



BRILL

The Reception of Receptive Ecumenism

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Abstract

Receptive Ecumenism (RE) has been presented as a distinctive ecumenical approach for nearly fifteen years, and it is eight years since Paul Avis asked the critical question, ‘Are we Receiving Receptive Ecumenism?’ The main part of this essay addresses that question by surveying the different ways in which RE has been received in the academy, in ecumenical bodies, and in the life of the churches. A shorter section then outlines a proposal for viewing RE in a wider ecclesiological context, rather than simply as an ecumenical practice. The essay primarily focuses on resources developed since 2012 in order to assess the breadth and depth of contemporary reception of RE, and potential future developments.

Keywords

Receptive Ecumenism – ecumenical movement – methodology – dialogue – ecclesial learning – Roman Catholic Church – ARCIC III

The twenty-first-century phenomenon of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’ (RE)¹ has been recognised at the highest levels of ecumenical endeavour. Echoing the ‘irrevocable commitment’, stated by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*, the

1 Although a number of its intuitions and principles have recognisable roots in earlier ecumenical and ecclesiological thinking, RE as a distinctive approach emerged from Paul Murray’s work at Durham University in 2004–2005 and an initial colloquium at Ushaw College in January 2006.

2019 ‘Catholic Response’² to the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission’s document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) affirms that ‘The Catholic Church commits itself to the new paths opened by receptive ecumenism. In addition to Pope John Paul II’s description of ecumenism as an exchange of gifts, receptive ecumenism emphasizes in a special way the importance of being open to learn from others.’³ So too, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, in a speech to the 70th Anniversary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2017 said: ‘One of the most important of recent ecumenical developments has been the concept of “Receptive Ecumenism” ... based predominantly on the work of Professor Paul Murray at Durham University ... It turns negotiated frontiers into open borders.’⁴

The basic principle of RE is that of attending to one’s own ecclesial shortcomings by receiving with integrity from the ecumenical other. This involves a commitment to critical—but constructively-oriented—discernment in one’s own community or tradition, combined with a constructive—yet appropriately critical—reception of other churches and traditions for fruitful growth, reparative healing, and greater Christian and human flourishing. In these critical-constructive interactions, the faithful hope embodied in RE is that new ways of growing together might become possible, even where apparently insurmountable obstacles presently exist. More formally, the key critical principle can be stated as a commitment to ‘recursive fallibilism’, and the key constructive principle as ‘expansive catholicity.’⁵ As

2 The difficulties surrounding ecumenically sensitive use of the term ‘Catholic’ are manifold, as illustrated in the recent Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) agreed statement, which ‘while recognizing that the term “catholic” is used by a wide variety of Christian traditions ... uses “Catholics” to refer to all who are in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, recognizing that Eastern Rite Catholics ... would not self-describe as *Roman Catholics*’, but nevertheless also ‘follows previous ARCIC usage ... in using “Roman Catholic Church” to refer to all the churches, East and West, which are in full communion with the Bishop of Rome’. ARCIC, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be Church—Local, Regional, Universal* (London: SPCK, 2018), pp. ii, iii. In this essay, I have endeavoured to follow formal self-designations where possible, and otherwise to embrace the spirit of these principles.

3 Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU), ‘*The Church: Towards a Common Vision: A Catholic Response*’ (18 October 2019), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/dialoghi-multilaterali/dialogo/commissione-fede-e-costituzione/2019-catholic-response-to-tctcv.html>.

4 Archbishop Justin Welby, ‘Ecumenical Spring’ (16 February 2018), <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/ecumenical-spring-archbishop-justins-speech-world-council-churches>.

5 See Gregory A. Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 198–203.

a distinct approach, RE has been developed since 2005 by means of Paul Murray's substantial writings, six projects at Durham University, UK, involving a variety of traditions and contexts, and a series of five major international Conferences (RE I-V).⁶ In addition to a body of scholarly essays, RE has informed postgraduate theses, formation resources, and ecumenical dialogues. The Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has adopted this approach under the rubric of 'receptive learning',⁷ with its first agreed document 'profoundly shaped by the insights of receptive ecumenism'.⁸ All of which might suggest that the question posed by Paul Avis in 2012, 'Are we Receiving Receptive Ecumenism?' can simply be answered in the affirmative.⁹ However, the reality is both more complex and more interesting.

At the heart of RE, then, is a double dynamic: on the one hand, acknowledging specific deficiencies in one's own tradition and desiring to heal them; on the other hand, recognising the graced potential of another Christian tradition as a source of learning and healing. In each of these critical-constructive movements, the fundamental orientation of RE is towards the apostolic tradition not so much as a static deposit but a dynamic transmission of the gospel along the lines of Anton Houtepen's 'Faith of the Church through the Ages'.¹⁰ Yet RE also values the contribution of ancillary disciplines such as psychology and organisational studies. Balancing these different factors in an equilibrium which fully respects the distinctive Christian identity of a particular tradition¹¹ is a challenging task which Murray approaches through the interplay of intrinsic, extrinsic, and pragmatic coherence in dynamic integrity: a post-foundationalist approach akin to the use of wide reflective equilibrium in ethics and

6 Details of the Durham projects and the International Conferences can be found at <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology/religion/ccs/constructivetheology/receptiveecumenism/>.

7 ARCIC, *Walking Together on the Way*.

8 James Hawkey, 'An Anglican Commentary', in Ormond Rush and James Hawkey, *Walking Together on the Way: Anglican and Roman Catholic Official Commentaries on the ARCIC Agreed Statement* (London: SPCK, 2018), p. vii.

9 Paul Avis, 'Are We Receiving "Receptive Ecumenism"?', *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012), pp. 223–234.

10 See Anton Houtepen, 'The Faith of the Church through the Ages: Christian Tradition and Postmodernist Challenges', in *The Living Tradition: Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of the Christian Tradition*, ed. Anton Houtepen, IIMO Research Publication, 41 (Utrecht: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1995), pp. 35–70.

11 See Ladislav Orsy, 'Authentic Learning and Receiving: A Search for Criteria', in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 39–51.

theology.¹² This complex dynamic belies the simplicity of the basic principles of RE, and raises two important points for understanding its reception.

First, two modes of reception can be seen in RE which are related but not identical to this dynamic. We might call these 'affective reception' and 'effective reception'. 'Affective' reception values the positive attitude towards the (attractive/valued) ecclesial other and seeks to learn from them. 'Effective' reception of RE focuses on discerning specific dysfunctions in one's own tradition or ecclesial community (experienced either directly as a 'wound' or indirectly by recognising a greater fullness in another tradition) and seeking transformative ecumenical learning in order to effect ecclesial change. Second, reception is a complex ecclesial reality. It certainly cannot be reduced to official endorsement by church authorities, but needs also to take into account the attitudes and practices of the faithful, including reception by theologians, in multiple large-scale and small-scale religious, cultural, and local contexts. These different sites of reception are not isolated, but dynamically interrelated.

