

Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning-Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed. Murray, P, Ryan, G. and Lakeland, P (eds). OUP, (2022). ISBN 9780192845108.

This magnificent compendium of essays by thirty-eight leading scholars in the field charts the way in which the understanding of Receptive Ecumenism has been developed since the first volume of essays, published in the wake of the first Receptive Ecumenism conference, at Durham in 2006. It includes work by scholars representative of all the main ecumenically involved communions. Significantly it also includes an article about an initiative designed to see that, in the final result, no churchly body professing faith in Christ should be left out of consideration. I refer to the article on the Global Christian Forum, written by a priest of the (Anglican) Church in Wales, Sarah Rowland Jones. The Forum was set up in the hope that it could enable both the traditionally ecumenically involved communions and the many churches, mainly evangelical and Pentecostal which remain suspicious of traditional ecumenism, to understand that, at the core of both communities lies a deep devotion to Christ that they can come to recognise in each other and which can then have a mutually transformative effect.

It is important to note the second and third sections of the rather lengthy title of this book. They reveal the hope of the thirty eight contributors as to the ultimate result of their work, and that of like-minded others. They hope that receptive ecumenism will be transformative of the life and mission of all the communions involved. They will become more richly and genuinely catholic, transformed both in terms of their current needs and lacunae and in their mutual enrichment. Murray, in his final summative essay expresses his hope for his own Roman Catholic tradition, that it will 'become more, not less Catholic precisely by becoming, for example, appropriately more Anglican by becoming more synodal, more Methodist by becoming more connexionally Catholic, appropriately more Pentecostal by becoming more charismatically Catholic, and so on'.

The third part of the title implies an increasing common synodality in a Church that can certainly be thoroughly re-formed as a result of the process of careful and increasingly intimate 'walking together', a phrase already beloved of Pope Francis as the means towards a Church fully re-formed with no gift, originally particular to separated branches of the Church, left unplaced at the disposal and delight of the whole totus Christus, to use the Augustinian expression.

All this, as various contributors record, will demand a primary matrix of constant prayer, an ascesis which does not try to dodge difficult issues and which, as Cathy Clifford states, acknowledges that learning is difficult and demanding. Above all, it demands attention to and reliance upon the Holy Spirit with every Christian being involved in a sort of permanent epiclesis of the Spirit that he/she and his/her community may discern the providential way ahead for their particular church.

In this context, Veli-Matti Karkkainen's essay on Receptive Ecumenism and the Dynamics of Development in Pentecostalism is highly significant. Karkkainen notes that the earliest Pentecostals hoped that their re-discovery of the dynamic gifts of the Spirit would enthuse and unite the whole of Christendom. When it did not they retreated, in the main, into isolation, apart from some contacts with very conservative evangelical churches. In recent years, a few pioneers have begun to seek wider links. Karkkainen suggests that the whole process might be aided by a dialogue between all churches on apostolicity as a mark of the Church which all recognise however much their particular understandings of it may vary. This present reviewer would humbly suggest that Matt 13: 52, where Our Lord speaks of every scribe of the Kingdom drawing out treasures old and new might be taken as a lead text, especially where the developing role of Tradition is under consideration.

In its early days, Receptive Ecumenism was primarily about encouraging churches to look not so much at what they had to offer to others, as to identify what they could learn from others which might enrich their life and mission. Now the emphasis is even broader and can, for example, involve re-reception from within their own tradition of truths which have tended to be under-emphasised or even almost lost over the decades of later development. Most illustrative of this is the article by Risto Saarinen and Minna Hietamäki on the Finnish recovery of Luther's teaching on sanctification, a recovery that has had a particularly great effect on Nordic and Baltic Lutheran dialogue with Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans.

The essays in this book are arranged in four different sections, the first section being entitled 'Receiving Receptive Ecumenism across the traditions'. Particularly noteworthy in my opinion, apart from the two already mentioned, are the articles by Paul Fiddes and David Chapman. Fiddes argues that the covenant basis of Baptist ecclesiology of the local church needs extending on a wider scale if 'national churches, unions or conventions' are ever 'to walk together effectively'. Baptists need to 'engage in a creative re-imagination of episkope'.

