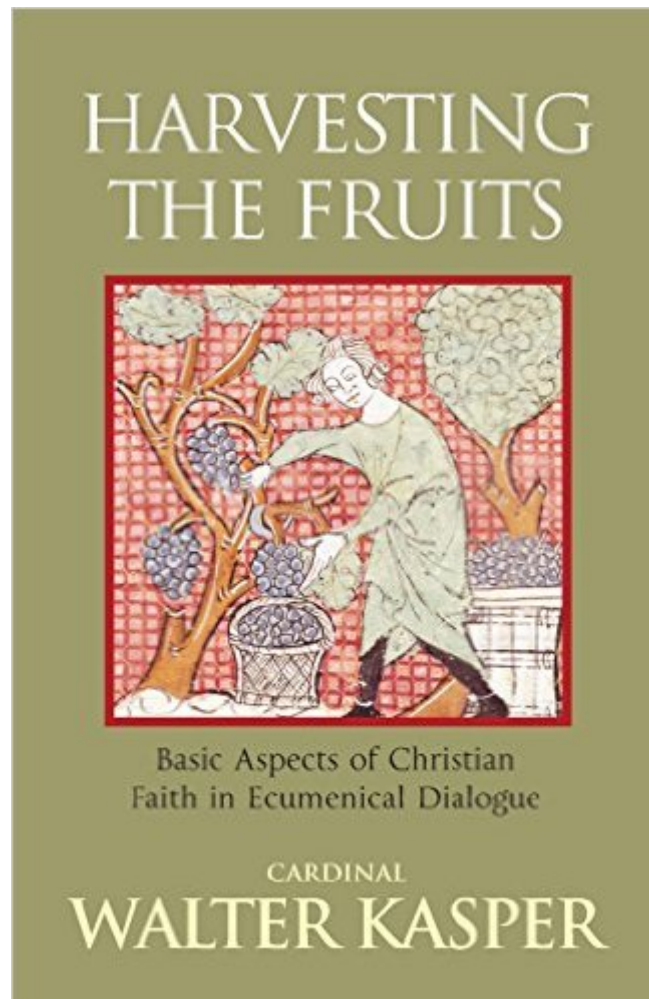


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Harvesting The Fruits: Basic Aspects Of Christian Faith In Ecumenical Dialogue



Synopsis

The Second Vatican Council declared the restoration of unity among Christians to be one of its principal concerns. Division among the Churches scandalises the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of The Gospel to every creature. A key figure to have worked tirelessly at these aims is Cardinal Walter Kasper, one of the most experienced, authoritative, and respected members of the Vatican hierarchy. Here Cardinal Kasper summarises the results of the Catholic Church's official dialogues with Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Methodist Churches over forty years, sets out a blueprint for 'consensus and convergence', and sets out a map for the way forward for ecumenism. From such a source, this document is therefore of crucial importance. The book focuses on the major issues in ecumenical dialogue - Jesus Christ, The Holy Trinity, Justification, The Church and The Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Cardinal Kasper explains the key issues at stake and offers signposts for the way forward so that the wish of Jesus may be fulfilled: That They May All Be One.

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"Harvesting the Fruits" references Galatians 6:9, "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up." As the title of the book and the featured scripture imply, this is not a season of frustration or discouragement in ecumenical relations, we are not in an ecumenical winter, but "rich fruits" already have been harvested from these and other dialogues. Writing about "ecumenical consensus, convergences and differences" over the biblical number of the past 40 years, Walter Cardinal Kasper brings us an easily readable, very useful

overview of formal, bilateral conversations between worldwide organizational expressions of Christianity: Lutherans and Catholics / Methodists and Catholics from 1967 through the publication date of 2009; Reformed and Catholics / Anglicans and Catholics from 1970 through 2009. These dialogues were grounded in "Catholic understanding of ecumenical dialogue" and ecumenical principles stated in Vatican 2 documents *Unitatis redintegration* and *Lumen gentium* and as Cardinal Kasper notes, they reflect multilateral interrelationships amongst the various expressions of Christianity that participated. The book is comfortable to hold, has an easily readable type face (style and point size) and includes a near-comprehensive list of abbreviations from each phase or period of each formal dialogue, one of several features that make it a wonderful reference book. The author attempts to outline where we are at this present time as well as where we in the churches can move ahead and should move ahead in the quest for common unity. Cardinal Kasper uses the traditional, 2-millennia-long theological "Father, Son, Spirit" theological vocabulary without equivocation or apology.

It's not everyone's cup of tea spending time reading ecumenical agreements between the churches of the world. So if for no other reason alone, Cardinal Walter Kasper's book is a God-send in that it gathers the ecumenical work between Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Methodists together in one even-handed and spirited volume. I cannot recommend this volume highly enough. It establishes that this season, which some have characterized as an ecumenical winter, is actually an ecumenical autumn, full of fruits ripe for harvesting. We have come a long way, and we have come this far because of the careful work of such theologians like Kasper who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, seek out our points of agreement rather than our reasons for difference. Ecumenicity is the exchange of gifts. Each communion brings its own gifts to the table. We are on a pilgrimage together towards unity. The book is structured as it should. After an initial chapter on fundamentals, Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity, in which Kasper illustrates the points of our greatest agreement, he then jumps to the stickiest subject of the Reformation era and afterwards, the doctrine of justification. In this chapter on salvation, justification, and sanctification, he illustrates how all our communions have come to a fundamental agreement on the very doctrine that first divided us. That is progress! Then he shifts to a very long chapter on the church. Here is the big issue for ecumenism today--topics like episcopacy, magisterium, relationship between tradition and Scripture, and so on. In another great summary document on ecumenism, the justly famous Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, it was the ministry that took up the most space and indicated the greatest struggle for unity.

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