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### **In Search of a Way**

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### **Abstract and Keywords**

This chapter explores ecumenical methodology. It is organized in six sections. The first reflects on ecumenism as a ‘method’, a ‘way’, variously understood, about which there is a second-order methodological discourse concerning how it is best pursued. The second reflects on the variant approaches of ‘Life and Work’ ecumenism and ‘Faith and Order’ ecumenism. The third assesses some of the strategies which have hitherto been important in bilateral dialogue and identifies the need now for an ecumenical gear-change. The fourth section pursues this idea by focusing on a strategy which has come to be referred to as ‘receptive ecumenism’. Following an exploration of the methodological implications of this strategy in relation to bilateral dialogues in the fifth section, the sixth section finally explores its implications at the level of the local church.

Keywords: bilateral dialogue, Faith and Order, Life and Work, method, receptive ecumenism, strategy, way

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## **Introduction**

This exploration of ecumenical methodology is in six sections. The first section briefly explores the sense in which it is appropriate to think of ecumenism as a ‘method’, a ‘way’, in relation to which it is in turn appropriate to think of there being a second-order methodological discourse about more and less fruitful, more and less adequate, ways of construing this ecumenical way. Also briefly introduced in this context is the fact of there being some markedly differing understandings of the goal of ecumenism, and hence markedly differing understandings of appropriate ways to travel towards the goal. The second section turns to explore both the basic necessity of ‘Life and Work’ understandings of the ecumenical task and the intrinsic limits of such understandings relative to the full demands of the sacramentality of the church and its inescapably structural and institutional dimensions, as appreciated by ‘Faith and Order’ ecumenism. The third section focuses on the range of strategies in service of structural and sacramental unity that have been adopted by the bilateral dialogues thus far and assesses

their achievements and limitations relative to the changed context in which Faith and Order ecumenism now has to operate. The need that this suggests for an ecumenical gear-change is taken up in the fourth section, which presents the basic vision operative in a fresh strategy that has come to be referred to as 'receptive ecumenism'. Following this, the fifth section specifically explores the methodological implications of receptive ecumenism at the level of formal bilateral dialogues. Complementing this, the final section explores the implications of receptive ecumenism at the level of the local church.

## Ecumenism as a Method, a Way of Christian Witness and Existence

From the outset the question needs asking as to what 'methodology', with all its connotations of systematic rigour, programmed procedure, and focused intent (Lonergan 1972), has to do with something as pluriform, complex, contextual, and intrinsically relational as the Christian ecumenical journey? Is not the mere bringing of these concepts together an example of the abstracted reification and concern to impose order on the messy reality of empirical church life for which systematic theology is sometimes criticized (Healy 2000, 3, 25, 32–49)? While this is indeed a legitimate concern, the burden of this chapter is to argue that, when understood aright, methodology—as also strategic thinking and planning more broadly—can properly be seen to be of intrinsic significance for any self-aware pursuit of the ecumenical task.

Here it is helpful to recall that if methodology is self-critical thinking and reasoning about 'method', method in turn—deriving from the Greek words *meta* ('after') and *hodos* ('way')—is literally about searching 'after a way' and the pursuing of such a way. This language of 'pursuing a way' felicitously serves to move discussion from the register of apparent abstract theorization towards one that has a far more natural resonance and intimate relationship with Christian tradition. After all, Christianity was itself first spoken of as a way, indeed as '*the Way*' (Acts 18:26; 19:9, 23; 24:14); to be precise, as a following in the way of Jesus of Nazareth, himself regarded as '*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*' (John 14:4–6; also Matt. 7:13–14; 16:24; 22:16; Mark 8:34; 12:14; Luke 9:23; 20:21; 24:32; 1 Cor. 12:31; Heb. 10:20; 2 Pet. 2:2, 21).

This range of metaphors can usefully be extended: if Christianity is the Spirit-led way of conformity to and participation in the Spirit-filled communion that the earthly Jesus enjoyed with the God he knew as 'Abba'—thereby disclosing in this order the Trinitarian communion and relations of love that constitute the eternal life of God—then Christian ecumenism is the way of seeking a form of restored relations between the fractured Christian traditions that can appropriately reflect and witness to this Trinitarian communion and to the gospel of reconciliation that Jesus proclaimed. As such, 'ecumenical methodology' in turn falls into place as that process of self-consciously and self-critically reflecting on how in a given context the Christian traditions might most appropriately and most effectively walk this way towards bearing coherent and

convincing witness to the Trinitarian communion of God and to the gospel of reconciliation.

