

Growing into the Fullness of Christ:

Receptive Ecumenism as a Way of Ecclesial Conversion

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Introduction

This polyvalent volume provides a rich and diverse set of explorations and analyses of the theology and practice of Receptive Ecumenism—both how it has hitherto been understood and enacted, and how this understanding and practice might continue to develop along constructive lines in relation to other contexts, issues, and intellectual resources. This richness is a consequence of the dynamic, adaptive character of Receptive Ecumenism, realized as its basic two-fold way of *transformative learning from our ecclesial others* in relation to *live issues within our own tradition* is variously pursued.¹ However, as Antonia Pizzey here correctly notes, despite all the different ways in which Receptive Ecumenism can be worked out in practice, it cannot properly be understood as lacking any characteristic form, open to becoming whatever people might seek to make it be.² ‘Dynamic integrity’ is an important principle within the understanding and practice of Receptive Ecumenism. Similar should

¹ For relevant statements in the literature of the basic two-fold way of Receptive Ecumenism, see: ‘... the first and dominant concern in the current phase of ecumenical engagement should be to ask after how the difficulties in one’s own tradition might, with integrity, be creatively addressed and one’s tradition accordingly re-imagined in the light of learning from one’s significant ecumenical others.’ Paul D. Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008), 30–45 (39). Also, with allusion to the wider understanding of the pragmatist-inclined, interrogative-systematic theological task that shapes it: Murray, ‘Foreword. Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit of Loving Transformation’, in Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning, and Loving in the Way of Christ* (Adelaide: ATF, 2018), xv–xxiii (xx). And Murray, ‘Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: Notes on Being Reasonable and Responsible in Receptive Ecumenical Learning’, in Virginia Miller, David Moxon, and Stephen Pickard (eds.), *Leaning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 217–34 (222).

² See Chapter 37: Antonia Pizzey, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and the Virtues’; also Murray, *Healing the Wounds of the Church: The Theology and Practice of Receptive Ecumenism* (forthcoming), Chapters 6 and 7.

applies also within the reception of Receptive Ecumenism.³ Like the living of the Gospel—of which the way of Receptive Ecumenism is a particular expression—its polyvalency in performance and register of expression relates to its living Christic heart and pneumatological dynamic integrity. Mike Higton puts it well: ‘Receptive Ecumenism is itself, at its heart, a form of spiritual discipline: a waiting upon the Spirit, longing for the gifts that the Spirit has to give.’⁴ Or as I have myself expressed it elsewhere:

for all its characteristic emphasis on organisational reform and doctrinal-pragmatic testing, at its most fundamental Receptive Ecumenism is a movement of the Holy Spirit—a movement rooted in prayer, penance, and call; a movement opened up by love and lived out through loving attention and response.⁵

In light of this perspective and following the diverse richness of explorations and analyses in this volume, this concluding chapter sinks deep tap roots into this defining pneumatic-Christic heart and character of Receptive Ecumenism. It presents Receptive Ecumenism as, at once, a way of Spirit-moved evangelical existence, of catholic ecclesial—‘whole-church’—commitment, and of dynamic, creative orthodoxy.

The digging down is in three stages. First, understanding Receptive Ecumenism as a way of ecclesial conversion is shown both to be the integrating theme of this particular volume and an integral dimension of the theology and practice of Receptive Ecumenism as a whole. Second, through an appreciative comparative reflection on the Groupe des Dombes’ theology of ecclesial conversion, the distinctiveness of Receptive Ecumenism’s understanding and practice of ecclesial conversion is clarified, as being fundamentally oriented not towards loss,

³ See Gregory A. Ryan, ‘The Reception of Receptive Ecumenism’, *Ecclesiology*, 17/1 (2021), 7–28.

⁴ Chapter 31: Mike Higton, ‘Receiving Scripture Again From One Another’, (000). See also ‘There is an intrinsic humility built into the notion of ecumenical learning. At the same time it fosters a keen attentiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit in the other, and a self-critical eye to oneself and one’s church, with the aim of being converted ever more deeply.’ Chapter 5: Donald Bolen, ‘Foundations and Openings for Ecclesial Learning: A Catholic Perspective’, (000).

⁵ Murray, ‘Foreword: Serving the Spirit of Receptive Ecumenism’, in Antonia Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement: The Path of Ecclesial Conversion*, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), xi–xii.

emptying, or diminishment but towards growth into ever greater fullness. Third, are some thoughts on the broad contours of the anticipated ecclesial end towards which Receptive Ecumenism is oriented and is intended to serve given the fundamental role of this particular understanding of ecclesial conversion in its theology and practice.

Receptive Ecumenism as a way of ecclesial conversion

Drawing upon the first extended published presentation of Receptive Ecumenism, Vicky Balabanski and Michael Trainor have reaffirmed the fundamental conviction ‘that the life of faith, personally and communally—or, better, ecclesially—is always in essence a matter of becoming more fully, more richly, what we already are; what we have been called to be and are destined to be, and in which we already share, albeit in part.’⁶ Assumed here is an understanding of Christian existence not, primarily, as an ethical code, nor, in the first instance, as a belief system, but as a real, always particular, Spirit-sharing in the fullness of the risen Christ, who as the ‘all and in all’ (Col. 3:11) is always infinitely more than we can

⁶ See Chapter 32: Vicky Balabanski and Michael Trainor, ‘Learning to be Church: Virtues and Practices Leading towards Koinonia in Colossians and Acts’, (000), citing Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda’, in *RECCL*, 5–25 (6).

