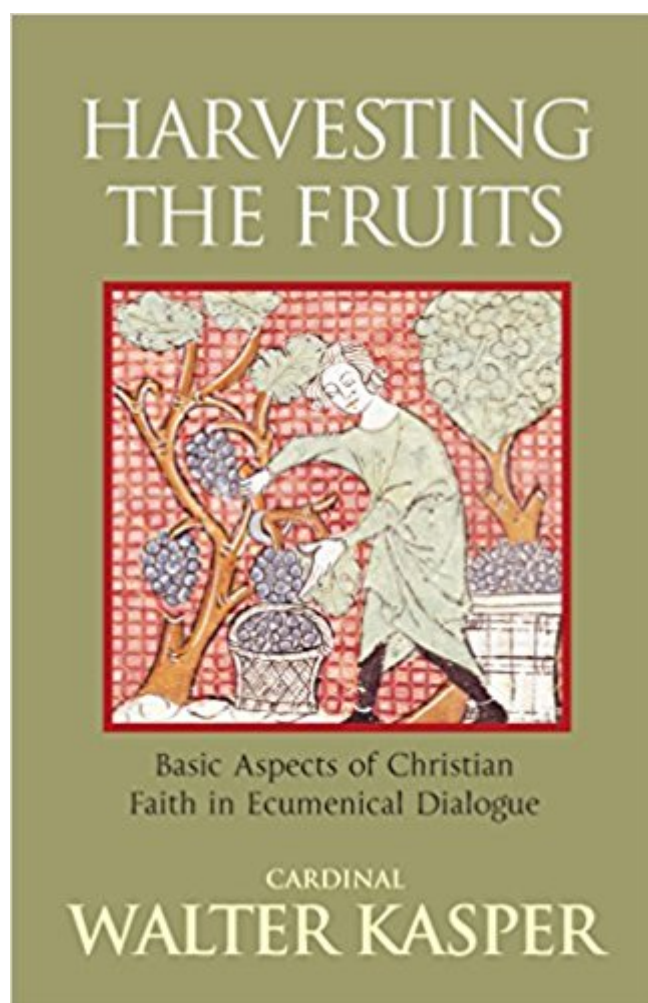


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Harvesting The Fruits: Basic Aspects Of Christian Faith In Ecumenical Dialogue



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.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic (December 14, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1441162720

ISBN-13: 978-1441162724

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #715,337 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #137 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Ecumenism](#) #9542 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership](#) #15767 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology](#)

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Cardinal Walter Kasper was President of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. A German by birth, he spends much time lecturing and giving conferences in the English-speaking world.

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. Kasper's book illustrates this as well, but does so winsomely, teasing out the theological points each of the bilateral dialogues as made on their pilgrimage together. A final chapter on the sacraments rounds out the book, and then some concluding preliminary conclusion. Kasper notes: 1. That we have a rich harvest in these ecumenical fields. There is much to learn, and much to celebrate, about who we are together. 2. We have a shared apostolic faith, especially in the creeds. 3. Together we are discerning a fresh and renewed understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. 4. We have fundamental agreement on the doctrine of justification. 5. We have a deepened understanding of the nature of the Church, and at least openness to looking at old conversations in a new light. 6. New approaches to the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. 7. A rediscovery of the centrality of liturgy. Additionally, we have some continuing questions about: 1. Fundamental hermeneutical problems. We interpret scripture in different ways. 2. Our symbolics sometimes gets in the way. 3. We continue to discuss the sacramentality (or not) of the church. 4. Although the Eucharist is a sacrament of unity, we do not yet share it fully in common. This is a profoundly hopeful and irenic book. I hope it is read widely.

A great synopsis of the doctrinal agreement (and disagreement) that has resulted from the ecumenical dialogues of the 20th century. Very much worth the read, if for no other reason, than to summarize 50 years of documented correspondence between historic Christian traditions.

"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. *Harvesting the Fruits* is logically organized into an introduction, four chapters and preliminary conclusions (at the end). Chapter subjects are: 1. Jesus Christ and the Trinity; 2. Salvation, justification, sanctification; 3. The Church - Nature and mission; Sources of authority; Ministry - "whole people of God" and "ordained

They worship the same God, but their divisions remain strangely strong. "Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue" is a discussion of the Catholic Church's communications with the Protestant churches to help fade the line between Catholicism and Protestant, a divide which at certain points have been stronger than the division of Christians and Judaism. These dialogues are spiritual enlightening and grant the reader for a unified future, "Harvesting the Future" is a worthwhile addition to any Christian studies collection.

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