

The Roots, Range and Reach of Receptive Ecumenism

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Introduction: what is Receptive Ecumenism?

As is independently mentioned in a few of the other essays in this volume, Receptive Ecumenism represents a fresh approach to the contemporary ecumenical task. It seeks to serve the traditional Faith and Order concern to work for the structural and sacramental unity of the churches whilst also seeking to move beyond the impasse and energy-drain that much Faith and Order style ecumenism has suffered over the past decade or so when compared with the remarkable achievements of the latter part of the twentieth century. Although having only come to named articulation and full development in recent years through a series of initiatives running out of Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies,¹ Receptive Ecumenism can be viewed as bringing to the fore certain background values and assumed dispositions that have always been quietly recognised as being essential to good ecumenical work.² It operates by bringing these background values and dispositions to the fore and giving them explicit shaping influence and strategic priority as no longer just ancillary to the ecumenical agenda but as actually constituting its core contemporary task and challenge.

At the heart of Receptive Ecumenism is the conviction that further substantial progress is indeed possible on the way towards full structural and sacramental unity but only if a fundamental, counter-instinctual move is made away from denominational traditions wishing that others could be more like themselves to instead each asking what they can and must learn, with dynamic integrity, from their respective others. Moreover, this required receptive ecclesial learning is envisaged as operating not only in relation to such things as hymnody, spirituality, and devotional practices but as extending to doctrinal self-understanding and, even more so, respective structural and organisational-cultural realities.

There have thus far been four key strands to the Durham Receptive Ecumenism projects. Where the first two focussed in international research conferences concerned to articulate and scrutinise the basic idea and to test it out, first in relation to Roman Catholicism³ and then in relation to as many other traditions as possible,⁴ the third has taken

¹ See Paul D. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, (Oxford: OUP, 2008), particularly Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda', pp. 5-25; and Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs', *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008), 30-45; and *id.*, 'ARCIC III: Recognising the Need for an Ecumenical Gear-Change', *One in Christ*, 45 (2011), 200-211. Also in preparation is Murray & Marcus J. Pound (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to Be Church Together*, deriving from the 2nd Receptive Ecumenism International Conference in January 2009 at Ushaw College, Durham.

² On something of the forerunners to Receptive Ecumenism, see Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning', *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14; and *id.*, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning', *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 38-41; also *id.*, 'Expanding Catholicity through Ecumenicity in the Work of Yves Congar: *Ressourcement*, Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Reform', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 13 (2011), 272-302.

³ See Murray (ed.). *op. cit.*

a directly practical turn, concerned to test the relevance and viability of Receptive Ecumenism on the ground in the local church. This has been done in collaboration with nine of the major denominational groupings in the North East of England.⁵ The fourth strand, to be hosted by Fairfield University in Connecticut, USA, will gather together the various individuals, groups and organisations throughout the world that have been putting Receptive Ecumenism to work in their own respective contexts and spheres of responsibility.⁶

The specific invitation in relation to the present essay was less to do with rehearsing the theological rationale for Receptive Ecumenism (for this, see the various essays identified in n.1 earlier) and more to do with our being asked to reflect more personally on the roots and reach of Receptive Ecumenism and the various influences that have shaped it. It is, of course, very difficult to trace such things adequately. Autobiographical reflection is notoriously partial and as reconstructed from hindsight. With these caveats in mind, the reflections that follow fall into three sections: 1) *the roots of Receptive Ecumenism*; 2) *the guiding principles and theological range of Receptive Ecumenism*; and 3) *the reach and potential of Receptive Ecumenism*.