yet glimpse, taste, or imagine.⁷ In light of this contemplative-eschatological understanding, Christian existence, both personally and collectively/ecclesially, is held intrinsically to consist in ‘a process of growth and change—a process of conversion—that is at root not a loss, nor a diminishment, but a finding, a freeing, an intensification, and an enrichment.’⁸ The centrality of this positive understanding of ecclesial conversion in the practice of Receptive Ecumenism—at least when the latter is well-conceived and well-performed—and its integrating role across the range of chapter topics in this volume is indicated in both parts of

⁷ Some key scriptural texts, amongst others, here—note the compounding repetition of ‘full’ (πλήρης), ‘fills’/‘filling’ (πληρόο/πληρουμένου), and ‘fullness’ (πλήρωμα/πληρώματος)—are: Eph. 1:3, 9–10 & 22–23 (‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ... he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth ... *he has put all things under his feet* (Ps 8:6) and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.’); Eph. 3:8–11 & 16–19 (‘the boundless riches of Christ ... the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things ... the eternal purpose ... carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord ... I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.’); Col. 1:16–17 (‘... in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him. ... He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.’); John 1–3, 14, 16 (‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.’); and 1 Cor. 13:12 (‘... now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.’). For extended reflection on the pneumatological catholicity of Christian existence and ecclesiality in the light of such texts, see Murray, ‘Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God’, in Staf Helleman and Peter Jonkers (eds.), *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), 109–58 (113–29); and for the specific relevance of all of this for Receptive Ecumenism, see Murray, ‘Afterword. Receiving of Christ in the Spirit: The Pneumatic-Christic Depths of Receptive Ecumenism’, in Balabanski and Hawkes (eds.), 157–70 (157–9).

⁸ Chapter 32: Balabanski and Trainor, (000), citing Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, 6.

the volume title, *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed*.

Whereas the chapters in Part One of the volume have explored the challenges and possibilities that Receptive Ecumenism presents across the traditions, both in relation to internal ecclesial reform and in relation to inter-ecclesial ecumenical practice, the chapters in Part Two have illustrated how this potential can be realized in respect of a number of specific live issues. These ranged from the new strategy that Receptive Ecumenism opens for formal bilateral ecumenical dialogue, through the experience of women in the Christian churches, the black church experience of ecumenism, respective disputed matters concerning ordained ministry and human sexuality, to the sacramental significance of interchurch families, and the relevance of Receptive Ecumenism in the lives of local churches. All are engaged as sites for potentially transformative ecclesial—that is, receptive ecumenical—learning. The recurrent dual concern has been to explore what a receptive ecumenical approach is able to contribute with constructive freshness and to ask how that, in turn, leads to the further reconfiguring and extending of the ways in which Receptive Ecumenism can actually be performed.

At the Second Receptive Ecumenism Conference, Kirsteen Kim noted that ‘learning to be church together is not only an inter-denominational exercise but also an inter-cultural one’.⁹ As complement and further extension of the process of testing Receptive Ecumenism in relation to fresh questions and contexts, the chapters in Part Three have recognized this and explored the possibilities and challenges pertaining to the adoption of receptive ecumenical ways of working in diverse international contexts. Particularly important here is Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator’s constructive exploration of the relevance of receptive ecumenical ways of thinking and proceeding in African country contexts not shaped by the historic disputes that have set the agenda for much formal ecumenical work. Perhaps then—and Linda Nicholls earlier exploration (Chapter 17) of the ways in which the Anglican Church of Canada is seeking to learn to give due space for the voices and concerns of indigenous peoples to be heard already suggested as much—Receptive Ecumenism has something to

⁹ Kim, ‘Inter-cultural Ecumenism: Rethinking Ecclesiology in Global Conversation’, unpublished paper presented at ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to Be Church Together’, Ushaw College, Durham, 11–15 January 2009.

offer in post-colonial settings. In two cases, exploring the contextual-cultural frontiers of Receptive Ecumenism has taken us beyond the domain of intra-Christian ecumenical engagement altogether and into the wider world of inter-faith relating. Whereas the former is appropriately focussed on the journey into full communion with each other in Christ and the Spirit, in inter-faith contexts the achievement of full communion of belief and practice in this order can never be an appropriate goal, regardless of timescale. Francis Clooney's contribution in this regard (Chapter 24) has been to pursue a critical-constructive reading of the points of resonance and difference between Receptive Ecumenism and Comparative Theology—the approach to close, textually-mediated inter-faith theological engagement which he and colleagues have developed—in a way that reinforces the need for careful, patient attention if one is truly to understand and learn from another's web of practice and belief. For his own part, John O'Brien's contribution (Chapter 25) has been to explore how the third-way, non-binary logic of Receptive Ecumenism resonates with that which is at work in the writings of the twelfth–thirteenth century (CE) Sufi mystic, Ibn al-'Arabi. Throughout this third part of the volume, it has again been evident that Receptive Ecumenism can properly be worked out differently in different contexts but with recognisable family resemblances between them.

