

## THE SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

### ***Mystery of the Church* (Paul Haffner, Gracewing 2007)**

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Paul Haffner is a priest of the diocese of Portsmouth who teaches at the Regina Apostolorum University in Rome. His book is based on his lecture presentations of ecclesiology and is lucidly and readably written.

He covers the main themes that one would expect. Particularly good is chapter 7, 'The Church and Salvation', in which he explores the many nuances of interpretation that have been given to the classical formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside of the Church). He gives particular attention to the teaching of Pius XII on the way in which non-Catholics who 'sincerely desire to do the will of God' may be related to the Mystical Body, their relationship being 'a dynamic progress towards a divinely recognised end'.

This book is written from a relatively conservative standpoint. There is a tendency at certain points to slide from patristic formulae to their modern received interpretations within the Roman Catholic Church, without acknowledging that some Catholic scholars, let alone those in other Christian traditions, may have serious difficulties with them. Thus, for example, he moves from citing Ignatius' famous witness to the Church of Rome as 'the Church that presides in charity' to the Petrine office as understood today, without sufficiently acknowledging that Orthodox and others would not accept that Ignatius' acclamation can necessarily justify all the later development and current practice.

There is rather less discussion of the Church as communion than one would expect from a modern ecclesiological text from any Christian tradition. The emphasis on authority is as top down, rather than as enabling. I note the absence of any reference to the teaching of the late Jean-Marie Tillard on the duty of the bishop in

safeguarding the particular heritage and tradition of his local church and in listening to his faithful. On the other hand, there is a strong acknowledgement of the protection of legitimate diversity in unity as a fundamental task of the Roman Pontiff in the Church.

One notes the author's bold assertion (page 131) that local churches exist 'within and out of the Universal Church'. This explains how he understands the delicate balance expressed at Vatican II and where he stands in the famous Ratzinger-Kasper debate. This book is a very good guide as to a particular tradition within Roman Catholic ecclesiology, though there are many who would dispute that it is the only one.