1. The roots of Receptive Ecumenism

In different ways we each grew up deeply marked by Catholic faith and practice, alive to it as a privileged place and means of encounter with grace, holiness, and the forgiving, strengthening presence of God in Christ and the Spirit in a way that has sustained an adult lifetime of committed participation. Equally, we each arrived at adult Catholic faith well aware of various ways in which Catholic life can seem thwarted and even resistant in some respects to engaging vital questions about its own growth and renewal. This, of course, is a dissonance, that runs through each of us personally every bit as and considerably more sharply than it runs through Catholic life and organisation in their more institutional forms. Accepting that and genuinely so, for each of us at different points the more institutional, organisational and cultural forms of this ecclesial dissonance – between calling and deep integrity on the one hand and lived response and integrity on the other – has led at times to periods of ecclesial frustration and even of longing desire for what variously appears differently attractive and of God-given grace in other Christian traditions. The live option has ultimately, however, never been to leave Catholicism for ecclesial residency elsewhere in the household of faith but rather to desire Catholicism's own further deepening, enriching, freeing and fulfilling and to lament its falling short, as also our own.

At its core here is a continuing sense of being called to be Catholic; of being indelibly shaped by Catholic sensibilities and understanding; of “at-homeness” and a continuing appreciation for Catholicism's distinctive gifts. Andrea once summed this up with the pithy

⁴ A related volume is in preparation: Paul D. Murray & Marcus J Pound (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to Be Church Together*.

⁵ This phase of the work will issue in a range of publications, including a further major volume: Paul D. Murray & Marcus J. Pound (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: An Exercise in Transformative Practical Ecclesiology*.

⁶ It is anticipated that this will issue in a fourth major volume: Paul D. Murray, Marcus J. Pound and Paul Lakeland (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism in International Perspective: Contextual Ecumenical Learning*.

comment: ‘Leaving Catholicism would be like divorcing your parents.’ The most important things in life are generally given happenings rather than chosen actions – or at least given happenings before they become chosen actions – starting with life itself, about which we are all singularly unconsulted. As what we have written here suggests, Catholicism for each of us is basically one of these fundamental givens. It is through Catholicism that we each came to Christian life and it is within the context of Catholicism, duly supported through much ecumenical learning, that we have grown in Christian life. Further, this long habitation and familial love goes beyond mere cultural habituation and accidental givenness and manifests in an appreciation for some of Catholicism’s distinctive gifts as being essential for the good of the whole church. Equally, this long habituation and familial love supports also the recognition that these very gifts are at once sites of difficulty as well as grace; gifts that need liberating and re-performing if their God-given quality is to be released and realised in a manner attractive to the other Christian traditions – as Pope John Paul II recognised most remarkably in relation to the Papacy itself in his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

In many respects this is already to have identified the core principle at the heart of Receptive Ecumenism and to have situated it within our own faith stories. This is not yet, however, to have identified the various factors and influences that served to bring it to explicit voice. Some of these are now traced briefly here.

For Paul a profoundly shaping experience over an extended period was that of receiving his initial introduction to and much of his subsequent formal training in theology at the hands of great Protestant, particularly Anglican, teachers: most notably Stephen Sykes, Ann Loades, Dan Hardy (all at Durham) and later David Ford (at Cambridge). In addition to opening up an appreciation both for the sheer richness of the Christian tradition in all its depth and breadth and for the vital role that critical-constructive theological conversation has to play in serving the health of the churches, they each had the tremendous generosity of spirit to encourage their students to go more deeply into their own respective traditions and to take ownership of same rather than to promote an assumed commonality. To put it in the later terms of Receptive Ecumenism, their shared commitment was that ecumenical theological learning should be about the enrichment rather than diminishment of identity. This is a great gift to bestow: to help another become him/herself in all his/her difference from you.

This basic value received more explicit formal stimulus during the years spent pursuing doctoral studies with David Ford at Cambridge and the opportunity this presented to engage closely the kind of approach to theology that he and others were pursuing. This version of ‘post-liberalism’ characteristically combined a concern to take the particularity of Christian practice and understanding seriously with due recognition of the need always to hold such particularity open to appropriate expansive scrutiny and potential revision.⁷ In David’s own work the clearest practical expression of this is in the practice of Scriptural Reasoning that he was developing during this period in the context of interfaith encounter and interfaith theological reasoning in collaboration with Dan Hardy, Peter Ochs and Aref Nayad. In this regard, Dan Hardy notably describes Scriptural Reasoning as ‘one way of going deeper simultaneously into one’s own faith and into the faith of others through study

⁷ See Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), particularly pp. 131-61 & 196-7.

and mutual mentoring'.⁸ In many respects Receptive Ecumenism can be viewed as seeking to do something directly analogous in the intra-Christian context.