Following all of this, the chapters in Part Four of the volume and its three sub-sections marked something of a gear-change. Prior to this point the primary focus was on Receptive Ecumenism as it plays out in relation to diverse ecclesial traditions, live issues, and international contexts. Here the attention has turned more directly to the kinds of self-reflexive issues about Receptive Ecumenism as a way of knowing, proceeding, and living in relation to the Christian ecumenical vocation that bubbled away in the background of many of the previous chapters. Where Antonia Pizzey (Chapter 37) has provided a lucid systematic analysis of the personal virtues required for the fruitful pursuit of receptive ecumenical ways of proceeding, Gregory Ryan (Chapter 26) has drawn on Andrew Rogers's work to delineate the specifically hermeneutical virtues required—collectively as well as personally—if Receptive Ecumenism's transformative potential for ecclesial communities is really to be unleashed. Taken together, this attention to the role of the virtues represents a significant deepening in understanding Receptive Ecumenism as a reasoned practice and as an authentic development of the pragmatics of Christian vocation. Of direct relevance also here is the emphasis placed by Bradford Hinze (Chapter 27) on the need for first-hand attention and Spirit-moved response to the laments of those scarred by wounds in the ecclesial body and the

call made by Ormond Rush (Chapter 28) to attend to the differently discerned ‘senses of the faith’ of other ecclesial traditions. Each of these contributions, from US and Australian Catholic Church contexts respectively, resonates with the call of the Francis papacy to a whole-church synodality—a theme echoed throughout the volume in numerous references to synodality, *indaba*, and *ubuntu*. In turn, Clare Watkins’s (Chapter 30) advocacy of the place of practical theology in the receptive ecumenical process and Jeff Astley’s (Chapter 29) consideration of some of the factors militating against Christian churches being effective learning communities have helped to clarify both some of the opportunities for and some of the obstacles standing in the way of the kind of concrete ecclesiology Receptive Ecumenism requires. Scripture sharing—breaking the bread of the Word together even when we cannot all break the bread of the Eucharist together—has always had an important role in receptive ecumenical events and engagements.¹⁰ Here this role has been most obviously performed by the four chapters comprising the second sub-section of this self-reflexive final part of the volume. Following Mike Higton’s (Chapter 31) reflections on scripture sharing as a potential locus for receptive ecumenical encounter, the respective specific textual readings by Balabanski and Trainor (Chapter 32) and John M. Barclay (Chapter 33) each contributed deep scriptural insights into serving the health of Christian communion. The integrating theme of the sub-section as a whole was then brought to crescendo by David Ford’s (Chapter 34) remarkable Johannine synthesis and associated set of programmatic proposals. Also taking Johannine texts (John 17 and 14:25–6) as her focus and drawing upon her close engagement with the ‘spiritual ecumenism’ of Abbé Paul Couturier (1881–1953) and the work of the Groupe des Dombes that he inspired, in this final sub-section Catherine Clifford (Chapter 35) has explored what form an appropriate spirituality for Receptive Ecumenism might take.¹¹ For

¹⁰ For example, see the role performed by Philip Endean’s scriptural reflections at the start of each main part of *RECCL*, each deriving from intentionally tone and theme-setting meditations delivered in the context of the Opening Liturgy and then Morning Prayer on each of the days of the first International Receptive Ecumenism Conference in January 2006.

¹¹ See Paul Couturier, ‘The Ecumenical Testament’, in *Paul Couturier and Unity in Christ*, Geoffrey Curtis (ed.), (London: SCM, 1964), 325–52; and Maurice Villain (ed.), *Œcuménisme spirituel. Les écrits de l’abbé Paul Couturier*, (Tournai: Casterman, 1963); also Mark Woodruff (ed.), *The Unity of Christians: The Vision of Paul Couturier. A Special Edition of The Messenger of the Catholic League* (October 2003–February 2004) No. 280 (London: The Catholic League, 2005 [2003]). For an insightful study of the relationship between Paul Couturier’s spiritual ecumenism and Receptive Ecumenism, see Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement*.

his own part, Callan Slipper (Chapter 36) has identified significant resonance in this regard with the spiritual writings of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare movement.

Each of these illuminates important aspects of the theory and practice of transformative learning in service of ecclesial conversion—in the first instance *within* particular ecclesial traditions and, subsequently, as a result of the new possibilities this can open, *between* them.¹² This constitutes both Receptive Ecumenism’s particular identity relative to the overall family of ecumenical approaches and the integrating focus of this volume. The preceding chapters by Clifford, Slipper, and Pizzey have each emphasized the essential role of individual and corporate conversion in any true spiritual ecumenism. Mindful both of the polyvalent nature of the volume and of the dynamic, adaptive quality of Receptive Ecumenism which that represents, it is this particular aspect of Receptive Ecumenism as transformative ecclesial learning that I wish now to develop as a distinctive challenge and possibility in the remainder of this chapter.

The Groupe des Dombes on the ‘Conversion of the Churches’ and the distinctiveness of the theology and practice of ecclesial conversion in Receptive Ecumenism

Founded by Couturier in 1937 as an unofficial but formally invited annual meeting of Catholic and Protestant theologians for prayer, spiritual encounter, and theological dialogue, the Groupe des Dombes is the world’s longest-running ecumenical forum.¹³ It takes its name from the Abbey of Notre-Dame des Dombes, near Lyon, where it generally met until the late 1990s. Catherine Clifford’s magisterial study of the Groupe’s methodological evolution traces a crucial development from a starting method of consensus to a more thoroughgoing emphasis

¹² Murray, ‘Foreword. Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit’, xx; and ‘Receptive Ecumenism seeks to do this in ways which at once serve, *as primary focus*, our respective greater flourishing *within* our own respective traditions and, *as secondary consequent focus*, a greater flourishing and depth of communion *between* our traditions.’ Murray, ‘Afterword. Receiving of Christ in the Spirit’, 158; also 159.

