

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: Theology and Religion/33
Title of case study: Receptive Ecumenism (CS2)
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Receptive Ecumenism (RE) is a fresh method for conducting ecumenical dialogue, originating in the research of Paul Murray. Traditional Christian ecumenism has aimed at formally resolving differences and producing substantive agreements, but this effort has made little progress in recent decades. RE has provided ecumenical discussions with a new purpose and method: that is, fostering within each tradition a sustained process of engagement with and learning from other traditions. RE has shifted the focus from outcomes to process, and from doctrinal flashpoints to denominational cultures of knowledge, decision-making and dissemination. Since 2008, RE has explicitly been adopted by an international range of Christian groups, and most significantly has provided the underpinning methodology of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission since its relaunch in 2011.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Traditional Christian ecumenical dialogue attempts to overcome deep-rooted divisions between traditions, divisions which historically have been accompanied by damaging social consequences. Dialogue has focused on the clarification and negotiation of specific knots of disagreement, in the search for common ground and a common language. While this approach has borne fruit in various bilateral ecumenical processes, it has also increasingly run up against fundamental differences of doctrine and culture. Professor Paul Murray's concept of "Receptive Ecumenism" (RE) provides a way out of this cul-de-sac. It focuses not on historic problems but on what each community / tradition can with integrity <i>learn or receive</i> from others. That is, each tradition is invited to focus, not on the problems which other traditions' doctrines and practices represent, but on an open-ended process of <i>self-criticism</i> in the light of the others' doctrines and practices. The process is one of spiritual discernment and communal self-examination.</p> <p>Murray was appointed Lecturer in Theology in Durham in 2003 (Professor from 2009). In 2004 he set out the key principles of RE in a book exploring the nature of theological reasoning in a plural, post-foundational context. At a theoretical level, RE reflects a 'committed pluralism' (Murray 2004), influenced especially by the American pragmatist philosopher Nicholas Rescher. This holds in creative tension the two convictions (1) that the world we inhabit is irreducibly plural, and (2) that particular rooted commitment is a rational, non-relativistic response to this plurality. The tension between these convictions gives rise to an ethical imperative for particularity to be open to its plural contexts. It needs to retain its own integrity while allowing itself to be affected by those contexts, rather than ignoring them or seeking to subject them to itself. When this ethic of receptivity is applied in the context of ecumenical dialogue, the focus shifts from critical questioning of the 'other' to critical questioning of one's own particular community in the light of the 'other'. The underlying question becomes, 'What can our own tradition learn by receiving from another tradition?', asked in the expectation that some aspects of Christianity will be more adequately performed in the other tradition than within one's own.</p> <p>The conclusions in Murray 2004 and in subsequent articles (Murray 2005 & 2006) drew out certain important ecumenical and ecclesiological implications. An RE approach to ecumenism, it is argued, requires Christian communities to deepen awareness of their own cultures and structures of reasoning and decision-making, and in particular of the contingency and fallibility of those cultures and structures. It also requires communities to consider how their own reasoning and decision-making recognise the contested nature of knowledge and certainty. Murray's articles applied this approach specifically to the Roman Catholic Church, questioning whether Catholic decision-making is in fact and necessarily as absolutist and hierarchical as is commonly understood. He described structures of knowledge in Catholicism as an open web which is in practice capable of assimilating ideas while preserving both their and its own integrity. The articles also explore how formal Catholic decision-making might be restructured to reflect this. These explorations were summarised in a programmatic statement of the RE agenda (eventually published as Murray 2007), around which a colloquium of 150 church- and university-based theologians from eight denominations and eleven countries was convened in 2006. Thirty-two papers presented to the colloquium were published in Murray 2008b. The power of this approach was further recognised by</p>

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an issue of the scholarly journal, *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008), much of which was devoted to RE. Alongside Murray's discussion of the methodological shifts underpinning RE, articles by Gabriel Flynn (Catholic), Kallistos Ware (Orthodox) and Paul Fiddes (Baptist) indicated how the position outlined in Murray 2007 could be applied in diverse ecclesial contexts.

3. References to the research

1. Murray 2004: *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters).
2. Murray 2005: 'Roman Catholic Theology after Vatican II', in David F. Ford (ed.) with Rachel Muers, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (Oxford: Blackwell), 265-86.
3. Murray 2006: 'On Valuing Truth in Practice: Rome's Postmodern Challenge', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, 163-83.
4. Murray 2007: 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, 279-301.
5. Murray 2008a: 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning', in *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008), 30-45.
6. Murray 2008b: Paul D. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: OUP)

The quality of this work is demonstrated by publication with leading academic publishers and peer-reviewed journals, and by the range of international scholars who have engaged with the project.

