

Christian disunity - the Archbishop's new approach

5. Rome's requirements

I am in the middle of trying to support my suggestion that Dr Williams's proposal is a good pragmatic solution to the present problem of disunity, and for that purpose examining the Roman Catholic position on 'pluriformity within unity'

How the Spirit works. In a further telling passage in his address to the conference on unity at St Albans Cardinal Kasper, said this: "The Holy Spirit as pioneer of the ecumenical movement calls us to reflect upon the nature of our journey, for the Spirit is dynamic, is life, is freedom. The Holy Spirit is always good for a surprise. In this perspective it is not possible to draw a blueprint of the future unity of the Church. The light the Spirit casts is similar to a lantern that lights our next step and that shines only as we go ahead." So far so good. But what comes next? "This does not mean that the Spirit engages us in a blind adventure. We are not left without a compass. The Spirit, as Saint Paul tells us, is one of order and not of confusion (cf. 1 Cor 14, 33). Theologians of all mainline Church have always been very cautious to distance themselves from the enthusiasts and their utopian and not seldom chaotic dreams. For serious theology, in accordance with the Bible, the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Rom 8,9; 1 Cor 12,3) and the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4,5)....."

I think I notice a faint distaste coming into Cardinal Kasper's prose at the mention of 'enthusiasts'. In the language of Rome an 'enthusiast' is often a euphemism for a follower of Jesus intoxicated with the Spirit, a phenomenon of which Rome broadly disapproves. Such followers have, understandably, always been perceived as dangerous by bishops entrusted with oversight by an authoritarian church, precisely because the Spirit 'is life, is freedom', (as Cardinal Kasper has reminded us in the previous paragraph) and difficult to control. The Roman Catholic church has always seen it as part of its mission to stamp out enthusiasm (labelling it 'heresy') as quickly as it can. Some years ago now Monsignor Ronald Knox wrote a book about early heresies entitled *Enthusiasm*, which illuminates the whole subject.

Cardinal Kasper reminds us that 'the Holy Spirit has always been good for a surprise', but the Roman Catholic hierarchy has, I suspect, seldom in its entire history welcomed one of its surprises. It prefers to get its revelations in an orderly way through the traditional channels. Note also that 'serious theology in accordance with the Bible' is theology on the basis of a Bible believed by the Roman Catholic church to be inerrant because God is its author, as to which see Part 12 of *Defending the church's truth claims* on this website.

The visible criteria for unity. The Cardinal continues with this key passage. "There are visible criteria for unity: unity in the same faith, unity in the same sacraments and unity in church ministry, i.e. the episcopal ministry, in apostolic succession....." The criteria stated by Cardinal Kasper quite simply rule us out. I have already drawn attention to the fact that when a Roman Catholic Cardinal talks about the 'faith' he is talking about the faith as set out in his church's *Catechism*, (including the Marian doctrines, as to which see Part 8 of *Defending the church's truth claims* on this website). From Cardinal Kasper's vantage point it is clear that we do not proclaim the true faith; we do not enjoy the right sort of ministry; and our sacrament of the Lord's supper is defective.

Cardinal Kasper continues: "Church unity is impossible with contradictions, and churches cannot or should not enter into conflicting agreements with different partners..... The church is the same in all centuries; today we cannot build a church in contradiction with her own tradition. We cannot be so proud as to believe that we have more Spirit than our forefathers, than all the Church Fathers and great theologians in the past. The Holy Spirit who was at work in the past does not now work in contradiction. The Spirit is faithful, recalling and preserving the truth". (my italics) This passage deserves to be looked at in detail.

No conflicting agreements on the way to unity. The suggestion, made at a conference on unity sponsored by the Church of England, that churches should be careful not to enter into conflicting agreements with other churches if they wish to walk one day with Rome, is unlikely to be lost on the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England. It can only make their opposition to any agreement with the likes of the URC more intransigent.

Comment on 'contradictions' etc. The other key words in this passage are, as I understand Cardinal Kasper, 'impossible', 'contradictions', 'same', 'her tradition', 'proud', 'all' and 'more Spirit'.

It is 'impossible' to join with Rome without accepting the Roman package of 'the faith' and committing ourselves to promulgate that Faith as the good news to all the world.

A 'contradiction' in the language of Cardinal Kasper is something which is inconsistent with Roman Catholic tradition.

It is mere assertion to say that the church is the same in all centuries. It purports to be a statement about history; but there is not a scrap of evidence to support the assertion. As a statement about history it is simply not true. This false statement is used to introduce and give spurious weight to a restatement of the age-old reliance of the Roman Catholic Church on 'tradition' as a curb on unruly manifestations of the Spirit.