At a more affective level, another key influence for both of us was the experience of sharing in a series of Ignatian-inspired Lenten retreats in daily life organised for interested staff and students of Newman College, Birmingham (where we were each then Senior Lecturers) by Barbara Stafford and Avril O'Regan of the Sisters of La Retraite. At the heart of all such Ignatian-style prayer, reflection and direction is a call to personal conversion but understood explicitly as the call to greater life, interior freedom and flourishing. With this, the offered path to such increased interior freedom is through bringing the movements of one's imagination and the desires of one's heart into clearer view (through imaginative prayer in relation to given texts of Scripture and subsequent heart-to-heart conversation with one's prayer guide) and the discerning of these movements in terms of what binds and what frees relative to the movements of the Holy Spirit who is understood as leading from frustration and confusion ('desolation') into life and peace ('consolation'). There is a direct link between the emphasis placed in Receptive Ecumenism on continuing conversion – both personal and institutional – as a principle of life rather than diminishment and our involvement in these guided prayers experiences and the tangible benefits they brought, as there is also in relation to the place accorded within Receptive Ecumenism to the imaginative, the creative, the 'dreaming of dreams' and their critical testing and scrutinising.⁹

Somewhat later, following a decisive relocation from Birmingham to Ushaw College, the then Catholic seminary for the North of England and the Diocese of Shrewsbury, other factors that would subsequently play a role in shaping the Receptive Ecumenism projects, particularly the regional comparative project, included an eighteen month period that Andrea spent conducting research for the Bishops' Conference project on Evangelisation in England and Wales.¹⁰ This served to connect Andrea's expertise in contextual social-scientific analysis with the empirical life of the church in a more formal capacity than hitherto and to confirm for her the pastoral and ecclesial value of such studies. Throughout this period also Andrea was serving as a Pastoral Tutor at St John's College, Durham, an independent Anglican College within the University, wherein she both enjoyed the warm fellowship and lively worship of an evangelical community and lived the pain each week of not being able to share fully in the community Eucharist.

For Paul's part, of immense significance during these years was the experience as the new boy on the staff of being given the responsibility to act as the Ushaw staff-member on a compulsory double module on Church and Ministry in an Ecumenical Context that was co-taught and co-studied in collaboration with staff and students of Cranmer Hall and the

⁸ Daniel W. Hardy, 'Acceptance Speech on the Occasion of Being Awarded an Honorary DD by General Theological Seminary, New York. Delivered in *Absentia* by Deborah Hardy Ford' (18th October 2007), in Daniel W. Hardy, with Deborah Hardy Ford, Peter Ochs and David F. Ford, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church*, (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 10-13 (p. 12). For further on SR, see David F. Ford and Chad Pecknold (eds.), *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 185-207; also <http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/index.php>; <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/ssr>; <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org>; <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum>.

⁹ See Murray, 'Preface', in Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, *op. cit.*, ix-xv (xi-xv).

¹⁰ See Philip Knights & Andrea L. Murray, *Evangelisation in England and Wales: a report to the Catholic bishops*, (London: Catholic Communications Service, 2002).

Wesley Study Centre, the Anglican and Methodist training institutions situated within St John's College. Few if any of the students were particularly positively disposed to the module. Quite apart from its being compulsory, which tends to bring out the adolescent in students, the prevalent attitude – amongst some staff also – was that the formal ecumenical project had basically arrived at an irresolvable dead-end: consequently, beyond praying together, being nice to each other and generally trying to do what we can together, the common assumption was that formal ecumenism simply does not justify the required expenditure of time and energy. Amongst the Catholics the tendency was to view the “others” as just not being prepared to get sufficiently serious about the importance of ecclesial unity and what it entails. In contrast, for the Anglicans and Methodists the tendency was to regard Catholics as simply *being* the problem on account of Catholic refusal to embrace other Christians into full communion in the face of continuing structural and institutional differences.

