

Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums—Schlüssel christlichen Lebens. By Walter Kardinal Kasper. Freiburg: Herder, 2012. Pp. 252. €22.

It is rare indeed that a reigning pope singles out for commendation a recent theological work. However, on March 17, 2013, shortly after his election as bishop of Rome, following the Sunday recitation of the Angelus from the Vatican portico, Pope Francis cited this volume of Cardinal Kasper's as an inspiring work by a superb theologian. Stunning praise that came as the cardinal celebrated his 80th birthday.

Indeed, this impressive book on the concept of mercy as the fundamental concept of the gospel and the key to Christian living complements the many volumes on ecumenism written by the former professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen and the recent prefect of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This study is not a simple lexicographical analysis of a single biblical term *hesed* or *eleos* along the lines of Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*; rather, it is a comprehensive overview of the teaching of Jesus woven into a doctrinal synthesis.

K. achieves this synthesis within the span of nine chapters. The introductory chapter notes how contemporary teaching aims at restoring the importance of divine mercy after an extended period when it was often overlooked or forgotten. Chapter 2 offers a brief account of similar concepts in ancient and modern philosophy, as well as in other world religions sometimes expressed in terms of the Golden Rule. Chapter 3 explains how mercy is understood in the Hebrew Bible. The following chapter summarizes the notion of mercy as reflected in the preaching of Jesus. Chapter 5, the heart of the book, presents a systematic reflection on the interrelationship between mercy and other Christian concepts such as grace, forgiveness, and divinization. This discussion continues in chapter 6, which compares mercy to virtues such as charity, reconciliation, love of neighbor, and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Chapter 7, focusing on the life of the Catholic Church, uses the presence of mercy as a measuring rod for the sanctity of the community. Mercy, it is claimed, is a virtue that should be apparent even in the application of the Code of Canon Law. Chapter 8 relates the practice of mercy toward one's neighbor in regard to the church's teaching on social justice. The concluding chapter 9 contextualizes the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title "Mother of Mercy," a title that appears in the hymn *Salve Regina* and in various Byzantine liturgical chants.

In chapter 5 K. shows how various Church Fathers such as Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Augustine, and Bonaventure regarded the biblical quality of mercy as the fundamental characteristic of God's being. (Given that conviction, I find it puzzling that so many church writers have been convinced that more souls inhabit hell than heaven.) Citing numerous New Testament passages, K. argues that mercy can also be considered as a kind of mirror reflecting the inner life of the Trinity. In this context, he then explores the implications of universal salvation as a distinct possibility, if not necessarily a provable reality, *Heilsmöglichkeit* vs. *Heilswirklichkeit* (103). In his discussion of *apokatastasis*, K. briefly comments on the views of Schleiermacher,

Troeltsch, Barth, Metz, and Balthasar. This chapter also contains some profound insights into devotion to the Sacred Heart as well as into our understanding of God's mercy in a post-Auschwitz context.

Several possible topics remain undeveloped such as the need for ecclesial conversion after sins and scandals. Also absent is discussion of the widespread decline of the sacrament of reconciliation, the blurring of the difference between mortal and venial sins, and the practice of prayer for the souls in purgatory.

An English translation is in production. Those interested in reeditions of K.'s books will find the website www.kardinal-kasper-stiftung.de helpful.

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The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions. By Gerald O'Collins, S.J. Oxford: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. xi + 214. \$45.

Few scholars are better positioned than Gerald O'Collins to clarify the most recent debates in the Catholic Church about interreligious dialogue. Professor emeritus of the Gregorian University in Rome where he taught for more than 30 years, and now adjunct professor at the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, and Honorary Research Fellow of MCD University of Divinity, O'C. accompanied the late Jacques Dupuis during his difficult conversations with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Provoked by Dupuis's 1997 book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, these conversations, beginning in the spring of 1998 and ending with a "notification" published by the CDF in January 2001, focused on several questions. The fundamental issue was, and remains, whether, given the trajectory established by Vatican II's teachings on other religions, it follows that those religions offer their adherents elements of divinely revealed truths that they can access through faith? To pose the question in another way, How can Christians affirm their faith in Jesus Christ as the one redeemer of all of humanity and at the same time recognize the Holy Spirit at work in the world's other religions and cultures?

While the focus on Dupuis's argument and the CDF's response constitute only the penultimate chapter in this volume, all the other chapters provide both a historical and theological basis for O'C.'s defense of Dupuis's argument, first laid out at length in his 1997 book. Four years later, Dupuis published a shorter, more accessible book, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (ET 2002). There he made important clarifications—too often overlooked by his critics—of such terms as "inclusive pluralism," "asymmetrical" and "complementarity"; and of the use of "the Word as such" and "the Word incarnate" instead of "Logos *asarkos*" and "Logos *ensarkos*." While the CDF's notification stated that Dupuis's 1997 book "contained notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions," it did not require Dupuis to change anything