Here, however, we encounter a problem that has run through the modern ecumenical movement from its outset: if methodology is self-critical reflection on method and if method is essentially a way of arriving at a goal, then we need some kind of basic common understanding—not a detailed outline and agreement, to be sure, but a basic common understanding nevertheless—of what the goal is that is being aimed at, as also of the nature of the obstacles that need to be overcome, before we can hope to have any shared understanding of appropriate methods for walking towards the goal. However, from the outset of the modern ecumenical movement differing construals of the appropriate goal of Christian ecumenism have coexisted in occasionally uneasy relationship—sometimes placed alongside each other as alternative projected goals, and at other times integrated as interrelated aspects of one common goal. The most significant tension has been between so-called ‘Life and Work’ ecumenism and ‘Faith and Order’ ecumenism.

## The Need for and Limits of Life and Work Ecumenism

The origins of the modern ecumenical movement are to be found in the missionary activities of Protestant churches in the nineteenth century. The reality of their frequently being engaged in close geographical proximity on a common but separately pursued—indeed, competitively pursued—task of evangelization gave rise to a sense of stark contrast and performative contradiction between the gospel of reconciliation being proclaimed and the multiple divisions actually marking Christianity, a lived contradiction that was increasingly recognized as diminishing the witness of the one church of Christ and requiring of reconciliation between the divided churches themselves.

These concerns issued in the landmark 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, frequently spoken of as the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement. In this manner, a concern for the coherence of Christian witness and for credibility in mission has been central to ecumenical endeavour from the outset. Beyond Edinburgh 1910 this concern came to continuing expression both in the establishment of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921 and in the international conferences on Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925 and Oxford in 1937, focused on how the churches, even in their institutionally divided state, might share and work together so as to give cogent witness in a given time and place.

It is notable that many of the stock-in-trade activities of ecumenical engagement even to this day still effectively fall into this category. The common concern is to pursue activities which help to build relationship and fellow feeling between the churches while they are still short of structural unity, and which promote effective cooperation in witness and mission. This is the case whether one thinks of acts of common prayer (e.g. during the

annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), facilitating the spiritual ecumenism called for by Paul Couturier (1881–1953), or of scripture sharing and common formation in faith, or of pulpit exchanges and clergy fraternals, or of acts of common witness (e.g. Good Friday walks), or of the sharing of resources (e.g. joint appointments and personnel), or of acts of common mission and social action (e.g. aid for asylum seekers, food banks). Similarly, many of the structures of ecumenism (e.g. Local Ecumenical Partnerships, regional and national meetings of ecumenical officers or church leaders) are geared towards facilitating the living and working together of the still-divided churches.

All of this is of massive significance. Such initiatives, activities, and structures have served to transform out of all recognition the relationships between the divided Christian traditions. Here it is worth noting the stark contrast between the normalization of prayer in common and the strictures of the 1917 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church (Peters 2001, canon 1258). Collectively, such initiatives, activities, and structures have effected a complete sea change in the prevailing relations between the churches, serving to place the ecumenical endeavour in a vastly different context from that which prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century. They provide an invaluable corrective to the impaired witness of the divided churches.

It is, accordingly, entirely appropriate to view Life and Work initiatives and activities as the very lifeblood and oxygen of ecumenism, without which nothing else is possible. But, equally, like oxygen and lifeblood, Life and Work ecumenism cannot be an end in itself. It exists in service of a purpose, that of drawing the divided churches towards reconciled life and work—a purpose, moreover, which it cannot fulfil on its own. The point is that no matter how much praying together, sharing together, living together, and acting together the churches achieve, such increased conformity of life and work is never alone going to solve the ecumenical problem. At its core the ecumenical problem pertains to the broken sign-value presented by the structurally and institutionally divided nature of the churches, which in many cases leaves them incapable of fully recognizing each other's authenticated ministers and formal decision-making processes.

For the healing of this more challenging level of Christian woundedness, Life and Work ecumenism, for all its essential contribution, is insufficient. It can further a loose associational federation of still institutionally divided churches that are prepared to share and work together despite continuing significant differences that prevent full mutual recognition, but it cannot itself advance full structural and sacramental unity—which, of course, need not imply uniformity.

Here it is significant that in the same year as the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, there was also a call for a similar world conference that would bring church leaders and theologians together from across the traditions to discuss differences of faith, ministry, and church order. This eventually led to the 1927 Faith and Order international conference in Lausanne, providing the third great strand which, along with the IMC and the Life and Work movement, eventually formed the threefold woven cord of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC story, the story of 'conciliar ecumenism' (Kinnamon

and Cope 1997, 110–111), has ever since been one of seeking to hold these strands together and to give each its due.