For all this, however, and for all the real challenges that teaching on the module entailed, not least not having taught either ecclesiology or ecumenism before, Paul found that the regular experience of having to prepare materials relating to difficult issues in one's own tradition for use in an ecumenical context served to release something in him. As with Andrea's experience more broadly in St John's, this involvement, surpassing all expectations, became a privileged opportunity to ask how the experience, practice and understanding of other traditions can speak into Catholicism's own experience and so help address the specific problems and difficulties that can be found there. With that, the basic core principle of Receptive Ecumenism was born if not yet either precisely articulated or named. Beyond this, the continuing preparation for the module provided ample further opportunity to come to appreciate just how well this basic principle coheres both with the teaching of Vatican II on ecumenism (most notably in the Declaration on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*) and with Pope John Paul II's remarkable encyclical, already referred to earlier, *Ut Unum Sint*. For each of us, then, our respective involvements with the communities of St John's College had something of the feel of a graced happening that was expanding us affectively, intellectually and ecclesially in ways pregnant with possibilities and implications that were as yet unclear.

Reinforcing this sense was another related happening about this time in the shape of Paul being invited by Bishop Ambrose Griffiths (RIP) to share in the work of the Methodist-Roman Catholic Committee of Great Britain. Again somewhat contrary to expectations, there was a similar experience of the work of the Committee going considerably beyond each party simply explaining itself to the other and allowing rather for each to be genuinely challenged and enriched by the other.¹¹ The idea of a research project in transformative Catholic ecclesiology in ecumenical perspective was beginning now to emerge clearly into view.

The final decisive event, following after Paul had moved to a post within Durham's Department of Theology and Religion, was the good fortune to be able to participate in a remarkable day conference in the nave of St Alban's Cathedral in early summer 2003 at which Archbishop Rowan Williams and His Eminence Cardinal Kasper each expounded

¹¹ Significantly, more so than any of the other international bilateral dialogue processes – even ARCIC II's identification of outstanding issues for one side with the other at the end of *The Gift of Authority* – the then most recent document emerging from the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Grace Given You in Christ*, had already moved very close to asking what each could fruitfully learn from the other.

upon their shared vision of Spiritual Ecumenism.¹² Spiritual Ecumenism articulated precisely the vision of receptive ecumenical hospitality and fruitfulness that we had each been experiencing and towards which Paul had been moving in his thinking. The one caveat was that Spiritual Ecumenism could potentially be heard as speaking of the need for receptive learning purely at the level of one's personal spirituality or, if extended to the collective level at all, to the need for such learning merely in relation to respective spiritual and liturgical traditions. If so, this would be to leave out of account the crucial need also for deep structural, institutional learning from each other in relation to such things as respective processes and structures of decision-making.

The point is that without such institutional learning it is unlikely to be possible either to find a means of fruitfully addressing the various respective difficulties within each tradition or for any real further ecumenical progress to be possible. Spiritual Ecumenism, whilst absolutely right in its basic orientation, appeared to be in need of being taken forwards in a more obviously institutional direction. In order to emphasise this, in the process of preparing for the first international research colloquium (Ushaw, January 2006) that was to explore this strategy and concern, the decision was taken to refer to Receptive Ecumenism rather than to Spiritual Ecumenism.

For all the undoubted success of the first event and for all the genuine attempts made there to move away from the theoretical alone and to engage in analysis of the lived, practical, organisational dimensions of ecclesial existence, the fact remained that the analysis operated at a relatively theorised, academic level. Speaking into this from her newfound vantage point of now working as the Ecumenical Officer for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, together with her long experience of contextual social-scientific analysis, Andrea helpfully suggested that 'Getting real about Receptive Ecumenism supposedly being a means of shaping the lives of the churches would require close engagement with such people as local ecumenical officers and the formulation of an initiative directed at the level of the local church.' It is this that led directly to the five-year comparative regional project in Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church that is reviewed in the final part of this essay. For now we turn attention to summarising the key guiding principles at work in Receptive Ecumenism. The resonance that variously exists with the principles less formally presented in the current section will be clear.