With this in mind, this essay attempts to examine systematically, if necessarily briefly, RE's reception over the past fifteen years in: 1) the academy; 2) ecumenical bodies and dialogues; and 3) church communities. It concludes with some suggestions on how the next phase of reception might be shaped.

Reception in the Academy

Whilst the International Conferences and subsequent publications have been the principal sites of academic reception for Receptive Ecumenism, a wider theological literature has developed since 2006. Murray has produced a substantial body of work on RE, the core of which sets out the main ideas,¹³ expands the methodology in conversation with Scriptural Reasoning and

12 On the relationship of Murray's approach to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's use of broad reflective equilibrium see Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, pp. 82–130.

13 Paul D. Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', in Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, pp. 5–25; 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs', *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008), pp. 30–45; 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist* 51 (2014), pp. 1–7.

ecclesial ethnography,¹⁴ documents the use of RE in ARCIC III,¹⁵ and presents RE in the light of Murray's coherence-based approach, correcting some misunderstandings.¹⁶

More pertinent to the question of reception is the way in which other scholars have engaged with RE. Conference papers from RE I and IV have been revised and supplemented for publication in edited collections,¹⁷ and a themed edition of *Pacifica* gathers several important Australian contributions to RE III.¹⁸ A further collection of essays from RE II and RE III along with newly commissioned chapters is in preparation.¹⁹ Aside from conference papers, RE has generated numerous ecumenical and theological journal articles, post-graduate theses, and chapter-length essays. The first full-length monograph on RE has recently been written by an Australian theologian, Antonia Pizzey,²⁰ and Murray has a major work on RE in preparation. The secondary literature on RE is now sufficiently established to be sometimes cited as authoritative, although passing references not infrequently misconstrue RE as a matter of reconciled diversity or a mutual exchange of gifts.

For the purpose of this essay, academic reception can be grouped under four thematic headings: 1) responses from a particular denominational perspective; 2) methodological analysis; 3) addressing specific theological issues using RE; and, 4) practical and contextual adoptions.

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- 14 Paul D. Murray and Mathew Guest, 'On Discerning the Living Truth of the Church: Theological and Sociological Reflections on *Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church*—A Regional Comparative Research Project', in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian B. Scharen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 138–164; Paul D. Murray, 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology, and Receptive Ecumenism', *Modern Theology* 29 (2013), pp. 76–92.
- 15 Paul D. Murray, 'The Reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and Discerning the Strategy and Agenda for ARCIC III', *Ecclesiology* 11 (2015), pp. 199–218.
- 16 Paul D. Murray, 'Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: Notes on Being Reasonable and Responsible in Receptive Ecumenical Learning' in *Leaning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church*, ed. Virginia Miller, David Moxon, and Stephen Pickard (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 217–234.
- 17 Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*; Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes, (eds) *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2018); Miller *et al.*, *Leaning into the Spirit*.
- 18 'Receptive Ecumenism: Perspectives', *Pacifica* 28 (2015).
- 19 Paul D. Murray, Gregory A. Ryan, and Paul Lakeland (eds), *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Reformed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 20 Antonia Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement: The Path of Ecclesial Conversion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

Denominational Perspectives

Murray's theological methodology involves a significant role for testing for intrinsic, external, and pragmatic coherence,²¹ and it is illuminating to apply this to the reception of RE itself. Seen in this light, much academic reception is principally concerned with testing the *intrinsic coherence* of RE with a particular ecclesial tradition, typically with reference to a normative ecclesiology (e.g. Vatican II) or exemplary figure (e.g. John Wesley). Seeking such coherence can also lead to an ecumenically-facilitated *ressourcement* of obscured elements in a tradition.

Initial work on RE established integrity in respect of Roman Catholicism. Through the antecedents of *Ut Unum Sint*, the pioneering work of Paul Couturier and Yves Congar, and Walter Kasper's development of spiritual ecumenism, Murray demonstrates that *ecclesia semper reformanda*, far from being an alien concept in Catholicism, is an essential ecclesial and ecumenical principle. RE's self-critical orientation not only has something in common with the Groupe de Dombes' call for the conversion of the churches, but also with Kasper's ecumenism *ad intra*, requiring corporate as well as individual transformation. Kasper's support for RE, which demonstrates its intrinsic coherence with modern Roman Catholic ecumenism and ecclesiology, has done much to underline its credibility in that tradition. Avery Dulles also provided an early endorsement of RE, as a rare example of an alternative to the dominant method of convergence which had 'nearly exhausted its potential'. Although Dulles' account of RE lacks substantive detail, it has nevertheless proved influential.²²

One beneficiary of Dulles' article was the Episcopalian theologian, David Hein. Writing in 2008, Hein sees a parallel between his own manifesto for 'radical ecumenism' and Dulles' account of RE, but proposes 'an even stronger challenge to our accustomed way of thinking and acting ... not simply a scholarly pursuit but a challenge—even a provocation'.²³ The examples he gives of how Anglicans could learn with integrity from the Amish in fact illustrates RE in ways that Dulles omits. Seeking a 'respectable provenance' for RE—intrinsic coherence with Anglicanism—Hein lays claim to Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) who believed that it was right to 'learn from the Roman Catholics poverty of Spirit ... and a deep regard for the Church in Paradise;

21 Paul D. Murray, 'Discerning the Call', pp. 221–223, 226–231.

22 Avery Dulles, 'Saving Ecumenism from Itself', *First Things* (December 2007), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/12/saving-ecumenism-from-itself>.

23 David Hein, 'Radical Ecumenism: A Teaching Moment for Anglicanism', *Sewanee Theological Review* 51/3 (2008): pp. 314–328.

... from the Lutherans, the universal mercy of God and the true consolation which comes from the Sacrament; from the Quakers, freedom for every individual conscience; and from the Mennonites, strict standards of Christian moral life'.²⁴

In fact, RE's perspective soon broadened to include a variety of Christian traditions. Anglican theologians have recognised RE as a legitimate and useful tool, not only in its 'revolutionary potential' for ecumenism (Avis), but as a source of structural and procedural change in the church in such diverse fields as canon law and synodality;²⁵ or addressing the challenges of 'mutual flourishing' within the Church of England.²⁶ The transformative potential of RE has arguably received less attention from Anglican academics than has the practice of Scriptural Reasoning developed by David Ford and others, with which RE shares certain family resemblances. A significant themed issue of *Modern Theology* brings both approaches into conversation with each other, and with Comparative Theology, but there is scope for substantial further exploration at the methodological and practical levels.²⁷

RE has been received by Methodists, both as theological method (David Chapman)²⁸ and as applied to specific ecclesiological issues such as Tony Franklin-Ross' creative proposal for 'Receptive Episcopacy'.²⁹ David Carter highlights the challenge posed by asymmetrical ecumenical relationships and

24 Martin Schmidt, 'Ecumenical Activity on the Continent of Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 101, cited in Hein, 'Radical Ecumenism', p. 327.

