for an actual reality; but instead they are envisaged as genuine instances of the full communion to which we are proceeding, and in which there is not an absence of Eucharistic reality (which tantalises and frustrates our aspirations) but a genuine 'access to the communion of salvation'. The life of grace imparted and experienced may be imperfect between us, but it is a participation which is Eucharistic in character. Rather than our sense of communion taking us gradually beyond Baptism, this is a sense of communion which draws us insistently *toward* union in Christ in the Eucharist.

I was particularly grateful for the treatment of communion through our respective martyr traditions. Once a point of rivalry and mutual recrimination, these are where we see, as Pope John Paul saw in *Ut Unum Sint*, the laying down of life in witnessing to Christ as the point of complete identification with Christ and of Christ with his follower. What was once a symbol of division, thus is shown to be a realisation of Christians' essential inseparability, on account of the indivisibility of Christ. Those who honour the saints, and particularly the martyrs, of our Churches have to interpret them in union with the sacrifice of Christ as bearing fruit in more than united fellowship – in the clearer reality of the one Christ and the unity of his Eucharist.

Cardinal Kasper's *Handbook* is principally addressed to Roman Catholics, (and the Catholic-minded in other Churches); but it too aims at looking afresh at the practicalities, and at convincing people that Christian unity is not about

interdenominational relations but is the very essence and purpose of the one Church as the minister of the world's salvation. It is full of practical suggestions, and furthermore reveals how all kinds of aspects of Church life – the Church's liturgical year, personal and corporate prayer, the study of Scripture, theology, service in parish life, religious communities, pastoral and social action, youth and family evangelisation - not only *can* be ecumenical, but how ecumenism is intrinsic to their purpose and direction.

Again, the journey to the Eucharist is the dynamic. But whereas in *Enriching Communion* the work seems to be about seeing the Eucharist ecumenically (and not just in terms of a sacramental sharing), the *Handbook* is about the re-evaluation of ecumenism as Eucharistic, in other words as standing at the heart of Catholic experience of faith and life.

In both books, 'spiritual ecumenism' is not about prayerful aspirations and activity to occupy us while we wait for the real thing. They both honour what has been achieved in the past, which may be partial but which more authentically stand in the future-oriented perspective of what is to be completed, as concrete constituent realities of it, faith being the substance of things hoped for.

Eucharistic sharing and the means toward organic unity remain the rub. But there are interesting ecclesiological hints in Cardinal Kasper's *Handbook*. In his 2005 book *'That they all may be one'*, Kasper discusses (before Cardinal Ratzinger was elected Pope) the unfortunate discussion of other Churches in *Dominus Iesus*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's declaration on the uniqueness of Christ and his work as universal Saviour. The document is not really about ecclesiological questions, or even collaboration among Christians in mission, and the role and standing of other Western churches is treated in a sort of shorthand way. The result is that it makes scant acknowledgement of the content and progress in mutual comprehension between the churches, through the various dialogues over the preceding 35 years, describing other ecclesial communities as 'not churches in the proper sense', *tout court*. A horrified Kasper translates the CDF's tactless and inadequate comment into the more authentic and nuanced terms of what has been understood in the dialogues, as well as in Pope John Paul's Encyclical Letter on Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*. He tells us that the discussion could have been 'better put'. This was excitedly reported as a rift between Kasper and Ratzinger, but subsequently Kasper has let it be known widely that he and the new Pope discussed

the matter thoroughly and both agreed on the declaration's shortcomings in this ecumenical regard.

Thus Church means the universal Church of Christ, or a local community of Christians headed by their bishop whose communion with the other local bishops includes communion with the universal Church through the Bishop of Rome as successor of Peter; hence the Catholic Church itself, in which the universal Church 'perfectly subsists'. Kasper has been at pains to point out that other communities, churches and communions of Christians are not seen as churches in a merely sociological or analogical sense, but as genuine bodies belonging to the one, universal and indivisible Church (something which after all applies to all Catholic dioceses too). Thus 'proper sense' is to mean 'in our own sense'; in other words, in the way in which the Catholic Church self-understands what its own local or particular churches to be. This acknowledges that although the means whereby the Christians in their churches and ecclesial communities can be in communion with each other locally and universally may not be apparent and available, nonetheless the reality and starting point of each is the Universal Church from which all derive, or in which they subsist, and not the contingent separateness of denominations.

