Kinnamon, M & Cope B E 1997 — The ecumenical movement. An anthology of key texts and voices


Reviewer: Dr Gafie van Wyk

It is impossible to review critically each of the many ‘texts and voices’ collected in this book in this short space, but perhaps a few words about the idea, approach and intentions of the editors are necessary. The book is primary designed as a resource for courses in ecumenism in theological seminaries and faculties of religion, but it can also serve as a useful reference guide for those engaged in various forms of ecumenical activity.

More than 150 documents from various backgrounds and situations are collected in this book. The documents are divided thematically into ten chapters (with an appendix), each beginning with an introduction on how the issues and themes treated in that particular chapter have developed in the history of ecumenical thought. The ten chapters in the book are:

* The ecumenical vision: Towards an integration of unity, service, mission and renewal.
* The unity of the church: Towards a common definition.
* Agreement on issues that divide the church: Towards fuller communion in Christ.
* Issues that divide both church and world: Towards a renewed and reconciled community.
* Ecumenical social thought: Towards solidarity in humanity’s struggles.
* Mission and evangelism: Towards a common witness throughout the earth.
* Dialogue with people of other faiths: Towards better understanding of our neighbours.
* Marks of ecumenical community: Towards a fellowship of sharing, learning and participation.
* Councils of churches: Towards an understanding of their nature and purpose.
* Prayer and worship: Towards conversion of the heart.
* (Appendix) Regional and local voices.

The book also has a general introduction, a chronological listing of the various documents, a selected bibliography, an index of Scripture references and an index of subjects.

The editors of the book distinguish four priorities in the ecumenical movement: service, fellowship, witness and renewal. They are convinced that most theological libraries include anthologies dealing with one or more of the mentioned priorities, but that, until now, no anthology has attempted to bring together key statements from the ecumenical movement as a whole. The priorities mentioned here are often seen by people as being competitive rather than complementary. The conviction of the editors, however, is that there exists an ecumenical vision which powerfully integrates unity, service, mission and renewal. This conviction is the unifying element of the book.

‘What should be included in a course on ecumenism? What should one have read before starting work with a council or other ecumenical ministry? This book is intended as an answer to such ques-
tions’. The most important shorter ecumenical texts are brought together in this publication. This book will be a useful tool for theological faculties as well as ecumenical councils of churches. This is the kind of book one would expect to find in any ecumenical library and considering its low price, it is also great value for money — even for the individual.

Sauter, G 1995 — The question of meaning: A theological and philosophical orientation


Reviewer: Dr Gafie van Wyk

The question of meaning was for a long time the main topic of discussion in theology and philosophy. There was even a time when it ranked as the decisive religious question not only in Christian theology but also in the pastoral care of the sick, suffering and dying. ‘But’ says Sauter ‘the longer [I consider this] the more I become convinced that not by a long way does this question bring new life to the question of God, as for many years it was expected to do. I have been forced to conclude that it is really a seeking of idols’. What is the force behind this conclusion? To be able to demonstrate his point of view the author needs to ask what the question of meaning itself means. Sauter probes beyond the quest for meaning and questions whether the modern quest for meaning is in fact meaningful or whether it weakens our perceptions of everyday reality and so confuses our understanding of reality. His conclusions lead him to a new quest. How can one discover sense while encountering a contingent reality?

The German word ‘Sinn’ means both meaning and sense. Sauter reevaluates the differences and the connections between meaning and sense. He argues that as the word ‘sense’ seems to find a home in linguistic philosophy, it undergoes a decisive change in its own field of meaning and experiences incalculable expansion. Sense is first the relation of an action or statement to what is intended. We ask what is the point of life, action, or speech. ‘Sense’ has become the substance of a text or statement. The term then comes to mean the same as ‘purpose’ and ‘value’. The inquiring mind tries to find the ultimate meaning from which all that is penultimate receives its relative value. Finally the term indicates that the detail can receive its meaning only from the whole and can thus be posited only in the light of the whole. The term is now a category of reality. To ask about sense or meaning is no less than to ask about what is real. The result of this development is that absolute meaning is needed if we are to be able to live. This is what it now means to ask about meaning. In this way the search for meaning becomes the quest for God, for God is the name we give for that entity that gives meaning to our world. This expansion of the question of meaning, however, leads to a progressive reduction of the perception of what it is that gives form to live. Perception is no longer orientation, because it only involves taking action to arrange and relate things.

Sauter is convinced that the question of meaning in the narrower sense is posed when something seems to be unintelligible, unrelated or without foundation and one seeks to justify what happens and the