4. Details of the impact

Murray's research has facilitated the resumption and redirection of the stalled process of engagement between Christian churches. The value of RE is that it does *not* aim to produce dramatic formal agreements or doctrinal shifts. Rather, its purpose is to change the way in which ecumenical conversations are pursued at every level; and thereby to promote change within particular traditions, through receiving and learning from other traditions. Its impact can be evidenced principally at two levels:

1: International ecumenical bodies

(i) The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The PCPCU is the Vatican body responsible for ecumenical matters. The PCPCU President participated in the 2006 colloquium and wrote a preface to Murray 2008b, stating that 'I am convinced that it [RE] will contribute to a new start ... within the ecumenical movement'; in 2008 he described RE as 'a decisive step' in ecumenism. [1] The report of an extraordinary PCPCU colloquium in February 2010 identified RE as a key ecumenical technique, emphasising how RE can 'help [ecumenical] dialogues to be sensitive to issues of culture and local realities'. [4] Since then, the PCPCU has introduced RE to a range of local Catholic contexts (see below, 4.2.ii). The PCPCU officer responsible for relations with Anglicanism and Methodism worldwide, stated in mid-2013: 'Receptive Ecumenism has had a considerable influence on the function and method of current ecumenical dialogue in which this Pontifical Council is engaged'. [1b]

(ii) World Council of Churches (WCC). An international colloquium, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning' (Durham, January 2009) attracted 200 participants including the twenty senior ecumenical officers from the UK's denominations (in lieu of their own annual meeting), and the director and both assistant directors of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. Consequently, the WCC invited Murray to be a consultant to the 2009 decennial meeting of the Faith and Order Commission, the principal global forum for ecumenical engagement. At the director's invitation, Murray prepared one of three documents for pre-circulation to all participants. The director's covering letter introduced RE as a 'significant development ... in the contemporary Ecumenical Movement'. [3] Those influenced by this introduction include the Professor of Canon Law and Kirchenrecht at Erfurt University, who has since lectured on RE to leading ecumenical groups in Germany, and through whom RE was in 2013 introduced to the newly started Vienna dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Roman Catholic Church. [10]

(iii) Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). RE is central to the third phase of ARCIC, the highest profile English-language bilateral ecumenical dialogue. Historically, the methods pioneered by ARCIC have shaped all other bilaterals. ARCIC's first and second phases (1970-1981, 1982-2005) eventually reached an impasse in the face of apparently irreconcilable

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and growing differences of doctrine and practice. A long hiatus followed the conclusion of ARCIC II, symptomatic of a general recognition that the process had stalled.

The emergence of RE therefore proved timely. A month after the 2009 RE colloquium, the Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster addressed the Church of England's General Synod, stating that 'I see the ecumenical landscape between our two Churches in this intermediate time as a kind of receptive ecumenism'. In the debate that followed, the Anglican bishops of Guildford and Durham explicitly praised RE as an approach, the latter paying particular tribute to Murray and adding that when he had first heard of RE, 'I thought it was a breath-taking and wonderful way of approaching the ecumenical task'. [2] RE was thus endorsed as a method for ecumenism by senior representatives of both partners in the ARCIC process.

In 2011, a third phase of ARCIC was launched, and Pope Benedict XVI named Murray as one of the Commission's nine Roman Catholic members, specifically in order to bring RE to bear on ARCIC's work. At the Commission's inaugural meeting in May 2011, it received a paper from Murray and then formally recognised RE as the fresh methodology which it needed. The official communique cites Murray 2007 and states: 'In considering the method that ARCIC III will use, the Commission was particularly helped by the approach of "receptive ecumenism". ... ARCIC is committed to modelling the receptive ecumenism it advocates.' [5a] One of ARCIC's co-chairs described Murray's paper for ARCIC as 'a serious and prophetic text, unlocking doors we might not have even thought were there'. [5b] The Anglican Communion's director of Unity, Faith and Order singled out the use of RE as ARCIC III's primary innovation. [5d]

ARCIC's agenda and methods have thus fundamentally changed from its previous iterations. Rather than aiming to produce agreed statements on controversial points, ARCIC III is now working to produce documents containing parallel statements from the two denominational parties, in which each engages in self-criticism in the light of the other's practices. In accordance with RE's focus on cultures of knowledge, the theme of the first phase of ARCIC III is the underpinning problem of 'how our two Communion's approach moral decision making, and how areas of tension for Anglicans and Roman Catholics might be resolved by learning from the other'. [5a]

In summary, while the work of ARCIC continues, RE has already provided a means of restarting this globally significant ecumenical process and profoundly shaped its proceedings. As one ARCIC member observed in 2013: 'We are starting from a different place than ARCIC I which thought that finding common language might lead us to unity. ... We began with receptive ecumenism.' This has not been uncontroversial: another member has expressed concern that 'we are putting all our methodological eggs in the receptive ecumenism basket'. [5e] But the effect is clear. As a senior bishop and officer at the PCPCU commented in 2011, the adoption of RE by ARCIC meant that 'Receptive Ecumenism has moved from a great initiative among a group of academics and ecumenists ... to a stated part of the methodology of the bilateral dialogue which has shaped the methodologies of so many other bilaterals'. [5c]

2: Local and regional churches

Endorsements by the PCPCU and WCC have fostered local interest in RE internationally. Murray has been invited to speak at RE-related events in ten countries on five continents, ranging from a full-scale conference on RE in Dublin in 2006 (organised by the Mater Dei Institute, Dublin City University), which brought together academic theologians and denominational ecumenical officers, through to practical workshops for church leaders, such as one in Rome in 2008, or the series in Australia and New Zealand described below.