¹³ An earlier version of some material in this sub-section was first presented as a paper at the 68th annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (Miami, FL, 6–9 June 2013) as ‘Growing into the Fullness of Christ: Receptive Ecumenism as an Instrument of Ecclesial Conversion’.

on ecclesial conversion;¹⁴ one which can be seen to have both points of resonance with and difference from that at work in Receptive Ecumenism.¹⁵

In the early years and for some decades thereafter, the Groupe's focus—as would subsequently also be the case within many of the great bilateral dialogues—was on working for the reconciliation of apparently divergent teachings across separated traditions by seeking for agreed formula. Over time, this matured—as somewhat similarly within Receptive Ecumenism—into a recognition that whilst what I have referred to as the 'softwood' of mere misunderstandings and apparent differences can be reconciled in this way, the 'hardwood' of deeper differences pertaining to what are assumed to be defining confessional identities cannot.¹⁶ By contrast, the Groupe came to the conviction that the overcoming of such deeper, hardwood differences requires—and here there is some nuanced but significant difference from the emphasis in Receptive Ecumenism—a *kenotic* preparedness to relinquish key aspects

¹⁴ See Clifford, *The Groupe des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); also Clifford (ed.), *For the Communion of the Churches: The Contribution of the Groupe Des Dombes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and Joseph Famerée, 'The Contribution of the *Groupe des Dombes* to Ecumenism: Past Achievements and Future Challenges', *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008), 99–116.

¹⁵ For the, only partially accurate, likening of Receptive Ecumenism to the approach of the Groupe des Dombes, see Adelbert Denaux, 'Ecclesial Repentance and Conversion: Receptive Ecumenism and the Mandate and Method of ARCIC III', in Stephan van Erp and Karim Schelkens (eds.), *Conversion and Church: The Challenge of Ecclesial Renewal. Essays in Honour of H. P. J. Witte* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 304–25 (319–21).

¹⁶ See Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist*, 51 (2014), 1–8 (3).

of such confessional identities,¹⁷ at least as absolutized, and a correlative willingness to walk the way of substantive ecclesial conversion.¹⁸ As Adelbert Denaux expresses it, ‘Each confessional tradition should be open to a radical change of its confessional identity in a more

¹⁷ From the use of ἐκένωσεν, the third person aorist (simple past) of the Greek verb κενόω (to empty out), in Phil. 2:7 to speak of Jesus—or a pre-existent divine agent who became incarnate in Jesus—as having ‘emptied himself’, the noun κένωσις, *kénōsis* (the act of emptying) has at various points been embraced in Christian theology and spirituality to valorize a self-giving understood as ‘self-emptying’. From the late 20th century to the time of publication, this has again become a popular motif in much global north theology and spirituality. For a highly influential example, see Sarah Coakley, ‘Kenōsis and Subversion: On the Repression of “Vulnerability” in Christian Feminist Writing’, in her *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3–39. For incisive critique of this tradition as theologically distorted and spiritually and pastorally damaging, see Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 108–13; and Karen Kilby, ‘The Seductions of Kenosis’, in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies (eds.), *Suffering and the Christian Life* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 163–74. For something of the debate in New Testament scholarship as to whether Phil. 2:7 refers to the earthly Jesus, or a pre-existent divine agent, or both, see James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edn., (London: SCM, 1989 [1980]), xviii–xix & 114–21, 123, 125–8; also Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003 [1998]), 281–8; compare Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation & in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, rev. edn. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997 [1983, 1967]); and Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (eds.), *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998). For the use of ‘kenosis’ by the Groupe des Dombes, see ‘Christian identity is operative in acts of service. It is displayed in kenosis (“renunciation” and “self-emptying”)', Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, trans. James Greig, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993) [*Pour la conversion des Eglises* (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1991)], 20; also 69–71.

¹⁸ See ‘Essentially, *metanoia* is not aimed here at failings or marginal faults—of which the churches must also repent. It concerns their confessions of faith, precisely where the churches call themselves in the fullest sense of the term “Catholic” or “Orthodox” or “Protestant”, but also where these designations concern apparently non-negotiable elements of their faith.’ Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 4; and ‘In 1943 the Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple said: “What is needed is that each of our existing Christian denominations should die in order to rise again in a more splendid form.” At the youth conference in Lausanne in 1960, Reformed theologian Johannes Hoekendijk took up the same theme: “There will be no unity until we are ready to die as a Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox in the expectant hope of a resurrection in the presence of Christ, and his one church.’ 24.

genuine ecclesial (organisational and sacramental) “form”¹⁹. The prescience of this basic shift from seeking after consensus to calling for a respective walking the way of conversion is evident in the fact that the Groupe was already beginning to make this shift in 1970, whereas the bilaterals would continue to pursue variants of consensus ecumenism—with some good effect, it needs be acknowledged—for decades to come.

The Groupe’s theology of ecclesial conversion came to full articulation in its 1991 text, *Pour la conversion des Eglises*. Four points are notable for current purposes; all points where the resonance with Receptive Ecumenism is at its clearest. First, as a helpful offset to the kenotic encouragement to relinquish the absolutizing of confessional identities, it is emphasized that far from threatening any real diminishment of identity, such commitment to a process of continual conversion *is* the very heart of Christian identity.²⁰ Second, it is clarified that nor does the need for openness to conversion within confessional identities mean that the plurality of such confessional identities should cease to exist in all and every form but that their definition in absolutized oppositional terms should be overcome.²¹ The somewhat underdeveloped implication here—emphasized more directly by Receptive Ecumenism—is that the heart of any given confessional identity is capable of being given fresh, even

¹⁹ Denaux, ‘Ecclesial Repentance and Conversion’, 321.