This has never been easy. What should be complementary and mutually necessary visions and strategies have in practice frequently found themselves in tension and in danger of unravelling into competing and contrary understandings of the ecumenical way and how it should be walked. If the Life and Work agenda is pressed to the exclusion of Faith and Order concerns, as was a danger during Konrad Raiser's period as General Secretary of the WCC (1993–2002; see Raiser 1991), Christian unity becomes a merely federalized or associational 'reconciled diversity' without structural unity. Equally, if Faith and Order is pressed to the exclusion of Life and Work, the result can be an abstracted idealism that pursues the way towards future doctrinal, sacramental, and structural unity—again, unity not uniformity—as a somewhat theorized game of concepts with little real effect on ordinary church life.

There have been two major instruments for classical Faith and Order ecumenism. On the one hand there have been various WCC-sponsored multilateral processes explicitly orientated towards producing convergence statements. Most successful here was the landmark 1982 text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Commission 1982), the success of which the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC hopes to repeat with its 2013 text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Commission 2013), itself the fruit of many years of multilateral discussion. On the other hand are the various formal international bilateral dialogues that have been established between churches, and which since their inception in the period following the Catholic Church's dramatic entry into the ecumenical movement at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) have made some quite remarkable progress. Indeed, on account of the seeming pace of early bilateral progress, in that heady golden age—which now, perhaps, appears to be a period of youthful exuberance and over-optimism—the expectation was that full structural reconciliation could be achieved within a generation.

Despite the very real achievements of the bilaterals, however, it is now clear that not only have such expectations not yet been realized, in reality they cannot now feasibly be envisaged as being realized for the foreseeable and even imaginable future. Nevertheless, while recognizing this, and buoyed by the recognition that Christian hope is for what is not yet possessed and cannot even be seen (Rom. 8:24–5), the classical strategies of the bilaterals need now to be examined in some detail in order to assess their respective achievements and limitations, and so discern what it might now mean to live the ecumenical way by such hope.

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## Achievements and Limits of Traditional Bilateral Strategies

A good way to assess the various strategies hitherto operative in the bilateral dialogues is to focus on the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), which since its establishment following Vatican II has, within the English-speaking world at least, been one of the most high-profile and influential of all the dialogues. The standard ARCIC pattern has involved annual meetings of teams of representative theologians working together on historic causes of division (e.g. Catholic understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass relative to Anglican emphasis—in line with Lutheran and Calvinist conviction alike—on the sole sufficiency of the sacrificial death of Christ), with a view to seeking ways beyond such divisions by showing them as no longer needing to be viewed as communion-dividing. The achievements have certainly been impressive, as possible ways have progressively been found through such historically divisive issues as eucharistic presence, eucharistic sacrifice, theologies of ordained priesthood (ARCIC 1982), and even, during the second major phase of ARCIC's activity, the relationship between justification and sanctification (ARCIC 1986), the latter anticipating by more than a decade the issuing of the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church 1999).

While variously pursued, with differing emphases at different points and all evolving over time, three strategies can be seen to have been particularly significant (Murray 2011, 202–205). First, there has been a concern to clear up misunderstandings of one tradition by the other and so to open the way to a possible appreciation that each does in fact maintain what the other believes to be required on a given point of belief or practice (we may call this 'strategy 1'). Second, there has been a concern to explore what fresh concepts and understanding are available that might help both traditions jointly to say what they respectively believe to be important on a given issue ('strategy 2'). Third, there has been a concern to explore whether the different theological frameworks, languages, and emphases of the respective traditions on a given point can be seen as different yet complementary emphases and languages rather than as contradictory and irreconcilably opposed positions ('strategy 3').

As an example, let us take the significant work of ARCIC already alluded to on Catholic understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass relative to Anglican emphasis on the sole sufficiency of the sacrificial death of Christ (ARCIC 1982, 12–25). Here, one of the ways in which progress was achieved was by clarifying that when Catholics speak of the Mass as sacrificial they do not mean that it is an additional sacrifice to that of Christ on Calvary—the sole sufficient sacrifice—but that it is the sacramental re-presentation of that one and same sacrifice and the making present of its transforming effects (strategy 1). This process of clarifying and correcting misunderstandings was in turn helped by the fact that scripture scholars had made great progress in tracing and understanding more fully the Hebrew roots of the word used in the Greek New Testament for 'making memory' (*anamnesis*) (strategy 2). What they discovered is that making memory of the

saving acts of God in a full, scriptural sense is never simply recalling the past to mind, but allowing the living force of these great acts of God to be present and active: 'making memory' is 'making present'. This is a very neat way of giving fresh articulation to what Catholics have always claimed about the Eucharist, but in a way that clearly avoids the traditional Protestant anxiety about appearing to add something to the death of Christ (strategy 2).

