

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

Method in Ecumenical Theology – The Lessons So Far

G. R. Evans, Cambridge University Press, 1996

A review by David Carter, June 1996

Gillian Evans' latest book is written with customary clarity and thoroughness. It completes a trilogy, dealing, respectively, with problems of authority, ecclesiology and method in ecumenical theology. This final volume deals particularly with the methodology and problems of the bilateral and multilateral international dialogues that have been so important in the last thirty years, though it also includes fascinating material on such early precursors of modern dialogue as the Bonn Reunion Conference of 1874-5 and the Malines Conversations.

Dr Evans is well aware of the disappointment of many that dialogue has, so far, led to so few concrete achievements in terms of full reconciliation. She reminds us that dialogue is bound to take time. She emphasises that it is hard work, demanding spiritually as well as academically:

'What is actually required is that ecumenists become multilingual, able to understand the language of the communions they come from and also the language of other communions, while building up a common language'.

She points to the need for ecumenists to admit fault and inadequacy within their own traditions, with all the huge implications that may have for their tradition. This is the hardest, but perhaps the most important lesson in the book.

Beyond this, she is aware of the vital necessity of 'reception' at every level, while recognising and documenting, from Anglican diocesan responses to ARCIC, the

difficulties this creates for local churches that may be short of those with the expertise or time to guide the process. She explores the problem of varying contextual expressions of the one Gospel, and their reception within other traditions.

Altogether, this is a valuable book, if priced at a level (£35) which will deter many would-be purchasers.