²⁰ See ‘A key insight in the pages that follow is that identity as a Christian or as a church is ultimately rooted in precisely such a movement of conversion, a turning again to the common centre, so that this identity can remain living and authentic only through a continuing conversion.’ Konrad Raiser, ‘Preface’, in Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, ix-xi (x); and ‘... *a fortiori* Christian identity could not be constituted and sustained, either personally or ecclesially, without constant and continued conversion.’ 4; and ‘... conversion is the very opposite of a loss of identity.’ 75; also 2, 15.

²¹ See ‘... if some should confine themselves to skimming through this work we would ask them to retain this from it: the Groupe des Dombes believes that the divisive character of the confessions of faith that belong to the Roman Catholic and the Reformation churches is not final. It can and must disappear. ... The plurality, certainly, must not disappear, but it is the duty of Christians to do everything to ensure that it is compatible with unity and communion (*koinonia*).’ Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 3; and ‘Reconversion from this consists in restoring these three motifs—all legitimate and all to be safeguarded—to their normal order of priority. But the divisive factor in them must after all become—or again become—a complementary difference ...’ 6; and ‘This does not entail the sacrifice of legitimate difference but a quest for a path which no longer makes it appear as divisive divergence.’ 8.

expanded, expression.²² Third, recognition is correspondingly given that identity is not only a matter of origins but also of futures;²³ and, fourth, with this that absolutized, opposed confessional identities are each to be viewed as falling short of the fullness of Christian ecclesial identity.²⁴

Taking these four points together, particularly helpful is the way in which the in itself somewhat problematic kenotic motif, advocating the relinquishing of aspects of one's own confessional identity, is qualified by an orientation towards future fullness. From a receptive ecumenical perspective, however, this could be further strengthened through deeper reflection on the way in which the core divine dynamic of 'life-giving, self-giving' is alternatively understood within Receptive Ecumenism as always being an overflowing fulfilling—always from fullness to fullness, without diminishment, and always creative-transformative—rather than as an emptying.²⁵ As is suggested in the Receptive Ecumenism literature and related, this core divine dynamic of life-giving, self-giving can well be thought of as the initiating-transforming movement of Love that *is* the Spirit;²⁶ which is the same movement we are shown being performed throughout the life of Jesus, most specifically in his life unto death on

²² See '... confessional identities too must be converted in order to be faithful to themselves.' Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 2.

²³ See 'Christian identity is always a Christian becoming. It is an opening up to an eschatological beyond which ceaselessly draws it forward and prevents it from shutting itself up in itself.' Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 20.

²⁴ See 'To be genuine in Christian terms, a confessional identity must include fullness and universality.' Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 23.

²⁵ For further on the divine dynamic of 'life-giving, self-giving' Love, its being core to Christian understanding of and existence in relation to God in Christ and the Spirit, and its relationship with *passio*, see Murray, 'Living Sacrifice: Is there a Non-pathological Way of Living Suffering as Sacrifice?', in Kilby and Davies (eds.), 189–206; and for its specific relevance for Receptive Ecumenism, see Murray, 'Afterword. Receiving of Christ in the Spirit', 169.

²⁶ On the Spirit as not needing only to be understood as agent of communication and reception—as is dominant in the Western tradition—but also as an initiating-transforming agency, in a way that resonates with Bradford Hinze's argument in Chapter 27, see Murray, 'Charisma, Institution und Trinität im Werk Karl Rahners: Zur Sicherung einer notwendigen pneumatologische Basis für eine ganzheitliche Theologie des Dienstamts' in Gunda Werner (ed.), *Gerettet durch Begeisterung: Reform der katholischen Kirche durch pfingstlich-charismatische Religiosität?* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2018), 145–63.

the cross. In turn, the intrinsically creative-transforming character of this divine dynamic of life-giving, self-giving Love is manifest both in the effects on those whom Jesus encountered during his earthly lifetime and, most definitively, in his being raised in the power of the Spirit, and all that flowed from that. Whatever the rhetorical significance of ἐκένωσεν ('emptied himself') in Phil. 2:7,²⁷ perhaps it can be made to do too much work as a seemingly literal 'emptying' and divesting of self in some interpretations. The point is that quite apart from the destructive pathologies of Christian spirituality which can result from any prioritising of self-diminishment, theologically it is just very odd to think in any substantive terms of a divine self-emptying. In orthodox, evangelically-rooted, catholic Christian understanding, God's loving, life-giving, self-giving in Christ and the Spirit is not in any sense the emptying, or diminishing, of God's being-in-act but its fullness.²⁸

Significant also in the thinking of the Groupe des Dombes from a receptive ecumenical perspective is the recognition that far from the plurality of confessional identities being eradicated through engagement in ecumenically-situated processes of ecclesial conversion, it should result in a plurality duly enriched and reformulated precisely through this self-critical engagement of the diverse confessional identities with each other. Again, however, whilst this sounds helpful resonance with receptive ecumenical ways of thinking and proceeding, it too could be further strengthened by replacing any notion of convergence—which might otherwise falsely suggest a uniform, common point of arrival as the appropriate goal of ecclesial conversion—with a clearer long-term orientation towards full communion in continuing real diversity.²⁹ By contrast, Receptive Ecumenism explicitly celebrates what is distinctive to each and affirms such distinctions as being of lasting significance for all by asking how each can learn from their others' distinctiveness in ways that can enrich their own ecclesial tradition and help to solve the particular difficulties and problems encountered there.

²⁷ On the rhetorical purpose of the passage being to establish counter-cultural standards for the Christian community, see Michael Wade Martin and Bryan A. Nash, 'Philippians 2:6–11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 66/1 (2015), 90–138.