A second example relates to the doctrine of justification and, more broadly, to respective understandings of God's saving work in Christ and the Spirit. Here, whereas Catholics have traditionally been concerned to maintain that the totality of God's saving work involves not just being forgiven but being transformed through grace into the likeness of God ('sanctification'), Anglicans for their part—again indicating a Reformation lineage—have wanted to emphasize very clearly that God's forgiveness comes freely without it having to be earned through good works. The problem, compounded by differing translations of the relevant terms in the Greek New Testament, is that Catholics have tended to assume that the more Protestant emphasis, particularly in its Lutheran form, espouses what Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) referred to as a 'cheap grace' (Bonhoeffer 1963) that does not attend to the need for renewal and transformation, whereas Protestant traditions, in turn, have tended to assume that Catholics make God's forgiveness conditional on human efforts for sanctification.

In contrast, recent ecumenical theology, aided by fresh scholarship (strategy 2), has clarified that these assumptions are based on misunderstandings (strategy 1). On the one hand, Catholics have come to see that Protestant-influenced traditions do in fact, in various ways, emphasize that God's free, forgiving grace brings about renewal and holiness. Correlatively, Anglicans have come to see that Catholics for their own part emphasize that God's transforming grace is indeed utterly unearned and comes first in a forgiving embrace in the human situation of incapacity through sin (ARCIC 1986). Through this combination of resolving misunderstandings and recognizing that not everything always needs to be expressed in the exact same way, respective Anglican and Catholic theologies of justification and salvation came to appear not as contradictory theological frameworks but as two legitimate and complementary languages or grammars, each saying what the other believes needs to be said albeit with respectively different emphases (strategy 3). While the theologies are not identical, they can and do map onto each other.

As these examples illustrate, the traditional strategies of ARCIC, like those of bilateral dialogues more generally, have been successful in overcoming apparently absolute differences between traditions by showing these differences, in key aspects, to be more apparent than real, resting on misunderstandings about what are more correctly viewed as legitimately diverse ways of articulating the same area of Christian truth. To this extent, these strategies have been immensely powerful and significant. It is to be noted, however, that they work not by changing the substance of either party's belief but by resolving misunderstandings. As such, they are really strategies of clarification and explication rather than of growth, change, and conversion proper. In substantive terms

they effectively leave things as they are—and therein lies their limitation, for a tradition can change its appreciation of what another tradition maintains on a given point without being required to go the extra step of expanding and rethinking its own position and practice. With regard to ARCIC, one of its founding members, Edward Yarnold, SJ, commented in 1996:

ARCIC habitually saw its task as the uncovering of agreement already existing between the Churches, not the negotiation of a change in the doctrine of either Church.

(Yarnold 1996, 64)

Consequently, what these strategies cannot deal with are areas of real substantive difference between traditions, for example questions such as whether it is possible for a non-ordained person to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist. Such issues cannot simply be smoothed away as alternative ways of expressing the same basic point. Thus, for all their erstwhile success, given the nature of some of the issues that continue to divide the traditions, the traditional bilateral strategies have, perhaps, now gone as far as they can on most fronts. They are fine for problems based on misunderstandings or the erroneous assumption that a point can only be expressed in one way. But many of the problems that are now regarded as divisive simply do not lend themselves to being resolved in this way—for example, in the Anglican-Roman Catholic context, continuing significant differences over the way in which the respective communions are structured, or issues about the nature and exercise of authority and associated processes of decision-making, or, perhaps most obviously, radical differences at the formal level over whether women can legitimately be ordained.

The context has fundamentally changed from that to which the classical bilateral dialogues responded, and what is needed, therefore, is a correlatively changed understanding of the appropriate strategy for such bilateral dialogues from here on. If progress is to be made with the more intractable kinds of problems just indicated, what is needed is not just increased mutual understanding *between* traditions but self-criticism, growth, development, change, and conversion *within* each tradition, and strategies aimed at exposing each to the challenge of the other. Accordingly, the members of ARCIC continue to develop fresh strategies for seeking to serve this need (Murray 2011, 205–206). It is in direct relation to this context and its challenges, and in creative continuity with the work of ARCIC, that the strategy which has come to be referred to as ‘receptive ecumenism’ has been devised and tested as charting a way for contemporary ecumenism (Murray 2008a, 2008b, 2015; Murray and Murray 2012). It proceeds by bringing to the fore the dispositions of self-critical hospitality, humble learning, and ongoing conversion that have always been quietly essential to good ecumenical work and by turning them into the explicit required strategy and core task of contemporary ecumenism.