The words 'her tradition' in their context in St Albans, as always with references to 'tradition' in Roman Catholic discourse, mean the Apostolic Tradition of the Roman Catholic church and no other. It is no doubt true to say of 'we' (meaning the Roman

Catholic church) that 'we can not build a church in contradiction with her own tradition', for with the brush of tradition that church has painted itself into a corner. But it is simply untrue (and a denial of the 'freedom' of the 'dynamic' Spirit) to proclaim that it is not open to any other church to listen to any urging which that church may understand itself to hear from the Spirit to build something new and 'contradictory'.

And then we have 'proud'. Think of the context in which these words were spoken. The Cardinal is not talking to his own, he is talking to persons from other traditions. Here, as in the past, the sin of pride is mentioned; perhaps on this occasion in order to make us feel guilty and suppress any questioning of the official Roman Catholic view?

'All' the Church Fathers? As though Chrysostom had never disagreed with Augustine about the interpretation of the story of the Garden of Eden; as though the Church had never changed its mind and dumped one of them. 'All' the great theologians in the past? as though they had, every one of them, had precisely the same vision - Tom Aquinas, Padraig, Bonaventura, Duns the Scot? The word 'all' as used here by the cardinal carries a *suggestio falsi* - a false suggestion of a unity in the past which did not exist.

'More Spirit'? meaning 'anything your community, or mine, suspects may be guidance from the Spirit, but which cannot be squared with the tradition of the Roman Catholic church'.

The end of the road to visible organic unity. Though difficult to hear over the loudspeaker system in St Alban's cathedral, Cardinal Kasper came across as a profound Christian and a delightful man - he was off to attend a healing service in London next day. The tone of his address was amiable; but when one reads it on the net and has a chance to think about it, there can be no doubt at all as to how any visibly organically united church which included Roman Catholics would represent God and Jesus to the world. They would be represented in the terms mentioned in the Roman Catholic *Catechism* (see Part 8 of *Defending the church's truth claims* on this website). Anything 'contradictory' of this vision would not, when it came to the crunch, be granted 'validity' by Rome.

As Rome believes that in the Apostolic Tradition (which it preserves) God has in effect underwritten the faith declared by Rome, it is natural for Rome to think of unity as a welcome return of lost sheep to the doctrinal fold.

Will Rome change? As it seems to me, many people hope impossible things of the next pope. As Rome believes that the entirety of its dogmatic beliefs are derived from the Apostolic Tradition (as to which see Parts 11 and 12 of *Defending the church's truth claims* on this website), it is not reasonable to suppose that a future pope, however 'liberal' and conciliatory, will repent of the new doctrines relating to Mary the mother of Jesus adopted in the last 150 years, abjure an immaculate conception, an assumption, a co-redeemer, and the filioque (which after 550 years still formally divides Roman Catholics from the Orthodox; (Council of Florence

1438; *Catechism* para. 246, though they are working on it)), and then renounce infallibility (and do that last). Down the centuries Rome has had some experience of schism, but the Vatican does not do repentance; never has done. If the Curia were ever to investigate the possibility, it may be predicted with some confidence that it would find that repentance was 'contradictory' to the Apostolic Tradition - notwithstanding 'Mark' 14.72 and parallels.

Future negotiations for organic unity. 'While at HQ in Rome work proceeds as usual without regard to the collateral damage inflicted on critical persons inside and unbelievers outside church doors, on the Protestant periphery pragmatic talks will (unless someone stops them) rumble on, the participants apparently unaware that a little way further down the way of negotiation they will meet a rich, powerful, numerically significant, earthly institution with a compelling prospectus (2865 technical paragraphs of it). Far from telling those outside the church gates that on a number of very important matters the pope is, with all due respect, mistaken, Protestant leaders in their several institutions have hitherto been acting (and talking at length) as though they wish one day to unite with him. If you believe that Christ prayed for the visible organic unity of Christian church institutions, the unpalatable nature of the likely result is neither here nor there, the medicine has to be swallowed because God has prescribed it. But not everybody believes with all their heart and mind that God did in fact prescribe it.

Cardinal Kasper has made it absolutely clear that for the United Reformed Church to go on with negotiations for visible organic unity is a complete waste of time - we shall never get there just as we are. It is perhaps worth emphasising that we in the United Reformed Church can creep into the Christian fold with the Roman Catholic church at the last great visible organic consummation only if we have in the meantime (in the course of the most subtle of all possible subtle negotiations) turned our coats completely and appear at the gate as tame wolves in some other sheep's clothing.

That brings us to the question - is the price of unity by negotiation for merger too high?

The Church of England is in a different position from us; it can at least mount a claim that its clergy are within the Apostolic succession; but trans-substantiation is always going to be a difficulty. Given the position of Rome, of which Dr Williams is clearly fully aware, Dr Williams's present suggestion seems to me to be a thoroughly pragmatic solution to the problem of disunity for both our churches.

In Part 6, is the price too high?