²⁸ See 'Far from giving up his filial relation to the Father, which made him what he is, Jesus displayed it in its primordial truth and made it a reality as a man by his earthly pilgrimage.' Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, 71.

²⁹ See Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden, (London: SCM, 1984 [1982]).

Receptive Ecumenism sets each tradition on an open-ended journey towards its own healing and greater flourishing. Far from this being a journey towards the absorption of the many into a great undifferentiated unity, it is a journey towards the particularity of each coming to full flourishing and shining in all its particular glory in a configured whole. Jean-Marie Tillard writes similarly of the need for ‘an ecclesiology which discovers on the faces of the different “confessions” the features inscribed there by God’s faithfulness and, from there, fathoms the nature of the Church of God.’ Rather than seeking ‘to eliminate’ the differences between the confessions, the point is ‘to cross-fertilize, to enrich each other’, and to ‘correct each other’.³⁰ The underlying principle here, as Henri de Lubac expresses it in *Catholicism*, is that ‘True union does not ... dissolve into one another the beings that it brings together, but ... bring(s) them to completion by means of one another.’³¹

With all of this, whilst passing acknowledgement *is* made in §49 of *Pour la conversion des Eglises* that the needed areas for kenotic conversion might pertain to ‘ecclesial structure’ and ‘the existential implementation of Christian reality’, and not simply to the ‘sphere of the language of faith’, these aspects would benefit from considerable development. In the Groupe’s work, the focus has frequently been on wider doctrinal rather than specifically ecclesial and ecclesiological aspects of opposed confessional identities. By contrast, as has been indicated a number of times in this volume, the general starting point in Receptive Ecumenism is with the experienced, practical, systemic stresses and strains within one’s own confessional identity—either as directly felt needs, or as brought to awareness by what is found desirable in another tradition but relatively lacking in one’s own by comparison.³² The dual concern is to ask how the existing configurations of one’s own tradition’s doctrinal webs are complicit in such stresses, strains, and pragmatic incoherences, and how they might

³⁰ Jean-Marie R. Tillard, ‘Towards an Ecumenical Ecclesiology of Communion’, in Lawrence S. Cunningham (ed.), *Ecumenism, Present Realities and Future Prospects: Papers Read at the Tantur Ecumenical Center, Jerusalem, 1997* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 133–48 (138 & 139).

³¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard from the 1947 4th French edn., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988 [1950]), 330; also 300.

³² See Murray, ‘Foreword. Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit’, xx–xxii.

potentially be repaired by learning from the differently configured webs of other traditions and adapting one's own accordingly, with dynamic integrity retained.

It is further significant that in this way the motivational basis offered by Receptive Ecumenism for engaging in the inevitably challenging process of ecclesial conversion consists not, primarily, in simply seeking to reinforce the high ideal of the call to Christian unity and the Christian responsibility to commit to walking its costly path. Whilst guilt-trips and high ideals can respectively bring us up short and serve to reorient us, on their own they are unstable and inadequate resources for sustaining a commitment to real ecclesial change through the necessary long-haul of the ecumenical journey. There will always appear to be just too much else more pressing to do and too much else seemingly closer to home to feel guilty about. A different motivational basis is required. For Receptive Ecumenism it consists in a characteristic pragmatic-pneumatic conjunction of need and desire. For example:

when the movement of attending in the Spirit to our own and the other's reality is lent wings and achieves take-off then we have need and desire conjoined: both repentant recognition and the dreaming of dreams. This is the holy erotics of Receptive Ecumenism, which has the capacity to move our imaginations, wills, determinations, and minds to find ways, with dynamic integrity, to overcome the obstacles which stand in the way of consummated full communion.³³

In this way, Receptive Ecumenism seeks to present ecumenical engagement and the opportunities it opens for transformative ecclesial learning as not just one more burdensome thing to do but as a positive, pneumatologically-situated, charismatically-drawn, energy-releasing resource for helping the churches address their respective real felt issues and difficulties; difficulties with which they already find themselves confronted.

As regards what we might refer to as this 'ecumenism of need', the point is that recognized self-interest and pragmatic navigation of same is generally a much stronger motivator for change than moralising alone. It is, perhaps, held in the providence of God that the same period as has witnessed a significant energy-drain around formal, institutional ecumenism and a more sober appreciation for its long-haul nature has also witnessed a sharper realization

³³ Murray, 'Foreword. Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit', xxii.

within many ecclesial traditions about their own limitations and respective need for change in ways beyond their own powers to effect. For Receptive Ecumenism, this sense of need represents a great ecumenical opportunity. When it can no longer be suppressed and controlled, a sharp sense of difficulty and need can be a great motivator for change in a way that high idealism more rarely can be. Consequently, when we can harness pragmatic self-interest and put it to work in service of the ideals to which we know ourselves called, we are presented with a moment of grace: a crisis/κρίσις that is also a kairos/καιρός . In receptive ecumenical understanding, we are now living through just such a moment of grace, when the ecumenism of the hardwood and the work of transformative ecclesial conversion can begin to take us out into the deep.