However, RE's influence now reaches well beyond Murray's own activity. A recent survey of local Anglican-Roman Catholic commissions across the world by the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) 'indicates clearly that Receptive Ecumenism is a formative influence on their discussions'. [1b] Indeed, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury has contacted Murray to discuss how RE could inform Anglican-Catholic relations. The cultural change effected by RE is by its nature diffuse, but is illustrated by Murray's personal involvement in two particular regions:

(i) North-East England. Following the programmatic statement in Murray 2007, the Durham Project on Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church was launched in north-east England in 2008, with

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the involvement of Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and United Reformed Church (URC) representatives. The aim is for the partners, in dialogue with one another, each to reflect on the contingency of their own cultures and organisational structures. The Moderator of the URC Northern Synod comments that the project has enabled the URC 'to explore ... a different way of expressing the unity that is a gift of Christ', which is 'rich in terms of intra church dialogue'. [8]

The self-critical awareness which RE has generated through this project is indicated by the following examples. The URC is using the example of Anglican and Roman Catholic deaneries to review the structures of its mission partnerships, exploring the place which 'personal authority (episcopate)' might have in 'a clearer more defined structure' to 'help support local churches'. The Moderator believes that this will 'enable us to live "the priesthood of all believers" more fully' [8]. The Roman Catholic diocese of Hexham and Newcastle is proposing to change the workings of its diocesan and parochial pastoral councils, drawing on Methodist practice. Canonically, these councils are purely consultative; the proposal is to introduce 'deliberative modes of governance ... providing stronger means for lay involvement' by 'opening up membership' and requiring such councils to be formed in every parish [9].

(ii) Australia and New Zealand. In 2012 Murray was invited by the South Australian Council of Churches (SACC) and the other principal ecumenical bodies in Australia and New Zealand to lecture and advise on the application of RE for their churches. From 8 July – 30 August, he toured both countries, addressing 25 public meetings and discussing the local adaptation of RE with virtually all of those in the two countries involved in formal ecumenical dialogues.

As a result, in October 2012 SACC published an online booklet, *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands: The Promise and Potential of Receptive Ecumenism* (since updated), which promotes the practice of RE at grassroots level. It states that Murray's visit 'inspired ... many people across the Church in Australia / New Zealand and led to the desire of the South Australian Council of Churches to keep alive the "conversation" on the promise and potential of Receptive Ecumenism' [6a]. As with international bodies such as ARCIC, RE has provided fresh wind to a becalmed ecumenical process. The SACC President confirms that RE now has 'a groundswell of interest ... across Australia and New Zealand'. Murray's visit 'has helped harness that interest, develop a strong theological framework around it and given an impetus across the Church community' [6b].

In turn, the success of the SACC booklet persuaded the British branch of the Bible Society, the world's leading Bible translator (working in more than 200 countries and territories), to commission a version for international use, bolstered by fresh material from Murray and from the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster. The Bible Society USA is also supporting this project. The Bible Society's head of advocacy confirms that this reflects 'our commitment to Receptive Ecumenism' and that the Society is 'investing a significant amount of both funding and time' to produce this resource and to disseminate it internationally. [7]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 1.a) President of the PCPCU, address at Rome launch of Murray 2008b, 23 October 2008; b) Letter from the PCPCU Staff Officer for Anglicanism and Methodism, 28 June 2013
2. Church of England General Synod, Report of Proceedings 9 February 2009
3. Letter from the Director of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, 15 September 2009
4. Summary Findings of the Harvesting the Fruits Colloquium, February 2010
5. ARCIC: a) communique, Bose, 27 May 2011; b) ARCIC Aide Memoire, 27 May 2011; 5c Email from the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, Canada, 27 May 2011; d) Centro newsletter, November 2011; e) ARCIC Aide Memoire, 7 May 2013
6. a) 'Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands', 2012 ; b) Letter from the President of the SACC, 18 September 2012
7. Email from the Head of Advocacy, UK Bible Society, 16 May 2013
8. Letter from the Moderator of the United Reformed Church Northern Synod, 31 May 2013
9. 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle', 2013
10. Letter from the Professor of Canon Law and Kirchenrecht at Erfurt University, 17 August 2013