2. The guiding principles and theological range of Receptive Ecumenism

The various essays cited in n.1 here, as also those in n.2, each provide systematic articulations of and reflections upon the various theological and strategic principles at work in Receptive Ecumenism. In the light of the freshly articulated autobiographical and contextual reflections on the roots of Receptive Ecumenism that have been offered here, no attempt is made in this present section either to repeat or substantively to supplement these various extended systematic accounts of its guiding principles. Rather, we settle for simply

¹² See *May They All Be One... But How? Proceedings of the Conference Held in St Albans Cathedral on 17th May 2003*, (St Albans: The St Albans Centre for Christian Studies, 2003). It is no accident that from the outset it was envisaged that the first two Receptive Ecumenism events would be held respectively in honour of Cardinal Kasper and Archbishop Williams.

summarising in point form and in ordered sequence the most important of these principles. By doing so their relationship with the various guiding influences on the articulation and development of Receptive Ecumenism formulated in the previous section should be all the clearer to view. These are:

- as called forth and held within the Trinitarian communion of God, the churches are called to grow ever more deeply and more visibly together in this communion and to come to express the union-in-relation it implies in appropriate structural and sacramental unity;
- “Life and Works” ecumenism – doing things together – whilst absolutely vital, can never be enough;
- whilst always in need of testing by the “head” – by critical theological scrutiny – all effective receptive ecumenical learning consists most deeply in an affair of the “heart”, as a matter of being attracted by, even falling in love with, the grace-filled beauty in another tradition and being impelled to move towards this even at cost;
- the authentic Spirit-led vitality of Christian life and tradition consists not in steadfast identical repetition but in the preparedness to return to our core calling and to ask what fresh performances of this, with dynamic integrity, are appropriate to the specific challenges and opportunities of our times and contexts;
- the integrity of traditions consists not merely in doing the same things in different ways and different locations but in doing, as required, genuinely fresh things in familiar or recognisably coherent ways;
- we need to resist exclusively past-oriented views of tradition and exclusively problem-solving understandings of the ecumenical task relative to such past articulations and to engage also future-oriented understandings of the tradition as all it is and might be relative to the saving purposes of God in Christ and the Spirit;
- traditions are better conceived as dynamic webs than as inflexible structures;
- our traditions are limited as well as life giving, wounded as well as grace-bearing: we need to show rather than to hide our wounds and to ask our others to minister to us;
- the openness to growth, change, examination of conscience and continual grace-filled conversion that lies at the heart of Christian life pertains as much to the ecclesial as to the personal: to allowing, that is, one’s own tradition to be challenged to expand and to re-think how it understands and does things in relation to specific issues;
- this due emphasis on the ecclesial dimension of conversion needs to extend beyond the doctrinal-theoretical alone to include also the organisational, the structural, the cultural, and the broadly practical;
- truth is ultimately something lived and not simply something thought;
- whether personal or ecclesial, the call to conversion requires to be lived through attentive hospitality to the truth of the other in specific circumstances;
- in this regard it must be remembered that Christian living and ecclesial existence is not a zero-sum game in the sense that the call to graced conversion is always the call to greater life and flourishing, never, fundamentally, to diminishment;
- consequently, rather than worrying unduly about what learning others may need to do, each should take responsibility for their own learning, mindful of the adage that “We cannot change others, we can only change ourselves but changing ourselves will enable change in others”;