Further, as indicated, in the understanding and practice of Receptive Ecumenism complementing and reinforcing the powerful motivating factors at work in this ‘ecumenism of need’ are the—perhaps even more powerful—draws and movements of what we might, in turn, refer to as the ‘ecumenism of desire’, or even the ‘ecumenism of love’. Aware, even if only in a tacit, suppressed manner at first, of deep-seated needs and frustrations in our own tradition—deep-seated needs and frustrations which we seemingly cannot resolve internally—we come to look with the eyes of desire on the particular gifts and strengths of our ecclesial others. We desire to move towards them and to benefit for ourselves from the gifts and strengths we see there and which we know ourselves to need. This is ecumenical engagement as a matter of falling in love: if awareness of lack and need disposes us to be prepared to change, loving, even erotic, desire draws us on and gives our soul flight and our bodies speed. As all of this imagery is meant to suggest, the conviction is that Receptive Ecumenism as a way of ecclesial conversion is a spiritual-ecclesial-theological journey, of which the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ is at once the initiator, the heart of our desire, and the perception and love that moves us. In this way, Receptive Ecumenism seeks to embody the full radical intent of Paul Couturier’s spiritual ecumenism, by refusing any false reduction of it simply to praying together and receiving of each other’s spiritual and liturgical riches, and by embracing its full potential for structural, institutional, ecclesial, and theological renewal.

The explicit primary emphasis throughout Receptive Ecumenism is not on what must be relinquished for ecumenical progress to be possible—as is most immediately communicated by the Groupe des Dombes’ *Pour la conversion des Eglises*—but on what we ourselves have to gain. Here Receptive Ecumenism is shaped by an Ignatian-inspired understanding of

conversion as always *out of that which frustrates us and into that which is of real life for us*. Within Ignatian formation, the call to personal conversion is most fundamentally understood not, primarily, as an act of mortification and dispossession but as a positive call to greater life, interior freedom, and flourishing. Core to this is the discerning of what binds and frees relative to the movements of the Holy Spirit, who is understood as leading from frustration and confusion (‘desolation’) into life and peace (‘consolation’).³⁴ Analogously, it is this understanding of conversion as being *from* what limits through sinful distortion so as to move more fully *into* the abundant richness of God’s gracing of us that sounds through Receptive Ecumenism.

Accordingly, Receptive Ecumenism views ecumenical ecclesial conversion not, primarily, as a relinquishing and diminishment of respective ecclesial identities but as a freeing of them to become more fully what they most truly are through expansion rather than diminishment. The vision is that that which is thwarted in the ecclesial existence of one can be tended to and enhanced by that which is fluent of grace in another. From the Catholic perspective, it is—as has frequently been intoned—about us becoming more not less Catholic precisely by becoming, for example: appropriately more Anglican, by becoming more synodal; appropriately more Methodist, by becoming more connexionally Catholic; appropriately more Pentecostal, by becoming more charismatically Catholic, and so on. Indeed, Congar was already moving towards saying something similar in 1950, describing the purpose of a true Catholic ecumenism as ‘being to surmount a complex of conventional ideas which, far from being in the true Catholic “tradition”, represent its stagnation and attenuation.’ He continues, ‘Yet, painful as such an effort is, it soon reaps its reward in the expansion of our own

³⁴ See St Ignatius of Loyola, ‘Rules for Discernment’, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, §§313–36, trans. Michael Ivens (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), 94–101. For commentary, see Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 205–37; also Jules J. Toner, SJ, *A Commentary on St Ignatius’ Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: A Guide to the Principles and Practice* (St Louis, MI: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1982); and Michael J. Buckley, ‘Rules for the Discernment of Spirits’, *The Way*, 20 (Autumn 1973), 19–37, reprinted in Philip Sheldrake (ed.), *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises* (London: SPCK, 1991), 219–37.

catholicity and in countless discoveries and enrichments.³⁵ This is not conversion from traditioned distinctiveness to a basic commonality but to a redeemed diversity and dynamic communion in which the distinctiveness of each is enriched by learning from transposed aspects of the other traditions, to the point of achieving mutual recognition across differences that need no longer divide. Again with Tillard, ‘The structuring of the full and visible communion is in no way a levelling, or a disappearance of confessional riches.’³⁶ And also: ‘The union for which ecumenical accords are searching does not envisage a fusion of all parties in one and the same pattern of ecclesial living; rather, they are aiming for a communion of all in one and the same faith, with room for a diversity of form and practice’.³⁷

This is ecclesial conversion understood not as a fundamental switching or diminishing of identities but as a process of integral change and growth through appropriate ecumenical learning which, in the first instance, is for the sake of the health of one’s own ecclesial community, and from which it is anticipated that further ecumenical possibilities will in turn flow. The conviction is that through walking this path of receptive ecumenical learning for the sake of their own health, the traditions will come closer together. Not because they have set out to converge upon an agreed and pre-envisaged limited common ground, requiring them each to leave behind their distinctive identities. But because they have each differently walked the path of conversion—indeed, have ministered to each other on their respective journeys along this path—and so will each variously come to a place of recognising themselves in the other, the other in themselves, and each together in the total truth of Christ and the Spirit.

The end of ecumenism—growing differently into the fullness of Christ in real communion with the Spirit

All of this might well lead us to ask as to what form of inter-ecclesial unity Receptive Ecumenism anticipates and is taking us towards? Some brief consideration is in order before

³⁵ Congar, ‘The Call to Ecumenism and the Work of the Holy Spirit’ (1950), in Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, trans. Philip Loretz, (London/Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966 [1964]), 100-106 (104–105).

³⁶ Tillard, ‘Towards an Ecumenical Ecclesiology of Communion’, 145.