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## Receptive Ecumenism: A Way for Contemporary Ecumenism

The central aim, then, of receptive ecumenism is to take seriously *both* the reality and the specific challenges of the contemporary ecumenical context *and* the abiding and absolutely non-negotiable need for the Christian churches precisely in this situation to continue to walk the way of conversion towards more visible structural and sacramental unity. It is recognized, as noted earlier, that Life and Work ecumenism—sharing in mission and prayer—vital though it is, can never alone be enough. The conviction is that the differing organizational structures, processes, and cultures of the churches and the challenge of how, ultimately, to bring them into configuration with each other cannot be bypassed. Receptive ecumenism accordingly seeks an appropriate ecumenical ethic and strategy for living between the times: for living now in accordance with the promise of and calling to being made one in the Trinitarian life of God, and for learning complete reliance on the Spirit who, in Christian understanding, is the foretaste and agent of the kingdom of God. The conviction of those practising receptive ecumenism is that, shaped and formed by the Spirit, they will bear imaginative, attractive, transforming witness to the kingdom in the here and now.

In service of this aim, receptive ecumenism represents a remarkably simple but far-reaching strategy which, as indicated, essentially seeks to draw out a value that has been at work, to some extent at least, in all good ecumenical encounter and to place it centre stage as the appropriate organizing principle for contemporary ecumenism. The basic principle is that further substantial progress is indeed possible on the way towards full structural and sacramental unity, but only if a fundamental, counter-instinctual move is made away from the tendency of traditions to wish that others could be more like themselves and towards each instead asking what they can and must learn, with dynamic integrity, from their respective others. A programmatic shift is, then, required away from prioritizing the question: ‘What do our various others first need to learn from us?’ and towards instead asking: ‘What do *we* need to learn and what can *we* learn—or receive—with integrity from *our* others?’

Ecumenical encounter too easily tends to involve ‘getting the best tableware out’, wanting others to see us and to understand us in the best possible light—in a light, if we are honest, in which we do not even generally see ourselves. In contrast, receptive ecumenism starts from the somewhat different assumption that for all our respective gifts, each of us, each of our communities and traditions, is wounded and in need of healing and continuing conversion. It might be said that receptive ecumenism is an ecumenism of ‘wounded hands’ rather than of the ‘best tableware’. It is about being prepared to show these wounds to each other, knowing that we cannot save ourselves, asking our ecumenical others to minister to us in our need from their gifts.

In some ways, receptive ecumenism builds upon the more familiar notion of spiritual ecumenism (Kasper 2007) by explicitly extending it to the communal, structural, and

institutional levels. Spiritual ecumenism tends to seek ways in which personal spirituality and theological understanding, even collective spiritual and liturgical practices, might be enriched across the traditions in relation to such things as hymnody, spirituality, and devotional practices. Receptive ecumenism extends this disposition to include doctrinal self-understanding and, even more so, structural and organizational-cultural realities by typically focusing on such things as respective systems of decision-making in order to ask how difficulties in one's own tradition's practice and understanding can be helped by learning from best practice and understanding in other traditions.

Further, it is to be noted that this is a question that can be asked by all people, at all levels, and in relation to all dimensions of church life. It could be asked, for example, at the level of the structures and processes of decision-making in particular parishes and congregations, but equally at regional, national, and international levels. The conviction is that wherever there is in practice a felt need, it can be met through appropriate receptive learning, whether at the level of international structures or parochial practice. This means that all can be involved in the ecumenical learning process at their own level. It is not simply a matter for professional ecumenists.

Receptive ecumenism, then, might be viewed as advocating a collective, ecclesial examination of conscience before the face of the other which complements, transposes, and extends the practice of an individual examination of conscience and commitment to personal conversion in which Christians are rather better versed. And, as with all examinations of conscience, for all the challenge associated with it, the conviction is that it will lead not to diminishment but to greater flourishing. In receptive ecumenism, Christians come before each other in a spirit of expectant and penitent joy: recognizing that they are on holy ground in each other's company; recognizing that they are called to be fed there by the real ecclesial presence of Christ in the other so that the particular ecclesial presence of Christ in their own tradition may be expanded and enriched; recognizing, most fundamentally, that they come to each other in need; recognizing that, for all the undoubted gifts in their respective ecclesial traditions, they all fall short of the glory of God; recognizing that each of their traditions has areas of difficulty representing ways in which each is respectively called to grow. In this context, receptive ecumenism views ecumenical encounter as not just one more thing to do on an already overfull list, but as a privileged means of blessing, a privileged means of receiving from the particular gifts, the particular modes of blessing, to be found in one's ecumenical others in a way that can speak to and tend one's own particular needs and difficulties.

It will be evident that receptive ecumenism is a strange kind of ecumenism, for it seeks to further unity not by directly seeking to overcome areas of disagreement *between* traditions, vital though that ultimately is, but rather by first addressing difficulties *within* traditions and the possibilities that are open for respective enrichment and deepening through learning *across* traditions. The dual conviction is that without this mode of self-critical receptivity no real further ecumenical progress will be possible, whereas with such a disposition considerable things are already possible which, if realized, will in turn open up further as yet unforeseeable possibilities. In the latter regard, the point is that

when Christians move towards the horizon they find that it expands rather than contracts. Moreover, if all were pursuing this path then all would be moving, albeit somewhat unpredictably, to places where more might become possible than appears at present.