David Chapman, former chair of MRCIC, the international Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue, notes how, after 2001, its attention passed from traditional faith and order issues to a stress on mutual learning from each others' gifts and riches. He particularly stresses the tenth dialogue on *The Call to Holiness*, an emphasis within both traditions. He does however miss a point he could make, from the Methodist side, that there is a very real sense in which, from the very beginning, Methodism effectively practiced a form of receptive ecumenism from a whole variety of sources. Wesley himself compiled the Christian Library, a collection of spiritual writings from early fathers, later Anglican, Puritan and pietist authors, but also including writings from counter-Reformation and later Catholics-all these sources culled in the interest of encouraging the Methodist preachers and people to 'press on to full salvation'.

Tamara Gdzeldze, in the sole Orthodox contribution to this book, raises many of the problems that Orthodox encounter in participation in ecclesial learning from others. She mentions their unique sense of 'being the Church' and the difficulty in being able to identify this with the related sense in other Christian bodies. One wonders whether this problem can only be approached liturgically, even hymnodically and I would argue that one of the key contributions a global Orthodox-Methodist dialogue might make is to compare the two traditions' understanding of the work of the Spirit in creating Church, particularly as understood in the hymnody of both St Symeon the New Theologian and Charles Wesley. In certain respects, as the late Donald Allchin successfully illustrated, Anglicanism, Methodism and Orthodoxy belong together as communions which think doxologically at least as much as others, Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed, formulate their teaching primarily magisterially and dogmatically¹.

Part II of this book is entitled *Receiving in Relation to our Difficulties*. It begins, appropriately, with an essay by Tony Currer on Receptive Ecumenism and ARCIC III where the approach of receptive ecumenism has been seen as crucial from the very beginning. It is, to quote the initial communiqué of the dialogue, about how 'Anglicans and Catholics can help each other grow in faith, life and witness to Christ if they are open to being transformed by God's grace mediated through each other'. Currer points to the inadequacies of the degree of differentiated consensus as recorded in the previous two ARCIC dialogues, but also points to hopes held out both in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6 and in the teaching of John-Paul II as to 'conversion, renewal and reform' as the 'dynamic route to unity'. Paul Lakeland points to what Roman Catholics might learn from work done at the end of the nineties by the Church of England, the URC and British Methodism, on 'whole body ecclesiology' in which the three churches exercise oversight through councils as well as through personal leadership and all saw their life as in faithful continuity with the apostolic church.

I would add this it is good to be reminded of this work and of the fact that there are gems amidst our very partial achievements in the search for unity that are ripe for re-reception in more recent contexts. Karkkainen quite properly reminds us of the Princeton Proposal of 2005 with its stern warning from ecumenists across the main denominations warning that opposition or even apathy towards the search for unity is, in itself, seriously sinful. A warning that, sadly, merits frequent repetition.

Susan Ross's article on 'Women's Ministry- A Hidden Opening for Ecumenical Discussion' is fascinating in pointing to the very major role that many women, some religious, some lay, have in ministry in very many American Roman Catholic parishes. The issue of women's ordination to the priesthood remains unresolved, but there can be no doubt that many women contribute greatly to pastoral and, in some cases, preaching ministry.

¹ Allchin, A.M (ed). *We Belong to one another. Methodist, Anglican and Orthodox Essays* (1965).

Peter Phillips, very much a partner of mine during the period when we were both members of the British Methodist-Roman Catholic Committee, contributes a superbly moving article on 'Re-Receiving Catholic Eucharistic Theology from the Hymns of John and Charles Wesley'. Phillips, following the critique of another Catholic scholar, P.J. Fitzpatrick, argues that the language of transubstantiation undermines a vibrant understanding of the eucharist. If 'the sacrament is regarded as a thing to be received or worshipped rather than a dynamic action which enables Christians to engage with the world', we fail to honour its full meaning.