25 Nicholas Sagovsky, 'The Contribution of Canon Law to Anglican-Roman Catholic Ecumenism', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 13 (2011), pp. 4–14.

26 Gabrielle Thomas, "'Mutual Flourishing" in the Church of England: Learning from St Thomas Aquinas', *Ecclesiology* 15 (2019), pp. 302–321.

27 *Modern Theology* 29/4 (2013), published as David F. Ford and Frances Clemson (eds), *Interreligious Reading after Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

28 David Chapman, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations: What can Methodists Learn from Roman Catholic Teaching on Interfaith Dialogue?', paper presented at the Thirteenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (August 12–19 2013), available at <https://oxford-institute.org/2013-thirteenth-institute/working-groups/>.

29 Tony Franklin-Ross, 'Receptive Episcopacy—a reflection from the Anglican-Methodist Dialogue in Ireland and Aotearoa New Zealand', unpublished paper presented at RE IV (2014), available at https://www.academia.edu/37404651/Receptive_Episcopacy_a_reflection_from_the_Anglican_Methodist_Dialogue_in_Ireland_and_Aotearoa_New_Zealand.

welcomes the contribution of RE to affirming identities.³⁰ Asymmetry within RE itself—privileging unilateralism over mutuality—is analysed in detail by Sara Gehlin,³¹ one of a number of Lutheran and Reformed theologians to engage positively with RE.³² Gehlin reads RE through the lens of feminist theory, in order to highlight both the basic expectation of mutuality for a just settlement and the positive value of asymmetry.

In a significant book, the Reformed evangelical Peter Leithart offers a short but incisive analysis of the significance of RE's self-critical approach, attention to doctrine, and commitment to radical transformation—not dilution—of distinctive traditions. Somewhat along the lines of Dulles' article, Leithart finds RE to be 'especially pertinent' as an alternative to 'federative unity' in his post-liberal manifesto for 'the end of Protestantism'.³³ A recent introductory textbook intended primarily for 'evangelical protestant theology programs' draws on a number of essays from *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*.³⁴ Despite this and, in a chapter on ecumenical reception, urging 'dialoguing churches to approach each other in humility, ... service, and love ... willing and able to learn from each other' (p. 144), RE *per se* is unfortunately missing.

Paul Fiddes has delivered serious and sustained Baptist engagement with Murray's work, recognising its suitability for ecumenism in local, largely independent churches, and working through several real-world examples of ecumenical learning.³⁵ Another model for 'Receptive Ecumenism, Baptist Style' is creatively worked out with theological depth and detailed practical examples by Steven Harmon, who argues that RE opens doors for Baptist participation in

30 David Carter, 'Unity in Reconciled Diversity: Unity or Cop-Out Church?', *Theology* 113/876 (2010), pp. 411–420.

31 Sara Gehlin, 'Asymmetry and Mutuality: Feminist Approaches to Receptive Ecumenism', *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* (2020), doi: 10.1080/0039338X.2020.1789737.

32 See also, Gehlin, 'Unity, Action, and Spirituality. Prospects and Challenges at the Intersection between Contemporary Receptive Ecumenism and Nathan Söderblom's Ecumenical Vision', *One in Christ* 52 (2018), pp. 78–92; Denise Liersch, 'The Promise of Receptive Ecumenism: A New Way of Ecumenical Encounter', *Lutheran Theological Journal* 48 (2014), pp. 52–58; Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, 'From Conciliar Ecumenism to Transformative Receptive Ecumenism', *HTS Teologiese Studies* 73 (2017) <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4353>.

33 Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016) pp. 167–169.

34 R. David Nelson and Charles Raith II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

35 Paul S. Fiddes, 'Learning from Others: Baptists and Receptive Ecumenism', *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008), pp. 54–73.

ecumenical processes from which they hitherto felt excluded by virtue of their decentralised ecclesiology.³⁶

Pentecostal traditions were less well-represented in the initial conferences,³⁷ prompting Bishop Joe Aldred to note at RE II that black Pentecostals were ‘not exactly insiders’ in the programme.³⁸ However the relationship of RE to spiritual ecumenism—correctly interpreted as pneumatological, not just devotional—is now being recognised in Pentecostal and ‘Third Article’ theology. Thus Kristen Laurel Guidero approvingly notes that RE ‘identifies the heart of Christian union as profoundly and reliably a function of pneumatology’,³⁹ and Anglican renewal theologian Andy Lord draws the conclusion that ‘this approach is particularly appropriate for Pentecostal ecumenism’.⁴⁰ The integration of affective and effective (‘head and heart’) perspectives in RE is also welcomed.⁴¹

On the surface, Orthodox reception has been somewhat muted. Kallistos Ware, among others, has emphasised a *mutual* exchange of gifts as the necessary dynamic, giving examples of where others might learn from Orthodox theology and practice.⁴² Certainly, the ecological theology which Ware identifies as a potential site of learning from the Orthodox tradition has become even more urgent: in the light of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* of 2015, this is a potentially significant locus for RE today. Whilst supportive of RE, Andrew Louth warns those seeking to learn from Orthodoxy that theology, liturgy and life, are woven into a seamless whole; it is not possible to simply list a discrete element and transfer it to another tradition. Louth also stresses that Orthodoxy in the concrete is not quite the same as theory—as evidenced

36 Steven R. Harmon, ‘Part III: Baptist Identity and Receptive Ecumenism’ in *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Harmon, ‘Baptist’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies* ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2017) doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600847.013.12.

37 Notwithstanding the important contribution of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen to RE II.

38 Unpublished address at RE II (2009).

39 Kirsten Laurel Guidero, ‘In the Unity of the Holy Spirit: A Third-Article Theology of Receptive Ecumenism’ in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016) pp. 463–478.

40 Andy Lord, ‘Transforming Renewal through a Charismatic-Catholic Encounter: An Experience of Receptive Ecumenism’, *PentecoStudies* 13/2 (2014), pp. 239–261.