A fundamental reconceiving of the ecumenical terrain is at work here. Rather than approaching it as an intractably problem-strewn field, receptive ecumenism views the prolonged interim ecumenical space in which Christians currently find themselves as a field of open possibilities; a privileged time and space for journeying towards their calling and destiny by the only means possible—through maturation and continuing conversion on all sides; a privileged time and space for learning from each other how to be more fully, more freely what they already are. The additional years are years of grace and possibility: the fig tree has been given more time (see Luke 13:6–9). For receptive ecumenism, this way of growth and continual communal conversion constitutes *the* way—the only way—whereby the Christian churches can both progress towards and already bear appropriate witness to their goal of the deeper enfolding of each in the other and of all together in the Trinitarian communion of God.

This, then, is ecumenism not primarily as a task of convincing the other, but as a task of asking how, in the face of the other, all are being called to conversion out of ways that are frustrating their flourishing and into a greater abundance of life, a deeper quality of catholicity. In this context, while it might not be appropriate to start out with a presenting concern to teach the other, it is absolutely right and proper to start by subjecting oneself to listening to what the other finds difficult and thwarted in oneself, so that that might speak into and open out one's own resident, if somewhat suppressed, concerns. The conviction is that each will meet the other not because they have set out after a particular, foreseeable, commonly agreed and envisaged destination, but because all are walking, albeit very differently, the way of conversion—indeed, ministering to each other on the way—and will therefore find themselves in God's good time coming together in the total truth of Christ into which each is differently being formed.

A number of times in the course of this chapter it has been noted that receptive ecumenism essentially proceeds by bringing to the fore and making into an explicit strategic priority some dispositions that have been basic throughout all good ecumenical work and engagement. It is possible to identify some notable precedents for and forerunners of receptive ecumenism within formal ecumenical work.

Keeping a focus on ARCIC, the closing sections of *The Gift of Authority* (ARCIC 1999) might fruitfully be considered. They seek to identify the outstanding issues of Anglicans and Catholics respectively with regard to the theology and practice of the other tradition in relation to matters of authority. If this is not yet to ask explicitly what can be learned from the other—remaining rather at the level of what one's own tradition finds difficult in the other—it is at least, by implication, an indication of each tradition being prepared to subject itself to the criticism of the other. Taking this to the next level of explicitly attending to what can be learned from the other, the 2006 document of the Joint

International Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You in Christ* (RC-M 2006), stands as a landmark text, focusing less on seeking to articulate a resolved, agreed theology of the church and more on seeking to identify the particular gifts that each tradition can fruitfully receive from the other in such a fashion as to both aid the flourishing of each tradition separately and ease their joint path to future reconciliation.

Without question, however, the most significant formal expression of the basic principle and intent of receptive ecumenism is to be found in Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, 'On Commitment to Ecumenism', in the course of which Pope John Paul extended a remarkable invitation to the theologians and leaders of other Christian churches to help reimagine the way in which the papacy operates so that it might once again become the focus for Christian unity rather than being a continuing cause of division (Pope John Paul II 1995, nn. 95–6). Here is a clear, prophetic expression of the kind of courageous commitment to one's own tradition's conversion that is required if the Christian churches are really to progress beyond friendship to the full catholicity of the one church of Christ. Also significant is the idea of an 'exchange of gifts' which Pope John Paul mentions (Pope John Paul II 1995, n. 28). However, whereas a gift exchange is premised on reciprocity, receptive ecumenism sees value even in a unilateral commitment to fruitful receptive learning in relation to the urgent felt needs and difficulties within one's own tradition.

Encouraged by these examples, it is timely now to reflect on the implications of receptive ecumenism for the future work of the bilateral dialogues.

## Receptive Ecumenism and Formal Bilateral Dialogue

The first thing to reiterate is that receptive ecumenism is intentionally in service of the traditional Faith and Order concern 'to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service in the world' (By-laws of Faith and Order, 3. 1; Faith and Order Commission 2015, 101). It cannot be content in the long term with anything less than full unity. As such, receptive ecumenism cannot properly be viewed as a second-best substitute which settles for dealing with merely peripheral matters now that the central task—of working for structural and sacramental unity—has become so difficult. On the contrary, receptive ecumenism seeks to bring to the fore the only attitude which, it believes, can enable long-term progress towards unity actually to occur: that of focused self-critical receptivity. It is intentionally a strategy of engagement and advancement, not one of retreat and defeat. In place of the over-optimistic promise of immediate convergence, it provides a deliberate way of long-term, hope-filled conversion.

