Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood (eds)


As befits a collection of essays honoring the theological work Carl Braaten, the contributors to this volume tackle a variety of enduring and perhaps intractable issues in ecclesiology, those subjects that either hinder or might help the advancement of an ecumenism that will not be fulfilled until there is visible unity among the churches, the unity that resides with Christ alone. Some of these essays visit past ecumenical struggles (not achieving unity) or ecclesial failures (the creation of new disunities), while other essays engage theological topics that could provoke and progress the ecumenical trajectory of visible unity, or at least a mutually accountable ecclesial existence. Like similar volumes, there are essays that deal directly with the contribution of Braaten and essays that can be viewed more in the ‘spirit’ of his work. Of course, when speaking of the contribution of Braaten, one is not just referring to books or articles in learned journals, but to editorials, publishing journals, directing the Center of Catholic and Evangelical Theology (along with Robert Jenson), and the organizing of several conferences.

One of the pervasive themes of this collection is an appraisal of communion ecclesiology and its dependence on the understanding and application of the Pauline concept of *koinonia*. In ‘The Ecclesial Meaning of the Eucharist’, Susan K. Wood rehearses the developed understanding of the church as a eucharistic reality. As is customary for this account, she references Henri de Lubac’s study of the swapping of the terms ‘true Body’ and ‘mystical Body’ between the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist and the Church. With the controversy surrounding Berengar’s reflection on Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in the eleventh century, the ‘true Body’ of Christ was located within the Eucharist, and the church is now deemed the mystical Body. Again, employing de Lubac’s phrase, ‘The Eucharist makes the Church’, we have moved into a situation whereby the Church as itself the Body of Christ is not fully appreciated. If it were, then we would draw a greater sense of accountability between the risen Body, the eucharistic Body, and the ecclesial Body. Simply put, a divided church is a divided Body of Christ. Thus, to re-inhabit this Body in its fullest and faithful ecclesial existence is the ecumenical agenda. What this looks like in reality brings us to communion ecclesiology, to the *koinonia* among all who share Christ’s body in baptism and Eucharist. In this regard, Robert Jenson reprises his emphasis on the Church as the Body of Christ, but with the critical distinction that exists between the historical/risen Body and the ecclesial Body, in his essay ‘The Bride of Christ’.
The Church is always called into union with Christ, and thereby to exist as this unity.

However, as some of the contributors indicate, appeals to communion ecclesiology, or invoking the mantra of koinonia, will not suffice to bring about the undivided Church constituted by the undivided Christ. We need to face our divisions in view of the saving and reconciling work of Christ effected on the cross of Calvary, realizing our at-one-ment with God and potentially with each other. In his essay, ‘The Cross-Shaped Church: A Pauline Amendment to the Ecclesiology of Koinonia’, Joseph L. Mangina makes this case. There is no communion without going through the cross of Christ to get there. He writes, ‘If the ecclesiology of koinonia has generally neglected the church’s cross-shattered character, this does not mean the latter has been left without witnesses’ (p. 80). One of these witnesses involved the organizing and visionary leadership of Braaten, the gathering of theologians that produced the document In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity (2003). A paraphrase of what Mangina’s review of this document and its agenda would be is that the divided churches must die with Christ so that they might be united in the one risen Christ. We are called to repent of our efforts to distinguish our ecclesial selves from each other to the obstruction of a common life in Christ. This penitential invocation for the Church’s future is noted as well in John Paul II’s encyclical Ut Unum Sint (1995) and the proposed Anglican Covenant drafted in wake of the stresses brought about on the Anglican Communion in wake of decisions made by the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada. (Speaking as an Anglican, and as one who supports the adopting of this covenant, its prospects are now dismal. The Anglican Communion as such does not exist anymore, which means that a theology of the cross for any viable and authentic communion is imperative.) It is Gabriel Frackre’s argument that communion of churches, genuine ecumenism, will only be advanced by getting our theology of the cross straight, by a mutually dependent constellation of the churches’ various doctrinal emphases on the work of Christ, the existence of perspectives on Christ’s reconciling work, on the atonement. Here, Frackre taps into the work of Braaten, that is, we cannot go where we are called to go as the Church without the hard work of theology on the basics of the Christian faith. He calls for a doctrine of atonement that represents a continuum of Christ’s work from incarnation, through ministry and crucifixion, to resurrection. That is, with a fuller doctrine of the atonement in place, there is a theological place for the churches to dwell together. Similarly, Leopoldo A. Sanchez M. explores the possibilities for ecumenism that a robust Pneumatological Christology would provide.