41 David Sang-Ehil Han, ‘Changing Paradigms in Global Ecumenism: A Pentecostal Reading’, in *Pentecostal Theology and Ecumenical Theology: Interpretations and Intersections*, ed. Peter Hocken, Tony L. Richie, and Christopher A. Stephenson (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 111–130.

42 Kallistos Ware ‘Receptive Ecumenism: An Orthodox Perspective’, *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008), pp. 46–53. See also Ruzvam Porumb, ‘Orthodoxy in Engagement with the ‘Outer’ World. The Dynamic of the ‘Inward-Outward’ Cycle’, *Religions* 8 (2017), p. 131.

by the challenges of turning the concept of synodality into actual, effective, synods.⁴³ However, internal coherence with Orthodoxy has also been established by highlighting figures who might be understood as precursors to RE, and identifying resonance between the neo-patristic movement and RE.⁴⁴ Although Paul Gavrilyuk's 'perichoretic ecumenism' in which 'charisms that we find better exercised in other Christian communions, if recovered, could revitalize and heal our internal wounds' makes no mention of RE, it shows a strikingly similar approach.⁴⁵ In these examples, as with Roman Catholic adoptions of RE, the theme of *ressourcement* is strong, allowing engagement with RE 'with integrity'—that is, without undermining fundamental Orthodox ecclesiology. Finally, it is notable that there has been virtually no ink spilled in serious academic papers on the *incompatibility* of RE with mainline Christian traditions. In terms of internal coherence, the principles appear to be accepted without much controversy across a broad spectrum of traditions.

Methodology

So far, the kind of reception I have detailed has been concerned principally with intrinsic coherence—with a denominational tradition, or with established norms of ecumenism. A smaller body of literature considers RE as a method, looking in part at external coherence with various background theories. Despite the apparent simplicity of RE, there is a significant methodological hinterland to Murray's approach which has received little attention until the recent publication of two books, each dealing with one of two major influences on RE. Antonia Pizzey's monograph is significant not only in showing how RE can rightly be seen as a particular form of spiritual ecumenism but in advancing an original reading of RE using the language of virtue and hospitality. My own book, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church*,

43 Andrew Louth, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—an Orthodox Perspective,' in Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, pp. 361–372.; See also Dora Costache, 'Applied Synodality and Contemporary Orthodox Diaspora: Learning from a Lutheran-Roman Catholic Document', in Balabanski and Hawkes, *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving*, pp. 79–88.

44 See Viorel Coman, 'Revisiting the Agenda of the Orthodox Neo-Patristic Movement,' *Downside Review* 136/2, pp. 99–117. Coman identifies Dumitru Staniloae's 'open sorbonicity' in the Orthodox tradition as an exemplary parallel to RE (as does Avis); see also Petre Maican, 'Sketching an ecumenical ecclesiology for Eastern Orthodoxy: the form of Christ crucified with special reference to Stăniloae, von Balthasar and Tillich' (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2016).

45 'Perichoretic Ecumenism Inspired by John 17: A Response to Prof. R. R. Reno', in *The Gospel of John: Theological-Ecumenical Readings*, ed. Charles Raith II (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), pp. 168–172.

takes a different perspective, setting RE within Murray's larger programme of theological method, itself considered within a horizon of critical-constructive, pastorally-shaped, post-foundationalist Catholic ecclesiology and hermeneutics. Karen Petersen Finch notes potential synergy between RE and Bernard Lonergan's theological method, and Michael Root sees parallels with his Kuhnian 'normal ecumenism'.⁴⁶ What is largely absent from the literature to-date is substantive dialogue with critical/liberationist approaches, although initial forays have been made with regard to post-colonialism,⁴⁷ queer theory,⁴⁸ and feminist criticism.⁴⁹ As with the work on Lonergan, these show the possibilities of weaving RE into different hermeneutical frameworks.

In addition to these fundamental analyses of RE, there are more tangential receptions: Nicola James uses the 'unexamined poetic strand' of RE to explore characters learning across denominational boundaries in the novels of Jane Gardam.⁵⁰ Although the application of such an approach to ecumenical dialogue might not be obvious, one could imagine such narratives providing a pattern for imaginative spiritual exercises or theological thought-experiments in ecumenical settings, a virtual space where learning could be explored without the restriction of systemic inhibitions.

Doing Theology

Valuable though it is to show the coherence of RE with a tradition, or with good theological method, this does not amount to an adequate reception: RE needs to be put to use. Theologians have long drawn on writers and even systematic exposition from other traditions, but two characteristics mark out instances of actual Receptive Ecumenism in such activity. First, the active theologian is in some sense acting ecclesially—as a member of a tradition, looking to address dysfunctions within it; and, second, there is ecumenical intentionality in drawing on another theological tradition. Gabrielle Thomas provides a good example of such attention in showing how contemporary Anglicanism might learn

46 Karen Petersen Finch, 'Bernard Lonergan, Decision, and Ecumenical Discernment' in Balabanski and Hawkes, *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving*, pp. 37–47; Michael Root, 'Normal Ecumenism: Ecumenism for the Long Haul', *Pro Ecclesia* 28/1 (2019), pp. 60–77. The term 'Kuhnian' is an allusion to Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012 [1962]).

47 J. K. Melton, 'Bridging the Colonial Divide', *Exchange* 47 (2018) pp. 350–371.

48 Tony Franklin-Ross, 'Queering Ecumenical Binary Constructs', paper given at the Council for World Mission, Discernment and Radical Engagements (DARE) Forum, Taiwan (2019). Available at https://www.academia.edu/42769480/Queering_ecumenical_binary_constructs.

49 Gehlin, 'Asymmetry'.

50 Nicola James, 'Jane Gardam: Religious Writer' (PhD thesis, Glasgow University, 2016) <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/7628>.

from the notion of friendship in Thomas Aquinas. This reception faces in two directions: friendship is presented as a healing gift to be received in the Church of England, but is also noted as a component of Receptive Ecumenism itself.⁵¹ Similarly, Stephen's Pickard reading of Michael Welker's Spirit-Christology not only highlights possible sites of ecumenical learning, but notes the centrality of the Spirit in RE itself, not indeed simply as 'spirituality' but as the active and surprising Holy Spirit.⁵²

Ormond Rush, writing on the *sensus fidelium* in the light of RE, asks how the sense of faith found in other Christians is to be evaluated and incorporated into Roman Catholic ecclesial learning.⁵³ The *sensus fidelium* also forms the basis of an impressive example of Orthodox RE by Petre Maican, even though he seems unaware that RE extends beyond affective orientation and includes precisely the kind of transformative therapy he prescribes.⁵⁴ Essays such as these are significant in demonstrating that RE is not to be distinguished from 'theological ecumenism' but includes it, albeit in a mode which—befitting Murray's post-foundationalism—is not concerned solely with consensus.