Part of the problem of perception, of course, lies in the apparent contrast between 'Churches' and 'Ecclesial Communities', as though the latter were a scaled back version of the former. In place of 'ecclesial' it would be better to use 'church' adjectivally - 'Churches and Church Communities' – to convey the Latin parity of *ecclesia* and *ecclesialis* into English, which the translation so fails to convey as to misrepresent. If this were done, the carefully constructed joint phrase (Churches and Church Communities) would be seen to encompass the universal dimension of the Church to which all Christians belong in baptism, the particular local churches in which the Catholics see inherence for themselves and others in that universal Church, and the organisations and traditions of other Christians whose legitimate status, context and nature is as communities of this same, sole universal Church. Thus the phrase excludes the denominationalism, rather than makes the distinctions. However imperfect the communion between them, however much Catholics and others may not share each others' faith and Church life in entirety, and however unmatching their structures have come to be, the Churches and Church Communities are part of the fabric of the Universal Church, not separate versions of it.

So Cardinal Kasper's *Handbook* places non-Roman Catholic 'Church Communities' or 'Ecclesial Communities' not in a separate department of his projections for spiritual ecumenism, but within the book's third and concluding section on *Diakonia* and Witness (the first is on a scriptural ecumenism and the witness of the saints, living and departed, to the Word of God; the second is on the ecumenism of prayer and worship). Thus the 'Church communities' are discussed with the great ecclesial movements which are ecumenical in character – in the context of what has gone before on religious communities, monastic communities and parish or local communities. The potential of each for building unity is examined according to that community's opportunities, but also within the setting of wider networks and even global and thus universal circumstances.

So is it perhaps being communicated that 'ecclesial communities' are not what the Catholic Church sees 'non-Catholic' Christians as belonging too, but an authentic instance of life within the one Church; and which are also to be found within the Catholic Church too? Among the ecclesial communities or movements, Focolare, L'Arche and Sant'Egidio Community are mentioned. Among the religious communities and orders mentioned alongside the discussion of ecclesial communities or movements or associations as analogy are the Basilian, Benedictine and Franciscan families across the Church's boundaries. Surely this means that other Christian Churches, such as the Anglican Communion or the Methodist Church, are not being considered as potentially 'fitting in with' Catholicism like an order (although Catholic canon law can be ingenious at harmonising itself to the exceptional) – this would not be respectful of their distinctiveness and integrity. But can it mean that Catholics too have 'ecclesial bodies', which are 'not churches in the proper sense', but are able to live in complete communion with the Catholic Church around and through its structures and theirs, and indeed are integral to the Church, not accommodated anomalies – the same Benedictines and Franciscans, Mother Teresa's community, Caritas International, Focolare, Communion and Liberation?

Is Cardinal Kasper's *Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, characteristically, also serving as the germ of a *Handbook of Receptive Ecumenism*? – 'Your Church Order and ours may be different, but the universality of the Church which subsists in the Catholic Church shows that they may not be so incompatible, and there are patterns ancient and modern well known to us all that show how they can receive from each other in communion and be integral to one another. In the past, when 'ecclesial communities or movements' are mentioned in a Catholic context, it has been through, for example, papal addresses to gatherings of renewal movements at

Pentecost or to the 'new movements' within the Catholic Church, such as the Neo-Catechumenal Way. The 1993 Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism states,

Those involved in such groups, movements and associations should be imbued with a solid ecumenical spirit ... whether by seeking Catholic unity through dialogue and communion with similar movements ... - or the wider communion with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and with the movements and groups inspired by them.

Kasper is pressing this 'wider communion' – envisaging within the perspective of the one universal Church of Christ the ecclesial similarity of those communities which are not in communion with the see of Peter with those that are, envisaging what can be received from them, and indeed how they might be received of each other.

It is not so much a matter of reconciling differences as noticing how the Church's communion, as Catholics have implicitly understood, it does not exclude from within itself ecclesial communities which are 'not Churches in the proper sense', but which are genuine communities of the Church. Since they continually renew, invigorate and sustain the Catholic Church's life and mission as integral to it, how much less can it be true of ecclesial communities which are not in communion with it, but whose gifts and riches it desires to make its own – not by mere exchange but through complete participation?