Phillips rightly cites the classic Methodist scholar, Rattenbury, to the effect that 'the eschatological hymns throb with the realised presence of Christ'. Sadly, I have to say that Methodism needs to re-receive most of these hymns; more gladly, I can say that it is a sign of our caring for one another, when others are able to remind us of our own heritage which we need to re-receive, thanks to their caring initiative.

Diane Ryan points to the very real contribution of inter-church families to receptive ecumenism. In a very real sense, one may say that through their marriages, inter-church couples and their children are privileged witnesses and teachers to the rest of the Church Universal.

In 'Learning to Love Differently Well', Linda Nicholls approaches a particularly delicate topic. She looks in detail at the complex process, resulting in the eventual acceptance of same-sex marriage in her own Anglican Church, that of Canada. She shows what particular care was taken in consulting that church's two closest ecumenical partners, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (actually already in communion with the Canadian Anglicans) and the Roman Catholic Church. She illustrates the increasing importance being given to considering the views of the indigenous Canadian Anglican community. She is particularly concerned for the continuing work of both ARCIC III and the Task Group of the Communion as it continues to explore how inner Anglican relationships might be firmed up, both on this and other complex questions.

Part III relates to 'Receptive Learning in International Perspective'. Marcus Pound explores this at the most local level, that of eight partner churches in the north-east of England, in the midst of which Durham is the key academic centre. The concern there is largely over practical issues of local co-operation. Baptists, for example, have been able to learn from the Presbyterian/URC system of elders as leaders with a remit that includes relationship forming with other congregations.

Particularly interesting is the article by a Nigerian Jesuit, in which he admits that receptive ecumenism is not, as yet, very much on the continent's ecumenical agenda, but he does note that the traditional African concept of ubuntu, which stresses that any and every person is always constituted in his humanity through relationships with others, holds out a promise for the future. He notes that 'ubuntu', 'far from failing to deliver in first order ecumenism, may serve the broader context with its stress on hospitality, openness and

mutuality'. He also feels that Pope Francis' teaching on the 'ecumenism of blood', i.e. martyrdom, may have a role to play in stimulating close mutual inter-dependence amongst the huge variety of African churches.

Two articles deal with a Latin American context, both of them looking at the prospects for Catholic and Pentecostal learning in relation to Mariology. The first begins by stating what has often been seen as a stark confrontation between Baptists and Catholics, with the former arguing that they worship Jesus whereas Catholics worship Mary. However, both essays indicate that there is some hope for progress. Both mention the work of Ralph del Colle at the level of international Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, who stresses that 'the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is an event among persons of whom Mary can serve as an icon. She witnesses to the fruitfulness of the Spirit's work'.

Political factors complicate the situation with some seeing traditional marian devotion as playing into the hands of right wing dictators that have exploited it. However, as Peter Cassarella suggests at the end of his essay, 'the presence of God through marian devotions can actually change the landscape of a city. He quotes a philosopher as saying, 'a (Marian) shrine is the sign of a permanent reunion in the midst of the varied and nomadic anonymity of urban existence'.

The second contributor, Nestor Medina, argues that 'any Pentecostal pneumatology could benefit from considering the transformative effect of the Spirit on Mary. He concludes that her 'brief musings show that Pentecostals and Catholics are much closer than they would care to admit'. He also suggests that the Wesleyan concept of 'entire sanctification' might help in any process of rapprochement.

If so, it would add as an interesting example of twin processes of reconsideration converging on the heritage of a third source!

Geraldine Hawkes looks at practical examples of Receptive Ecumenism in South Australia. She details several very interesting local projects aimed at encouraging people to listen to each other 'in a spirit of humility and vulnerability, and attentiveness to listening, learning and loving at every stage'. Apparently, these were very widely appreciated.