More traditional areas of ecumenical concern have not been ignored. RE has inspired fresh examinations of justification and baptism, for example.⁵⁵ But what is largely missing in RE's theological reception to-date is substantive work in relation to controverted ethical issues, both in themselves, and as a sign of 'divided witness'. This is an area of critical significance to current ecumenical dialogue, including ARCIC III. The moral significance of receptive ecclesial learning is briefly noted in Neil Arner's fine survey of ecumenism and ethics,⁵⁶ and Mitzi Budde offers a general outline of where RE might contribute, emphasising virtue formation, humility, witness, and the need for marginalised voices to be heard.⁵⁷ Melton notes many of the same characteristics, and uses the lens of decolonialisation to propose ways in which RE could be used

51 Gabrielle Thomas, "Mutual Flourishing" in the Church of England.

52 Stephen Pickard, 'Theological Horizons for an Ecumenical Future: A Response to Michael Welker' in Miller, *et al.*, *Leaning into the Spirit*, pp. 39–45.

53 Ormond Rush, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*: Expanding the Categories for a Catholic Reception of Revelation', *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), pp. 559–572.

54 Petre Maican, (2019), 'Through *Sensus Fidelium* to Deification: Listening to the Voice of the Faithful in Eastern Orthodoxy', *Modern Theology* 35 (2019), pp. 285–300.

55 For example, Paul D. Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010), pp. 142–170; Susan K. Wood, "Return to Your Baptism Daily": Baptism and Christian Life', in *Luther Refracted: The Reformer's Ecumenical Legacy*, ed. Piotr J. Malysz and Derek R. Nelson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 193–214.

56 Neil Arner, 'Ecumenical Ethics: Challenges to and Source for a Common Moral Witness', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36 (2016), pp. 101–119.

57 Mitzi J. Budde, 'Lived Witness', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 50/3 (2015) pp. 391–416.

in LGBTQ+ conversations, as well as in dialogues involving historical geo-political colonialism.⁵⁸ These essays are helpful starting points but much remains to be done on this topic.

Contextual Adoption

Much practical reception of RE occurs without formal academic reflection. However, there are a few examples of academic research in particular UK contexts. Two Durham University projects utilise and evaluate RE in the context of local churches, and the ecclesial experiences of women.⁵⁹ Mary Cullen takes a different approach, adopting Murray's post-foundationalist methodology to analyse archive material on lay-clergy relationships in recent Scottish Catholic experience, and in doing so, providing substantial evidence in support of Murray's analysis of the contemporary ecclesial and ecumenical situation.⁶⁰ RE has also been used to reflect *post-hoc* on existing initiatives for church renewal and ecumenical rapprochement, as Pizzey documents for Australia.⁶¹ Further examples from Europe, America, Asia, and New Zealand—some more descriptive than analytic—were presented at RE II and III.

In addition to these practical projects can be added a third category containing socio-cultural analysis of *potential* contexts. RE III and IV contained keynotes on various regional opportunities and challenges for the inculturation of ecumenism, although only beginning to engage the specifics of RE. Similarly, a wide-ranging paper at RE II by Jeffrey Gros, only hints at how RE might be applied in various regions.⁶² Nonetheless, some important issues emerge, including awareness of colonialism, and the interplay between inter-church, inter-religious, and political issues in many countries. Carlos Mora, for example, applies the principles of RE to specific ecclesial wounds in Columbia.⁶³ The inculturation of RE in this diverse body of work can involve testing external coherence with the prevailing culture or subculture (we might call this 'contextual coherence'), as well as internal coherence with local, 'ordinary' theologies.

58 Melton, 'Bridging'.

59 See <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/projects/receptiveecumenism/projects/>.

60 Mary Josephine Cullen 'Looking to the Future: The Development of a New Partnership Between Priests and People in the Catholic Church in Scotland' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2017), <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/7981/>.

61 See Pizzey, 'Receptive Ecumenism', pp. 213–218.

62 Jeffrey Gros, 'Inculturating Receptive Ecumenism' (January 12, 2009), available at http://www.academia.edu/2175949/Contextualizing^Receptive_Ecumenism.

63 Carlos Arboleda Mora, 'El Ecumenismo Receptivo: Una Propuesta para Columbia', unpublished paper, 2020. Available at https://www.academia.edu/43543579/el-ecumenismo_receptivo_uno_propuesta_para_columbia.

A further body of work addresses the pragmatics of RE more theoretically, particularly in relation to barriers to, and enablers of, ecclesial learning.⁶⁴

Reception by Ecumenical Bodies

RE in the Modern Ecumenical Movement

The impressive array of denominational testimonies does not mean that RE has been received uncritically. In fact, the most sustained criticism of RE comes from those already invested in the ecumenical movement. When presenting on modern ecumenism, Murray recounts a consistent narrative, tracing the development from an 'ecumenism of life' to the search for comprehension and consensus in Faith and Order dialogues, to the 'ecumenical winter' from the 1980s onward. Into this narrative, RE is offered as a fresh approach: the only way that significant progress might still be possible. This narrative has attracted more critical comments than any other aspect of RE. These are three-fold: 1) RE is not new; 2) RE risks undermining the substantive work of Faith and Order; 3) RE is too focused on Roman Catholic experience.

The first criticism is widespread, but relatively innocuous. Murray himself recognised that RE is in some ways a new name for an old idea. Although precursors to potential learning from other churches can be identified (including the 1952 Lund Faith and Order Conference), RE brings focused intentionality in the face of ecclesial dysfunctions, and a methodological sophistication which continues to develop. It is not simply a question of changing attitudes and carrying on, but of actively reweaving the webs of tradition through ecumenical learning. A variation on this criticism is to subsume RE under an ecumenism of gift-exchange, criticising RE for not being mutual enough. But although Murray is at pains to stress that RE hopes for, but does not *depend* on, mutual engagement, critics misrepresent him when they suggest that there is no place for mutuality in RE. Nor is Receptive Ecumenism to be confused with 'ecumenical reception' of agreed texts, although these remain *one* possible locus of receptive learning in the spirit of RE.

More seriously some ecumenists have criticised RE as undermining Faith and Order dialogues. At RE 11, John Gibaut and Tamara Grzelidze of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, spoke of the significance of RE as a complementary strategy to established dialogues, but Gibaut's assessment carried an implicit criticism. He had 'two anxieties': RE being held up as the 'new ecumenism'; and

64 See 'Part IV: The Pragmatics of Receptive Ecumenical Learning' in Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, pp. 255–356.