In turn, as regards how receptive ecumenism might, for its part, take the agenda and strategy of the bilateral dialogues forward in distinctive ways, perhaps most notable here is the way in which receptive ecumenism forgoes the strategy of seeking directly after agreement *between* traditions, for the time being at least, and seeks instead for more piecemeal—even unilateral—self-critical learning *within and across* traditions. This is partly strategic, reflecting the recognition that on many fronts agreement is simply not possible *pro tem*. Beyond such strategic pragmatism, however, it reflects the conviction that simply coming to agreement on new formulae of faith does not, in itself, go far enough and may even become a substitute for the deeper and expansive self-critical learning that must also take place for real progress to occur. The strategy at issue in receptive ecumenism, of a somewhat ad hoc yet systematically tested receptive learning process, is assumed to have the potential to take each tradition with integrity to a different place than at present—one resulting from the creative expansion of current logic rather than its mere clarification, extrapolation, and repetition.

The third major phase of work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III) provides an interesting example here, with its mandated focus on decision-making and ethical discernment at local and universal levels, and in light of its formal adoption at its May 2011 inaugural meeting at the Monastery of Bose of receptive ecumenism as a key strand in its proposed methodology (Murray 2011, 2015). This has shaped the first agreed statement to emerge from ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, to be published in 2018. In practice this has meant, firstly, that the key question is not, as would have been traditional: ‘How can Catholics and Anglicans seek to move directly to a common mind on issues such as decision-making at local and universal levels?’ Rather the question is: ‘What respective difficulties do each of our traditions have with decision-making and how can these potentially be helped by learning from what is strong in the other tradition?’

ARCIC III is concerned both to model this process in its own work and to stimulate similar processes at all levels of the lives of the churches through creating appropriate consultation documents and resources. The basic principle is that the respective traditions formally committing to engaging in the process of receptive ecumenical learning in this manner and seeking to show forth its transformative potential in clear, useful, attractive, and convincing ways is actually more important than seeking to arrive at a comprehensive theorized conclusion in a convergence statement. Consequently, ARCIC III’s first agreed statement includes clear acknowledgement of continuing areas of substantial and substantive disagreement between the two traditions. Equally, it seeks to articulate, witness to, and serve a process of real receptive, life-giving learning on behalf of each tradition precisely in the context of and in face of such continuing substantive disagreement.

This is all well and good at the level of intentionality and strategic goals, but how does it actually work out in practice? When stated in its simplest terms—as a necessary openness to learning of God’s grace and blessing from each other—there is something almost incontestable about receptive ecumenism. It is wholesome and self-evidently good. At this

basic level it is little wonder that ARCIC III has felt able to embrace the language and aims of receptive ecumenism as appropriately guiding its work and goals. But there is significantly more to receptive ecumenism than this, and the 'more', while still incontestable, is, like the gospel call to conversion itself, also profoundly challenging.

As has been noted, receptive ecumenism involves a preparedness to acknowledge the respective difficulties and sticking points in one's own tradition and to ask one's others to minister to that need from their own particular gifts. This is not just a simple acknowledgement of each other's giftedness. It involves making oneself vulnerable, recognizing one's inadequacies, and being open to change. And the point is that for all sorts of entirely understandable reasons, this is precisely what the various Christian traditions—some more than others—find it so difficult to do. As ARCIC III's annual meetings have displayed, for each tradition there are areas of difficulty that are intrinsically difficult to bring into open discussion.

To put this at its sharpest and from the perspective of a lay Catholic member of the commission: a substantive mandated focus for ARCIC III is on decision-making at the local and universal levels, which the adopted strategy of receptive ecumenism in turn invites us to look at in terms of what is respectively experienced as difficult in such processes within each tradition. However, the problem is that some of the difficulties experienced in this regard pertain to the routine ways of working of the very bodies that will in turn pass authoritative judgement on the work of ARCIC III. Consequently, the question arises as to whether ARCIC III will indeed manage to find a way of discussing these neuralgic issues both in a genuinely receptive ecumenical fashion and in a way that can gain a serious hearing externally. Therein lies both the possibility and the challenge of receptive ecumenism at the formal bilateral level. Realization of this potential will require patience, imagination, generosity, and tenacity, all held in equal measure within the movement of the Spirit.

## Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church

The traditional Faith and Order focus on bilateral dialogue has a particular appropriateness in relation to traditions where there is a strong structural and juridical emphasis on the universal church, most particularly the Catholic Church wherein all significant decision-making and innovation is gathered at the centre. But this is an asymmetric reality. For the more Congregationalist traditions, trans-local, trans-regional, and trans-national structures and responsibilities are limited to relatively loose federations and associations, without juridical authority, that provide the means for various local churches throughout a region, country, or across the globe to express their agreement in relation to various aspects of doctrinal, ecclesial, and procedural identity. Even within the episcopally ordered churches of the Anglican Communion, the high degree of provincial authority that has always characterized the Communion makes comparisons of like with like difficult.