A particularly remarkable article in this section deals with learning from a mentor of another religion, a Sufi mystic, Ibn al-'Arabi. John O'Brien sees the mystic's emphasis on bewilderment at God as actually pointing to a lesson for Christians, the lesson being that, that 'our Christomonist tendency... gives rise to lopsided emphasis on the Church's self-understanding as a proclaiming, teaching community, equally visible, identifiable and categorizable-over God's equally consubstantial self-communication as Spirit-untrammelled, present and active beyond identifiable parameters'.

O'Brien follows this up in the second part of his article with a quite amazing catena of theologoumena. Citing Unitatis Redintegratio 4 to the effect that 'whatever is wrought by

the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to *our own* edification (his italics), he argues that 'one can justifiably say that, for Catholics, Receptive Ecumenism' is part of the teaching of the Church'. He lists a whole series of ways in which he has been involved in such learning encounters, following it up with the assertion that 'God's self-communication in and as the Holy Spirit takes place ceaselessly not only in the wider Christian Church outside Catholicism but outside Christianity and even beyond religion. This is a point never to be over-looked since, as Charles Wesley sings, God's 'undistinguishing regard was cast on all of Adam's fallen race'.

O'Brien ends with a reflection on the 'Blessedness of Bewilderment', referring back to an expression of Ibn al-' Arabi. Bewildering indeed is the Holy Spirit's patience with us, His perseverance and his ability to work through those of any faith or even no faith.

In many respects, the best in this book has been left to the last section, entitled 'Learning to Be Receptive Ecclesial Learners'.

First, Gregory Ryan, drawing on a lead given by Antonia Pizzey, talks of Receptive Ecumenism as a 'Total Ethic for a Broken Body'. He stresses that it is 'a disposition, rooted in love and established in hopeful humility, focussed upon a distant but not impossible goal', an excellent summary of what the whole ecumenical process has always been about, even if not, in the days before the emergence of Receptive Ecumenism times, as carefully and fully defined as such. Ryan rightly stresses that the texts to be studied must go far beyond the doctrinal/magisterial-they must include practices, hymns, liturgies and prayers, a point also made two essays further down the line of the book, by Ormond Rush. A thoroughgoing approach to receptive ecumenism demands that each participating Christian community must 're-weave its web of understanding and practice with dynamic integrity'.

Such a request calls all ecumenically engaged churches to an even more demanding level of commitment and receptivity than has already been achieved. It is a commitment that involves both head and heart in tandem. It is a total ethic that can and should also learn from wisdom from beyond the borders of the Church Universal. He tellingly cites the Anglican ecumenist, Jamie Hawkey to the effect that,

'if we believe that the world is the locus of God's redeeming action in Christ, it is right to discern voices of passion, expertise and insight beyond the Church's structures as well as within them'. An echo there of what John O' Brien also says earlier.

I would add my own reviewer's comment that that such a stance is truly in line with both the Methodist and Roman Catholic traditions. It conforms with our joint belief that the triune God's mercy is indeed 'over all his works' (Ps 145:9), that to the truly just of other faiths and even of none a way will be found of applying the merits of Christ for their ultimate salvation. It conforms to our knowledge that no limits can be set to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in all who are made in the image of God.

Ormond Rush considers the importance of the extent to which, in terms of Roman Catholic understanding, the *sensus fidelium* is shared with other Christians and their churches. He argues that there can be no doubt as to the fact that they share in the *fides qua*, the sheer trust in God, but also that they have also faithfully received enriching insights in terms of continuing Christian life, worship and service within their respective traditions. This, as John Paul II teaches in *Unum Sint* is in spite of the objective sin of schism-nevertheless there results 'a rich embellishment of the *koinonia*'. However, we also need to remember Paul's injunction. 'Shall we continue in sin (in this case the sin of disunity)-that grace may abound?

Rush concludes that Roman Catholics must thus consider their experience and teaching as an ancillary source for due Catholic appropriation and enrichment. I would complement this from the Methodist side by saying that we have always tried to treasure the dictum of the early nineteenth century Wesleyan, William Shrewsbury, to the effect that Methodism, then the youngest of the Christian communions, had always been 'the debtor of all', the Anglican fathers, the Puritans, the Moravians and pietists².