RE being portrayed as an attractive ‘soft option’ as an alternative to the hard work of theological dialogues. At the 2014 conference, Gibaut explicitly revised this critical view: he was ‘much less anxious’; indeed, RE had given stimulus to ‘classical’ reception of convergence texts.⁶⁵ The opposite criticism, that RE remains too intellectual and abstract, is rarely found in academic articles but has certainly been heard at grassroots level. However, Ray Williamson raises an important point in arguing that the ecumenical impasse into which RE speaks is not a reality for all churches, and that fruitful moves toward full communion have continued in what from a Roman Catholic perspective has looked like an ‘ecumenical winter’.⁶⁶ Although it is sometimes overlooked, Murray does in fact position RE as a solution to overcome obstacles especially in ‘mature dialogues’ where the softwood of early gains has been replaced by the hardwood of long-standing differences.⁶⁷

More recently, Peter Carnley’s RE IV presentation scatters a number of critical comments in the direction of RE, raising some useful questions.⁶⁸ However, his argument is founded on an understanding of RE as ‘affirmative ecumenism’ which misses RE’s self-critical concern for ecclesial transformation, and this undermines an otherwise useful exploration of RE’s relationship with Faith and Order. Carnley also asks the obvious question: if churches keep learning from each other via RE, won’t they become so alike that there will be no ecclesial other left to learn from, making RE thus fundamentally self-limiting? In particular, he sees ecclesial otherness as something rooted in divisions of the past. Even if this were conceivable at the level of official doctrine and order, a richer understanding of sites of synchronic receptive learning across diverse communities of interpretation—which can be found *within* a tradition, as well as across churches—and continual diachronic *ressourcement*—ongoing learning, not a final system—robs this criticism of significant practical force.

Formal Dialogues and Ecumenical Organisations

One of the defining characteristics of RE is its intended application in multiple levels and sites of ecclesial learning, neither limited to, nor excluding,

65 From the start, RE was positioned to complement, not replace, established ecumenical approaches. See Murray, ‘Receiving Gifts’, pp. 40–41. Following REII, Gibaut and Grdzeldidze invited Murray to prepare a paper for, and to attend, the 2009 Crete Plenary Assembly of Faith and Order.

66 Raymond K. Williamson, ‘Receptive Ecumenism in the Context of Bilateral Dialogues’, in Miller, *et al.*, *Leaning into the Spirit*, pp. 147–157.

67 Murray, ‘Introducing’, p. 4.

68 Peter Carnley, ‘Does Receptive Ecumenism Have a Future?’, in Miller, *et al.*, *Leaning into the Spirit*, pp. 235–250.

formal dialogues. In addition to the academic engagement outlined above, there has been substantial reception by ecumenical bodies in practice and policy. The potential of RE for ARCIC was noted as far back as 2011 before shaping *Walking Together on the Way* (*WTW*) under the rubric of 'Receptive Learning'.⁶⁹ As the official Anglican commentary notes, 'The methodology of the document is profoundly shaped by the insights of receptive ecumenism, pioneered and developed by Professor Paul Murray', opening 'a whole new vista in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations'.⁷⁰ The Roman Catholic commentary agrees: '*WTW* has admirably demonstrated the advantages of the receptive ecumenism approach.'⁷¹ The adoption of RE is expressed in *WTW* §§17–19, and the impact is seen in the novel paragraph layout in Sections IV, V, and VI, setting Roman Catholic and Anglican perspectives and issues side-by-side, and identifying sites of possible receptive learning. Less obviously, the ethic of RE in fact permeates the whole document. Murray describes RE as having three movements: *attending* to what is; *discerning* what might be, and *enacting* anew. Whilst section IV involves 'discerning what might be' in terms of potential receptive learning, the historical overview (section II) and the analysis of present-day ecclesial instruments of communion (section III) relate to 'attending to what is'. As is true for the reception of RE overall, the process of 'enacting anew' largely remains to be seen.

WTW also marks an important new phase in the reception of RE in opening a new, secondary, channel of reception. For example, Russel Murray argues that 'it is not only legitimate, but also necessary to ask how can the Catholic Church be open to receive the gifts offered us by another communion of Christ's faithful ... To realize our identity as Catholics, we need ... to hear what our Lord is saying to us through them, precisely from within the integrity of their own lives of faith.'⁷² He correctly names this 'receptive ecumenism'—but his source is not Paul Murray's essays but *WTW*. Episcopalian Elisabeth Kincaid suggests looking to recent Roman Catholic teaching 'to be more effective advocates

69 See ARCIC, Communique (27 May 2011), <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=39>. Also, the initial communique from the ARCIC meeting at Erfurt (20 May 2017), <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=1295>. See also, Paul D. Murray, 'ARCIC III: Recognising the Need for an Ecumenical Gear-Change', *One in Christ* 45 (2011), pp. 200–211.

70 Hawkey, 'Anglican Commentary', pp. vii, 32.

71 Ormond Rush, 'A Roman Catholic Commentary on *Walking Together on the Way*', in Hawkey and Rush, p. 26.

72 Russel Murray, 'Christ Calling to Christ: Receptive Ecumenism, ARCIC Dialogue and the Gift of Primacy', *Paralellus* 9(21), pp. 395–414 (at pp. 410–411).

against the death penalty, and also engage wholeheartedly in the process of “receptive ecumenism”.⁷³ Again, her inspiration comes directly from *WTW*.

Although no other dialogue has yet produced a document comparable to *WTW* in terms of receiving RE, the potential of the approach, and a commitment to further exploration, has been incorporated into Anglican dialogues with Methodist, Pentecostal, United Reformed,⁷⁴ and Mennonite churches.⁷⁵ The Anglican-Methodist Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group has drawn directly on RE, as well as indirectly via *WTW*.⁷⁶ Interest in RE has also been noted in regional Anglican-Roman Catholic (ARC) groups in Ireland, Belgium, and Canada.⁷⁷ The South Australian Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and the Uniting Churches made RE their main focus for 2014–2017, resulting in a significant appreciation and ongoing commitment.⁷⁸

Reception by regional ecumenical bodies focuses on the practical, spiritual, and local—affective—potential of RE, with less focus on addressing systemic change. Churches Together in England (CTE) has developed online resources, focusing on the affective, spiritual aspects of RE. A workbook by the South Australian Council of Churches (SACC), ‘Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands’, is now widely used by church groups worldwide, including as a resource for the Swedish Christian Council, who in turn used RE to develop an innovative ecumenical learning pilgrimage.⁷⁹ Examples like this creatively model how RE might be experienced away from the lecture theatre or conference table.