All of this shows something of the intrinsic limitations of bilateral processes, and the need not only for strategies that promote the local reception of the fruits of such processes (Rusch 2007) but for strategies that consult appropriately with the local level and that can bring the concerns, issues, and understanding that operate there into the formal dialogue processes. Pressing this further, even within Catholicism, for all its structural centralization, there is a real sense in which it is at the local level that the church really lives and that in ordinary terms the life of the church actually unfolds. With this, for all that 'local church' tends to be taken as meaning 'diocese' in general Catholic usage, local Catholicism is *de facto* highly parochial. As such, it is vital to ask after the implications of receptive ecumenism at the local level.

As all that has been written here indicates, receptive ecumenism is less a formal step-by-step programme and more a strategic orientation and movement that has developed from gestation to maturity within the broader ecumenical movement. Most fundamentally, it is a movement of the Holy Spirit into which Christians are drawn. The time has arguably now come for receptive ecumenism to be spread abroad, literally to be disseminated, in order to foster in Christian traditions the most challenging but really fruitful ecumenical growth on which the health of each part, as also that of the whole, now depends. The language of 'movement' is a reminder that receptive ecumenism is self-involving, that it does not happen automatically but only as individuals, communities, and traditions are drawn to participate. Earlier it was noted that such participation is not confined to the ranks of theologians, professional ecumenists, and church bureaucrats, but pertains to all people at all levels of church life, asking what can be learned fruitfully and with integrity from the ecumenical other that speaks creatively to given areas of difficulty in one's own tradition. In any given context the question is always: 'What opportunities are there for engaging in such processes of real receptive learning?'

This might, for example, take the form of already existing intra-denominational groups and committees (e.g. a bishop's council, or a meeting of synod officers, or a parish council) deciding to review what they might here and now respectively learn and receive from the interestingly different yet cognate practices and understandings of other traditions. Equally, complementing this is the question as to whether there are any more explicitly ecumenical spaces (e.g. ministerial fraternities, Lenten groups, and ecumenical scripture-sharing groups) in which this process of mutual receptive learning might be trialled—not, it should be noted, just further meetings devoted to learning a bit more *about* the other, but opportunities for learning what one tradition, in the light of its own specific difficulties and challenges, might learn and receive in real terms *from* another tradition.

As all of this suggests, there is a great deal of openness and flexibility as to how the way of receptive ecumenism might actually be practised at the local level, depending on what people actually do with it and how it is adapted and developed in relation to specific circumstances and situations. It is not like a branded product, or a commercial franchise, that simply replicates itself in identical algorithmic fashion, but more like a virtuous virus that can evolve and adapt in relation to specificities and so become potent in ways

appropriate to varied contexts. It is in such practice and performance that the story and discerning of receptive ecumenism most properly consists.

Finally, here again, as also in relation to the relevance of receptive ecumenism for the bilateral dialogues, the urge towards totality and completion needs to be resisted. The point is not whether there is here a means of completing the ecumenical journey within a foreseeable timescale and through a series of steps that can be traced in detail in advance. Rather the point is whether there is here a way of walking towards the ecumenical *telos*, the full detail of which is not yet open to view, and of witnessing to this way on the journey. Whether the more Catholic-sounding categories of sacramentality and holy living or the more Protestant-sounding category of witness be used, the importance of creative acts of Christian living—and in the specifically ecumenical context, the importance of creative acts of ecumenical learning—cannot be overemphasized, going far beyond their immediate utility and effectiveness in their own immediate contexts. So, walking the way of receptive ecumenism at the local level and also at the level of formal bilateral dialogue effectively comes down to each asking themselves how in a given context the Spirit might be inviting their own tradition, in specific terms, to learn from and receive of another tradition for the sake, in the first instance, of their own tradition's greater flourishing, thereby showing to church and world alike the gospel's healing power.

## Conclusion

This chapter started out by reflecting on the appropriateness of the language of method and methodology in relation to the ecumenical journey. It then turned to explore both the lasting significance and intrinsic limitations of Life and Work modes of pursuing the ecumenical way and the abiding need for a Faith and Order orientation to the goal of full structural and sacramental communion. Having, in the third section, analysed the effectiveness of some classical bilateral strategies and identified the contemporary need for something of a strategic gear-change, the fourth section explored the strategic vision behind receptive ecumenism as a way for contemporary ecumenism. The fifth and sixth sections in turn focused on the implications respectively for formal bilateral ecumenism and for local ecumenism, in each case placing a premium on the value of bearing inspiring witness to the Spirit-led way of the gospel.

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