At the very end of his article, Rush sets out seven criteria for harvesting the riches of the *sensus fidelium* across the sweep of traditions. In particular, he stresses the pneumatological dimension, 'the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of Reception of the Word', the eschatological as pointing to the fact that Christ's promise (John 16:13) indicates that 'together we are being led into 'all the truth' by the Holy Spirit we hold in common', the heuristic possibilities, as we discover more and more differences in expression which may now be reconciled in other forms of differentiated consensus, and finally, pedagogical, related to the way in which Catholics would learn a deeper understanding of their own learning and traditions. And, I would add, as reviewer, that the same might apply to the other traditions.

Sandwiched between these two essays comes Bradford E. Hinze on the subject of what the Spirit is saying to the churches through the laments of the faithful. He argues that these should prompt the rest of us to find out what is wrong and who is being hurt where and how, as a community of faith, we should seek to find remedies. Hinze argues for the importance of boldness in addressing issues that other may neglect, appealing to Francis' current stress on *parrhesia*, boldness in so doing. He quotes the desire of Murray for an ecumenism of wounded hands in which we are bold to show those wounds to others, bearing in mind that that we need to be helped by the gifts and graces of others.

Jeff Astley then asks what prevents churches from learning from each other. He suggests a variety of reasons, including what are felt to have been hurts from others in the past, but it can also be a matter of sheer apathy, 'people just don't want the sweat of new learning'. What he does commend is a style of approach from those seeking to commend learning

² Shrewsbury could also have mentioned those counter-reformation spiritual writers commended by Wesley in his Christian Library.

from other churches that is able to enthuse their prospective audience for the other traditions from which they might learn. Astley cites an example of a schoolgirl who 'fell in love with Maths because of the sheer enthusiasm of her teacher and his confidence that he could get his pupils to love Maths too'.

If I may be permitted an autobiographical allusion here, I can say that my particular ecumenical vocation began when, as a student during the years of Vatican II, I heard a group of Roman Catholic fellow students talk to other Christians in the College of their sheer enthusiasm for what the Council was achieving. It was the first time I had really encountered another Christian tradition in depth other than my own native Methodism, and I was captivated by it.

Clare Watkins, in 'Living Church. Practical Theology as a Locus for Ecumenical Learning', talks of the impression made on her by a project at a night shelter that involved volunteers and clients feeding together in a way, indeed 'feasting' rather than just eating in a very celebratory way that for her had genuine eucharistic resonances, despite the central actors being Salvationists, from a church that is still formally non-sacramental. She felt that the 'vibrant and encouraging living out of 'eucharistic living' held vital lessons for her own church. She concludes 'how do such eucharistic resonances within these faith-full, and *ad extra* practices relate to the explicit and liturgical practices of the church *ad intra*? One may add, a very interesting example of where extremes can meet when the Spirit illuminates the resonances.

There then follow a few essays on Scripture in the context of ecumenical learning. First, Mike Higton deals with 'Receiving Scripture again from One Another'. In this, he is indebted to earlier work on inter-faith reading of scriptures involving at least Jews and Muslims as well as Christians. He argues that the Spirit is at work in this 'through all the members of the Body of Christ, turning each of its members –and each of its various settlements (i.e. denominational locations) towards learning from each other'.

Another essay, 'Learning to Be Church. Virtues and Practices Leading Towards Koinonia in Colossians and Acts', tracks, first, the very complex instructions from Paul and Timothy relating to the way in which they wanted their letter to be circulated around a variety of churches near to Colossae in the hope of consolidating the koinonia and mutual responsibility that they felt should prevail in that area. The Acts section refers to the institution of a specific ministry of diakonia, whose members, however, as shown later on also exercise a ministry of the word.