At the international level, RE has been welcomed by the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute.⁸⁰ The Global Christian Forum, involving

73 Elisabeth Kincaid, ‘Convention, Pope Francis, and the Death Penalty’, *Covenant* (14 August 2018), <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2018/08/14/convention-pope-francis-and-the-death-penalty/>.

74 *Ecumenical Relations 2019*, §§ 61, 101, 133, 172, available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Annual%20Report%20on%20Ecumenical%20Relations%202019.pdf>.

75 <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/009m-Appendix-12.pdf>.

76 General Synod paper GS 2135, ‘Mission and Ministry in Covenant: Report on further work from faith and order bodies of the Church of England and the Methodist Church’ (June 2019), §§ 25–32. See also <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17589/conf-2020-29-joint-covenant-advocacy-and-monitoring-group.pdf>.

77 See <https://iarccum.org/national-arc-survey/>. The Canadian use was reported at RE III.

78 *Healing the past – Building the future: The Report of the Church of England – United Reformed Church Joint Study Group on God’s Reign and Our Unity* (2011), available at https://urc.org.uk/what_we_do/ecumenical/docs/healing_the_past_building_the_future.pdf.

79 Gehlin, ‘Receptive Ecumenism: A Pedagogical Process’, in Balabanski and Hawkes, *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving*, pp. 111–122.

80 Nelson Illuno, ‘Dialogue in the Search for Church Unity’, *Ecumenical Trends* 48 (2019), pp. 7–11. https://geii.org/ecumenical_trends/Trends_January_2019.pdf.

many 'young churches' can also learn from RE, according to Larry Miller (then GCF Secretary), who nonetheless echoed Joe Aldred's challenge of asking who was missing from the conversations.⁸¹ Nevertheless a significant gap in reception can be seen as regards the WCC, Archbishop Welby's 2017 speech notwithstanding. As noted above, individual WCC members have played an important part in the critical reception of RE, but at the institutional level RE is conspicuous by its absence in WCC materials. The 147-page 'Ecumenical Conversations' report from the 2013 assembly in Busan notes only that 'local ecumenism is receptive ecumenism and the sharing of gifts is the place where needs and opportunities meet.' Such ecumenism is set in explicit contrast to the 'top-down "elite" ecumenism of institutions.'⁸² Although the term is being used here, it bears so little resemblance to the method developed at Durham and RE 1-IV that it is difficult to know whether any allusion to Murray's work is intended. Commenting on the 2014 WCC publication *Reception: a Key to Ecumenical Progress* (distributed to attendees at RE III) Melissa Carnell bemoans a missed opportunity in the document's failure to take any account of RE.⁸³

But is this lack of reception all on one side? Murray has paid attention to showing how RE does not threaten traditional Faith and Order work, but offers a distinctive way of making progress.⁸⁴ There is little comparable material on how RE might complement the ecumenism of life, which is at the heart of much WCC effort. In trying to ensure that RE is not mistaken for differentiated consensus, essential areas of ecclesial life have been overlooked in the development of RE: notably mission, and justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.⁸⁵ These are not incidental to ecclesiology, but intrinsic to it. In terms of pragmatic coherence, too, James Cone's critique of ecumenism needs to be heard in RE: 'We blacks do not believe that church unity with white people is meaningful unless it arises out of a demonstrated commitment to implement justice in society.'⁸⁶ Does RE offer any *distinctive* hope in this regard? The question remains to be answered.

81 Unpublished plenary at REIII (2014).

82 WCC, *Ecumenical Conversations Reports, Affirmations and Challenges from the 10th Assembly* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014), pp. 2–3, 8, available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/ecumenical-conversations-report>.

83 <https://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/docs/GETI-MelissaCarnall.pdf>.

84 See also Paul D. Murray, 'Faith and Order and Receptive Ecumenism', *One in Christ* 43/2 (2009), pp. 189–94.

85 An exception is Sara Gehlin, 'Reconsidering the Ecumenical Vision', in *Pathways for Theology in Peacebuilding Ecumenical Approaches to Just Peace* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 154–184.

86 James H. Cone, 'Black Ecumenism and the Liberation Struggle', *Journal of the Interdenominational Thought Center* 7/1 (1979), pp. 1–10 (at p. 3).

Ecclesial Reception at Various Levels

Whilst the academic literature, and the official documentation of ecumenical bodies provide evidence of reception in the first two categories, data is more limited for a third group, namely the churches themselves, operating at universal, regional, and local levels. However, a 2017 UK study commissioned by CTE notes ‘the growing popularity of the concept and methods of “receptive ecumenism” ... Our research revealed a general awareness of and, in some cases, a clear commitment to the principles of receptive ecumenism.’⁸⁷

At the worldwide level, the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to RE has now been stated repeatedly.⁸⁸ Although lacking in details as to what this means in practice, the recent response to *TCTCV* makes the important acknowledgement that RE marks a further development of the ideas of *Ut Unum Sint*, not a mere repetition of a gift exchange motif. This understanding is reflected in Pope Francis’ address for the 2017 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: ‘Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other’s gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, *without waiting for the others to learn first*.’⁸⁹ There is however little evidence yet of this change extending into other ecclesial structures. At the diocesan and parish level, explicit references to RE are scarce.

Anglican reception is somewhat better distributed across levels of ecclesial organisation, with the Church of England’s annual ‘Ecumenical Relations’ reports showing a developing commitment to RE,⁹⁰ aided by experience with ARCIC III, and fruitful use of the approach in Anglican-Methodist, United Reformed Church, Baptist, and Pentecostal dialogue.⁹¹

87 N. Mladin, et al., *That They All May Be One: Insights into Churches Together in England and Contemporary Ecumenism*, <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Reportfiles/CTE-report.pdf>.

88 See, in addition to the *TCTCV* response, Anthony Curren, ‘Il metodo dell’ecumenismo ricettivo’, in *L’Osservatore Romano* (27 January 2019), p. 7.

89 http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170125-vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html.

90 *Ecumenical Relations 2019; Ecumenical Relations 2018*, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/GS%20Misc%201205.pdf>; *Ecumenical Relations 2016*, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/annual-report-ecumenical-relations-2016.pdf>.

91 See *Ecumenical Relations 2019*, §§ 61, 101, 133, 172. See also Jeremy Worthen, ‘Reasons for Conversations: Reflections from an Anglican Late Arrival’, in *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches Practicing [sic] Theology*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2015), pp. 138–147.