³⁷ Tillard, “‘Reception’: A Time to Beware of False Steps’, *Ecumenical Trends*, 14/10 (1985), 145–8 (147).

bringing this chapter and volume to conclusion, or at least punctuation. Given what was earlier noted about each of us individually and each of the Christian traditions corporately being unique sharings in and showings of God’s love in Christ and the Spirit—with each having an irreplaceable contribution to make to the gathering of all in that ‘all and in all’—we can be confident that the ecumenical future will never be a grey uniformity. By contrast, as has been clearly at work throughout the analysis of ecclesial conversion presented here, the form of unity—better, communion—at issue and anticipated in Receptive Ecumenism is one which takes the abiding significance of particularity and diversity absolutely seriously. The vision is not that any cease being who they are but that all are freed to become more fully and more fluently who we most deeply already are and are called to be.

As such and as I have noted before, for one possible image for the form of ecclesial unity that Receptive Ecumenism anticipates and seeks to serve, we might borrow from our sisters and brothers in the LGBTQ community and say that what we have in view is a rainbow unity, a rainbow communion.³⁸ By which is referenced the gathering of all in full ecclesial communion across and through significant diversity.³⁹ Indeed, as then noted, rainbow is too limited an image, for it is, by analogy, not just the visible spectrum but every possible frequency on the ecclesial electromagnetic spectrum that is to be brought into configured communion in Christ and the Spirit.

³⁸ See Murray, ‘Afterword. Receiving of Christ in the Spirit’, 169–70. On the need for the churches to attend to what LGBTQ members are saying, see here Chapter 17: Linda Nicholls, ‘Learning to Love Differently Well: Human Sexuality, the Churches, and Receptive Ecumenism’ and Chapter 27: Bradford Hinze, ‘What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches through the Laments of the Faithful?’

³⁹ Compare:

‘No one has monopolies on truth.
Rather, like a prism’s dispersed side
Rainbowed truth allows us variants
Of another side’s pure gathered light.’

Micheal O’Siadhail, ‘3. Steering. Canto 5. A Beckoned Dream (iii)’, *The Five Quintets* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 229–33 (231).

To alter the register, the communion in diversity which Receptive Ecumenism anticipates and serves might alternatively be imaged as like that of a polyphonous choir singing in harmony, wherein each distinct voice is required to play its part in the performance of the whole.

Or again, as I have shared a number of times, one of my own favourite images for our anticipated reconciled full communion in Christ and the Spirit is that of a fully-decked, fully illuminated family Christmas tree. Not one with the uniformity of colour and style that one finds in shopping arcades but one with the kind of non-uniform, organic assemblage of diverse particular items, gathered ad hoc on trips, collected, and passed on through generations, each treasured in its uniqueness, and then brought into concert with each other in the dressing of the tree. Here, each unique ornament gathered over years, each with its own story, is needed for the whole showing. I love to look at our decked tree from various different angles and perspectives, letting my eyes go slightly out of focus in order to enjoy its shimmering unity, before then bringing them back into focus and appreciating each ornament in its particularity of relation with the others.

Moreover, Receptive Ecumenism does not simply hold out hope for the future achievement of the fully-decked ecclesial tree with all its diverse shimmering particularity in orchestrated harmony. Receptive Ecumenism also provides a way in which we can live now, oriented in anticipation on that hope, and in a fashion that will take us substantively closer to its realisation. This is a way of leaning-in to and living out of the Spirit so that the church's witness to our communion in the risen reality of Christ might be more clearly manifest for the salvation of the world.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For the image of the Spirit in the Receptive Ecumenism literature as uncontrolled, uncontrollable, initiating-sustaining-transforming pentecostal power, into whom we can lean our full weight, and who sets us on our feet, energising and impelling us into action, see Murray, 'Foreword. Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit', xxii, n.10.

Conclusion and *Missa*

The essential argument of this concluding chapter is that the way of reparative receptive ecumenical learning—understood as a way of refreshment and *ressourcement* by and through the Spirit-gifted presence of Christ in our separated ecclesial others—is the only way in which the currently divided traditions can walk towards full structural, ministerial, sacramental communion and their own healing together. Rather than prioritising, as the Groupe des Dombes tends to do, the undoubted need for real ecclesial conversion as key to any further substantive ecumenical progress, Receptive Ecumenism drills down deeper and maintains that such ecclesial conversion itself first requires the refreshment of ecumenical engagement and receptive ecclesial learning if it is ever actually to be achieved. Only through the sharpened sense of need and correlative expansion of desire and imagination that such ecumenical engagement can promote will the respective traditions—which cannot save themselves—be able to move beyond the reinforcing closed logic of current habits of thought and practice. Thomas Reese expressed it well at the first international Receptive Ecumenism conference: ‘We used to think that the conversion of the churches was required for any ecumenical progress. Receptive Ecumenism is teaching us that receptive ecumenical learning is first required if we are to have any real conversion of the churches.’⁴¹ In the understanding and practice of Receptive Ecumenism, it is precisely such transformative ecclesial learning through receptive ecumenical engagement that holds the key to enabling the required processes of real ecclesial conversion; processes which can, in turn, open the way—the only way—to any further substantive ecumenical progress. Receptive ecumenical learning as a locus of transformative ecclesial learning is the way both to intra-ecclesial reform and renewal and, thereby, to achieving the inter-ecclesial ecumenical goal of fullness of communion and embraced diversity in Christ and the Spirit. May we continue to walk this way in dynamic faith, sure hope, and active love—and thereby tend together to the wounded one church of Christ.

⁴¹ Reese, ‘Organisational Factors Inhibiting Receptive Catholic Learning’, presentation at the First Receptive Ecumenism International Conference, Ushaw College Durham, 12–17 January 2006.