- with this, receptive ecumenical learning requires a move away from the presupposition of mutuality – “we’ll move if you move” – to the embrace of a certain unilateral willingness to walk the path of ecclesial conversion for the sake of the greater flourishing one’s own tradition’s and regardless, to some extent, of whether others are also currently prepared so to do;
- the primary aim is not the promotion of increased mutual understanding and appreciation *between* traditions but of continuing ecclesial conversion, deepening and expansive growth *within* traditions;
- throughout, it must always be remembered that progress towards our ecumenical goal is fundamentally God’s work and calling into which we are being drawn rather than any merely human project of our own creation, possession and control;
- living this requires *both* active trust that we *are* being resourced for this and led into it in the ways that we require *and* patient recognition that any real receptive ecclesial learning necessarily takes time to be realised;
- as such, the ecumenical scene is best viewed not simply as a problem-strewn field but as one of open possibilities, across which the only path is one of long, slow learning into greater life and maturity – this is not a second-best accommodation compared with a supposedly alternative faster route but the only route possible, the golden highway;
- the time we have is a time of grace and time for the eventual unfolding and present anticipating of God’s success, not a time of irredeemable failure;
- the fact that some problems and differences can now appear insuperable does not mean that they will always so appear;
- we must neither give up on the God-given calling to be one, nor allow it to mutate into merely getting along with each other but rather seek to live courageously and imaginatively in hope;
- we need to “lean-into” the promise of God’s purpose and the presence of God’s Spirit and to ask what it means in practice for us to enter into this more fully in the here and now;
- we are changed by love not by anger and if we are in turn to effect creative ecclesial change then it must be through the sustained passion of love rather than frustration: “By love alone” the way of ecclesial transformation.

3. *The reach and potential of Receptive Ecumenism*

Having traced something of the back-story to Receptive Ecumenism’s emergence into clear voice and some of the experiences and influences that promoted this (sec. 1 here) and having also surveyed its core guiding principles (sec. 2), both theological and strategic, it is now fitting to take a brief look at what Receptive Ecumenism can look like in practice. Without this it would be in danger of sounding like a fine vision that does not in any way connect with the nit and grit reality of ecumenical work and encounter.

One way in which we could do this would be to review and reflect upon a selection of the creative theological analyses that were pursued during the course of the first and second international receptive ecumenism conferences, engaging respectively what Catholicism might have to learn with integrity from other traditions and what the full range of Christian

traditions might each have to learn from one or more of their own other traditions. There is certainly a great deal of very high quality work here that requires considerable further engagement. As noted earlier, however, there is also a sense in which for all their strengths, the analyses in each of these first two phases of Receptive Ecumenism tended to operate at a relatively theorised level. As such, for present purposes it will probably be most helpful to attend awhile to the regional project in Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church that has been underway in recent years in the North East of England in partnership with nine of the major denominational groupings in the region.¹³

The core purpose of the project has been to examine how respective specific difficulties in the organisational cultures of each of the participant groupings – and the doctrinal theological commitments associated with these – might fruitfully be addressed by appropriately learning from and receiving of examples of ‘best practice’ in the other traditions. As such, the idea has been to use practical and organisational matters – and the social-scientific means of analysing these – as portals into the ecclesial and the ecclesiological. This comparative analysis of respective organisational cultures has been pursued at the three levels of: *regional processes and structures* (e.g. Diocese, District, Synod, Association etc.), *local processes and structures* (parishes/congregations) and, where they exist, *intermediate processes and structures* (e.g. deaneries, circuits, mission groupings etc.).

In order to do this an interdisciplinary and diversely skilled and situated overall project group was brought together, comprising philosophical and systematic theologians (Department of Theology and Religion, Durham), sociologists and anthropologists of religion (Department of Theology and Religion), practical theologians (St John’s College, Durham), organisational and human resource experts (Durham Business School), adult Christian educational experts (North of England Institute for Christian Education), and local ecumenical offers and local church practitioners. This overall group was in turn sub-divided into three research teams: one focussed on matters pertaining to *Governance and Finance*, another focussed on matters pertaining to *Leadership and Ministry*, and a third focussed on *Learning and Formation*.