Partly through the efforts of the national ecumenical officer, these principles are being taken on in parish and diocesan life. Significantly, in several places adoption of RE is set in the context of mission, but in a way which recognises the need for transformation, not simply working together as best we can: 'Not only are the churches going out in mission together, but they are also *learning from one another, seeking healing for their own ills by receiving, in a way suitable for them, the gifts and practices of the other within the integrity of their ecclesial lives*. Not only can they grow closer together but, as they become more Christlike, they can be more fit for mission.'⁹²

A similar combination of incorporation into dialogues and practical resources for church groups is seen in Australia through the efforts of Geraldine Hawkes and the SACC. RE has reinvigorated ecumenism in the Uniting Church of Australia, including the re-establishment (after 13 years) of a Synod body to encourage Receptive Ecumenism within congregations and to make links with other ecumenical bodies.⁹³

Most of the above reception is focused on ecumenical polices and dialogues, rather than applying RE with regard to specific issues. More concrete examples are also evident, including a review by the United Reformed Church of presbyteral and diaconal roles as a result of the North East of England Local Church project.⁹⁴ The diaconate also provided a site of receptive learning in New Zealand between Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches,⁹⁵ successfully catching the spirit and method of RE by combining concrete issues with formational, practical and theological perspectives, avoiding an abstract or overly instrumental interpretation of RE. The significance of RE for the smallest ecclesial unit—the *ecclesia domestica*—has also been recognised in reception by interchurch families.⁹⁶

92 Alice Costar, *et al.*, 'Doing Mission Together: How Partnership Promotes Gospel Growth' (Council for Christian Unity, 2019), p. 11, (emphasis added).

93 See the reports from RE IV at <https://sa.uca.org.au/serc/receptive-ecumenism-resources>.

94 See 'Receptive Ecumenism and Northern Synod' (2013), at <https://urc-northern-synod.org/receptive-ecumenism/>; see also United Reformed Church, *Book of Reports, Southport Convention Centre, 8–11 July 2016*, pp. 131, 134, at https://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Assembly2016/assembly_reports_16.pdf.

95 See https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/for_parishes/NDCU%20Newsletter%20202.pdf. See also Maylanne Maybee, 'The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity', in *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective: Ecclesiology, Liturgy and Practice*, ed. D. Michael Jackson (Durham, UK: Sacristy Press, 2019), pp. 142–144.

96 See Paul Hendricks, 'Interchurch Families and Receptive Ecumenism', *One in Christ* 46/1 (2012), p. 11. Papers on the topic were given at RE II (Bernard Prusack; Ray Temmerman) and RE III (Temmerman; Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi).

Conclusion: Are We Receiving Receptive Ecumenism?

This survey, necessarily illustrative rather than exhaustive,⁹⁷ points to significant developments in the reception of RE since this question was originally posed. First, ecclesial reception has taken place beyond RE's roots, across a wide range of different traditions, including some with little historical involvements in the ecumenical movement. Second, academic development of RE is no longer limited to Murray and colleagues at Durham University. In particular, it is attracting the efforts of emerging scholars in various fields. Third, RE has been received beyond its initial UK context, particularly in Australia, Canada, and Scandinavia. Fourth, RE has moved beyond theory to reception into policies and dialogues, if not yet resulting in many concrete changes at the higher levels of ecclesial organisation. Some reception has been insufficiently attentive to the distinctive elements of RE, and has been too quick to assimilate it within existing models and individual exemplars. Nonetheless, these receptions—while missing distinctive elements of RE—serve to highlight elements of continuity and intrinsic coherence with existing ecumenical practice and ecclesial traditions.

Reviewing the reception of RE thus far also suggests areas for further development. Reception in the *academy* would benefit from: (1) the use of RE in respect of ethical issues and moral theology; (2) sharpening RE, and ecumenical activity in general, through critical and liberationist theologies; and, (3) integrating RE into mission (including justice, peace, and the integrity of creation) in ecclesiological as well as practical perspectives. (4) Reception by *ecumenical bodies* has generally been positive, but remains at the exploratory stage and, by minimal reference to the substance of RE, risks remaining as affective, not effective reception. Although RE distinguishes itself from ecumenical reception, it is not immune to the challenges of moving from ecumenical activity to real change which are familiar in that field. The absence of RE in WCC publications is a notable gap. In the churches, too, there are areas for development. (5) Substantive reception by non-European churches, independent free churches, and Black churches in particular is an opportunity for the distinctive potential of RE to be realised and inculturated. (6) In the 'traditional' churches, where RE has been recognised at high levels, vital work is needed to translate that into meaningful ecclesial change, on the one hand, and local reception, on the other hand. For Roman Catholics at least, these challenges intersect in a

97 An extensive list of articles relating to Receptive Ecumenism can be found at <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/projects/receptiveecumenism/publications/>.

lack of agency for the lay faithful, who not unreasonably ask, 'But what can I change?' (7) Finally, there is potential for RE-like learning apart from between the churches. In a pluralist world, not only is there opportunity for 'internal ecumenism' (Paul Lakeland)—and thus internal RE—for intra-church dissensus and division, but opportunities abound for learning from other faiths, as well as extending the transversality suggested by external coherence in learning from other disciplines. An unanswered question is how RE might work in post-denominational settings, ad-hoc groups, and virtual socio-religious spaces.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is for RE to be received outside of those church groups already concerned with ecumenical activity. A real risk for ecumenism is that it becomes a special interest group (or even a kind of cultic priesthood performing its esoteric rites on behalf of the mass of passive faithful!). Avis convincingly shows that RE is not just a Roman Catholic concern but 'an ecumenical matter'. I would go further, and argue that, counter-instinctive as it might sound, RE is not primarily an ecumenical matter. It is an ecclesiological one.⁹⁸

The development and reception of RE show that it is neither a purely theoretical method nor simply an affective disposition, but rather a reflective ecclesial praxis with an ecumenical locus. If there is to be widespread effective as well as affective reception of RE, it will require the work not only of ecumenists, but theologians, church leaders, and communities whose goals are not ecumenism *per se* but ecclesial growth, renewal, and a desire to conform, ever more closely to the gospel. Practically, RE needs to be presented to and received by church groups at all levels, especially diocesan (or equivalent) bodies capable of realising effective change. Such a reorientation could open up significant further sites and avenues of reception. Indeed, RE realised as transformative ecclesial learning would be an ecumenism fitting Pope Francis' vision in which 'the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation'.⁹⁹

98 Kristen Colberg also indicates the 'renewing power of the relationship between ecclesiology and ecumenism' in 'Ecumenical Ecclesiology in its New Contexts: Considering the Transformed Relationship between Roman Catholic Ecclesiology and Ecumenism', *Religions* 9 (2018), p. 291: doi: 10.3390/rel9100291.

99 *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), § 27.