Particularly significant is John Barclay's examination of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul bends the body metaphor in such a way as to stress what it means in any church community to need each other and to grant each other the recognition that renders us willing both to give and to receive'. Paul argues that diversity in the Body is only truly operative when no one feels that they do not belong. Paul has already referred earlier to

those who 'show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing'. He now shows that what matters is that these previously despised people have been placed in the Body by God, who arranged the members 'each one of them as he chose'. Next, he stresses that the Body is constituted by relations of mutual need. All parts of the Body share both in gift and need. All are to greet one another, encourage one another and welcome one another, above all 'love one another'. The notion of 'bearing one another's burdens' implies that all have some need of help with that. Finally, Paul rams home the point that 'the members of the Body that we think weaker are indispensable, and those members we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour'. One may add that is often amongst the humblest and least noticed in a congregation that one finds *sensus fidelium* most fully at work.

Paul's goal is the solidarity formed by mutual recognition. 'If one member suffers, they all do, if one is honoured they all rejoice together over it'.

David Ford presents us with a brilliant article, listing seven ways in which John's Gospel can enrich receptive ecumenism. He begins by pointing to the sheer stress in abundance, beginning with John 1:16 which talks of our receiving 'grace upon grace', John 3:34 which talks of the Spirit being given without measure', John 10 on life abundant and, finally, the miraculous catch of fish in John 21. He emphasises the very daring nature of Jesus' promise to the disciples 'greater works that these you will do' as a promise that commits us to dare to achieve in the power of the Spirit. Finally, he asks 'is there any more impressive vocation of receptive ecumenism than to discern and practice whatever glorifies God?'

Cathy Clifford and Callan Slipper both contribute essays on ecumenical spirituality, the former listing lessons that can be drawn from the development of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the latter from the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, of which he is a fully professed member. Clifford quotes both Mohler and the late Bernard Sesboue on the call to abandon all ecclesial egotism. Clifford stresses the promise that the Spirit will lead us into all truth, the whole church being a learning community.

The penultimate contribution by Antonia Pizzey, examines the relevance of the cardinal and theological virtues to the practice of receptive ecumenism. She particularly emphasises the relevance of humility, in terms both of deep awareness of need accompanied by an attitude disposed to reception without waiting for others to learn first and the need for justice in a listening, expectant for what the Spirit may be waiting to teach through the life and witness of that other tradition.

Finally, we come to the summative essay 'Growing into the fullness of Christ', by the man who has for nearly twenty years now taken the lead in developing and commending the practice of Receptive Ecumenism. Paul Murray describes it as 'a form of spiritual discipline, a waiting on the Spirit, a longing for the gifts that the Spirit has to give'. He argues that 'assumed here is an understanding of Christian existence not, primarily, 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' is always infinitely more than we can glimpse, taste or imagine. He continues this existence consists '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.

Murray then devotes several pages to a contemplation of the teaching of the Groupe des Domes on 'the conversion of the churches', stressing the kenotic preparedness to relinquish key earlier absolutised aspects of confessional identity.' He then moves to stress the positive gains for all churches stressing particularly how, as a Roman Catholic he sees them for his own communion. It is a matter of 'becoming more, not less Catholic precisely by becoming for example, appropriately more Anglican by becoming more synodal, appropriately more Methodist by becoming more connexionally Methodist, more Pentecostal by becoming more charismatically Catholic, and so on'. The title of his last section heading sums up the goal. 'The End of Ecumenism: Growing Differently into the Fullness of Christ in Real Communion with the Spirit'.

This is a magnificent and seminal book which should be read by all involved in the search for Christian unity. It defines very clearly the ways in which the concept of Receptive Ecumenism has been refined and deepened since the first big conference on the subject at Durham in 2006. In order that some of its insights should become much more widely diffused amongst those who are not professional theologians, I would suggest that Murray and his key collaborators consider producing, at a more popular level, a shorter work that could command the insights of Receptive Ecumenism to a much wider range of lay leaders and ministers across the range of denominations.

I am all too aware that I have only scratched the surface of this book, several chapters of which I would need to read several times over in order to harvest the full richness of the fruit they bear. I am deeply indebted to the three editors and their contributors.

David Carter