The work itself has ended up being divided into six interrelated phases. First for each research team was a detailed mapping, on the basis of extant documentation and some initial interviews, of what is in principle happening on the ground within each denominational grouping relative to the interests of the particular research team in question and at the three relevant levels of region, intermediary, and congregation.

Second was a more detailed empirical testing of how this relates to actual practice (again at all three levels of region, intermediary and congregation) and the strengths and issues this raises: in the case of the *Governance and Finance* team this was largely done through structured interviews; in the case of *Leadership and Ministry* by questionnaire; and in the case of *Learning and Formation* by focus groups and participant-observation.

In turn, taking the respective strengths and open questions cum areas for possible development that had been identified in Phase Two, the third phase consisted in a series of

¹³ The nine participant regional denominational groupings are: the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; the Anglican Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle respectively; the Northern Synod of the United Reformed Church; the Methodist Districts of Darlington and Newcastle respectively; the Northern Baptist Association; the Northern Division of the Salvation Army; and the Assemblies of God.

cross-trajectory participant-observer congregational studies focussed on examining how the various denominational groupings are responding to the challenges raised by the declining numbers of ordained, or authorised, ministers. This generic change serves to bring into focus issues relating to all three trajectories of *Governance and Finance* (e.g. in the shape of the need for fresh structures or ways of organising), *Leadership and Ministry* (e.g. in relation to the need for fresh models and patterns of ministry and ways of relating between clergy/ministers and lay), and *Learning and Formation* (e.g. as regards the formational work required to enable a congregation to make a smooth transition through this period).

For each denominational grouping the various materials and interim reports deriving from the three respective research teams in relation to the first three phases of work are, at time of writing, currently being used as the empirical basis for the production of one integrated, multi-perspectival report for each participant grouping. Each of these Phase Four preliminary integrated reports will culminate in identifying respective strengths and weaknesses for each denominational grouping and specific areas worthy of further consideration for potential receptive learning at one or more of the levels under investigation and from one or more of the other participant groupings.

These will be working documents for purposes of: a) consultation with the respective stakeholder groupings to test initial reactions both to the integrated account in the round of how their groupings are being presented in the project and to the specific examples of potential receptive learning that are being identified in their regard; and b) the subsequent rigorous testing and, where possible, sharpened re-articulation (Phase Five) of these aforementioned examples of potential receptive learning relative to considerations of ecclesiological integrity and real possibility, pastoral appropriateness, and sheer practicality. The respective possibilities for real receptive learning that survive this robust process of ecclesiological, pastoral and practical testing and associated refinement and re-articulation will then be finalised and accordingly offered, along with their worked-out justifications, to each denominational grouping for potential reception, or otherwise.

The sixth and final phase will then consist in a process of widespread dissemination of the findings and proposals arising from the project both throughout the participant groupings themselves and for widespread consideration by others much further afield.

Interesting whilst all of this is and not just for the substantive findings and constructive proposals that will emerge from the project but also in relation to the fresh methodological light it casts on the systematic task of ecclesiology,¹⁴ there is nevertheless a major limitation with the project when viewed as a potential model of Receptive Ecumenism in action. That is, whilst it certainly engages closely with the lived reality of the local church, the extensive use made of expert social-scientific analysis in the Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church Project means that it does not represent a practice of Receptive Ecumenism that, in this particular form, can easily translate into the ordinary practice of the local church or be easily continued and further applied by those without specialist social-scientific training. For this to happen then rather than the kind of expert consultancy model prevailing – which in no small part is what is being played out in Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church – what is required is for groups in diverse local contexts themselves to take on the responsibility of

¹⁴ See Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth of the Church: The Systematic Task of Ecclesiology in Practice', in Mike Higon & Jim Fodor (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Practice of Christian Theology*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), *forthcoming*.

identifying what is difficult and in need of repair in their respective contexts and with that in view to turn to pursue the Receptive Ecumenical question as to how their particular difficulties can, with integrity, be creatively addressed and tended to through appropriately receiving from the gifts of other traditions. In this regard it is heartening and humbling to see that this local reception of Receptive Ecumenism is indeed well in progress with groups, to our knowledge, in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Germany, Scotland and England exploring what it means in their own respective contexts.¹⁵ Also significant here is the fact the staff of Churches Together in England have been tasked by one of the Presidents with devising resources to help promote and support the practice of Receptive Ecumenism at the level of the local church.

If, then, the fruitful reception of Receptive Ecumenism requires it to be capable of being adopted, in appropriately adapted form, into the ordinary practice of the local church, it equally depends on it being taken into the formal ecumenical practice of the churches in their institutional relating to each other. On this front, highly significant has been the interest shown by the Faith and Order Directorate in thinking and practice of Receptive Ecumenism.¹⁶ Of greater significance still, however, is the explicit adoption of Receptive Ecumenism by ARCIC III as providing an appropriate way of proceeding and theological orientation as it sets out on this crucial next phase of the Commission's work focussed jointly on the relationship between the local and universal levels of the church and on the dynamics and substance of ethical discernment.¹⁷

In terms of how this will shape and change the practice of ARCIC III when compared with previous rounds of the Commission's work, it first and foremost implies that the key question will no longer be, as it once would have been, 'How can Catholics and Anglicans seek to come to a common mind on issues such as decision making at local and universal levels?' but 'What respective difficulties are there in each of our traditions around decision making and how can these potentially be helped by learning from what is strong in the other tradition?' With that it also means that ARCIC III will both seek to model this process in its own work and seek to stimulate similar processes at all levels of the lives of the churches through creating appropriate consultation documents and resources. Here the process of receptive ecumenical learning and showing forth its transformative potential in clear, useful, attractive and convincing ways is actually more important than seeking to arrive at a theorised conclusion in a convergence statement.

As such, the final statements arising from ARCIC III will very likely include clear acknowledgment of continuing areas of substantial and substantive disagreement between the traditions. It is hoped, however, that what they will also do is to articulate, witness to and serve a process of real receptive, life-giving learning on behalf of each tradition precisely in the context and in face of such continuing substantive disagreement. If so, each tradition will

¹⁵ The Third International Receptive Ecumenism Conference will take place from 8-11 July 2013 at Fairfield University, Connecticut, USA on the theme 'Receptive Ecumenism in International Perspective: Contextual Ecumenical Learning'. To register interest, contact ccs.admin@durham.ac.uk.

¹⁶ See Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Faith and Order', *One in Christ*, 43 (2009), 189-94.

¹⁷ See the official communiqué released at the end of the May 2011 meeting: www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2011/5/27/ACNS4874. What follows draws upon Murray, 'ARCIC III: Recognising the Need for an Ecumenical Gear-Change', *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.

be called to grow in specific ways in its respective practices and structures of decision-making through effective receptive ecumenical learning.

In terms of what it means for the theology and practice of Receptive Ecumenism that ARCIC III is explicitly taking it up in this way, one friend, on reading the official communiqué, commented: 'Receptive Ecumenism has now moved from being a good idea discussed by some academics and ecumenists with some church support to being embraced by the most significant international bilateral process in the English-speaking world that has in turn tended to influence the methodology of all the other dialogues.'

This, of course, all needs to be kept in perspective. As indicated earlier, whilst the specific language and systematic articulation of Receptive Ecumenism as an explicit strategy fit for our times might be of relatively recent articulation, it is a way of thinking and acting that has long been incubated in the ecumenical movement and which has, in part at least, been assumed in all good ecumenical work throughout. If Receptive Ecumenism is indeed fruitful for our times, it represents the coming of age and to full voice of a gift born within and given by all *that* has and all *who* have gone before in the ecumenical movement. As such, the appropriate attitudes are those of gratitude, rejoicing, humility and confidence that in as much as Receptive Ecumenism is indeed right and fitting for our times, it will be shown so to be by its fruits and, in as much as it is not, it will in due course be similarly discerned not to be and so be suitably adapted and developed by the community of the church.

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