

Section A		
Institution: Durham University		
Unit of Assessment: 31, Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Receptive Ecumenism		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2004 and 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Paul D. Murray	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Systematic Theology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2003 onwards
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between August 2013 and July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Receptive Ecumenism (RE) is a new method for conducting ecumenical dialogue, originating in Paul Murray's research, asking Christian traditions to consider not what other traditions can learn from them, but what they can learn from others to help achieve unity. RE has been incorporated into papal teaching by Pope Francis, and welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as "one of the most important of recent ecumenical developments". It has become part of formal church teachings and led to an international bilateral statement between Christian traditions. At the level of national and local church communities, its practical value has been implemented across many geographies, languages, and cultures.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Traditional ecumenical dialogue attempts to overcome deep-rooted divisions between Christian traditions, divisions which historically have been accompanied by damaging social consequences. Dialogue has traditionally focused on the clarification, negotiation, and attempted unpicking of specific disagreements in search of common ground and a common language. While this approach has borne fruit in various instances, it has also increasingly run up against fundamental differences of doctrine and culture. Paul Murray's concept of "Receptive Ecumenism" (RE) provides a way out of this impasse. Drawing on his original work developing a post-foundationalist approach to theological reasoning [R1], RE focuses not on overcoming historic problems and achieving commonality but on what each community/tradition can <i>learn or receive</i> from others across continuing differences. 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 communal self-criticism, self-examination, and constructive adaptation in the light of these differences.</p> <p>Murray came to Durham in 2003, and in 2004 set out the key principles of RE and explored the nature of theological reasoning in a plural, post-foundational context. At a theoretical level, RE reflects a "committed pluralism" [R1], influenced especially by the American pragmatist philosopher Nicholas Rescher. This holds in creative tension the two convictions: (i) that the world we inhabit is irreducibly plural; and (ii) that rooted commitment to a particular set of beliefs is a rational response to this. As Murray argues, the tension between these convictions gives rise to an ethical imperative for traditions to be open to plural contexts, while retaining their own integrity. When this ethic 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 one's own tradition learn by receiving from the other tradition?" asked in the expectation</p>		

that there are aspects of Christianity that may be more adequately performed in other traditions than one's own.

Murray's conclusions [R1] and related papers (for example, [R2] and [R3], the latter was also published in German translation) drew out the relevant ecumenical and ecclesiological implications. The RE approach to ecumenism, it is argued, requires Christian communities to deepen awareness of the contingency and fallibility of their own cultures and structures of reasoning and decision-making. It also requires communities to consider how their own reasoning and decision-making recognise the contested nature of knowledge and certainty. The essays both explain the RE approach and apply it specifically to the Catholic Church, questioning whether Catholic decision-making must necessarily be as absolutist and hierarchical as is commonly understood, and describing Catholic structures of knowledge as an open web which is in practice capable of assimilating ideas while preserving both their and its own integrity. These and other essays also explore how Catholic decision-making might be restructured to reflect this.

A series of four dedicated international conferences (UK 2006, UK 2009, USA 2014, Australia 2017) have gathered over 500 church-and university-based theologians from multiple denominations and contexts to discuss and appropriate Murray's proposals. The volume indicated in [R2] issued from the first of these and that in [R6] from the fourth. A further volume is in process relating to the second and third.

Much of Murray's work subsequently turned to exploring quite what the practical adoption of this approach would look like in relation to formal international bilateral ecumenical dialogue processes (for example, [R4] and [R5]). With that, through a further series of papers and published essays, Murray also returned to the underpinning research on the dynamics of Christian theology in post-foundationalist, pluralist perspective [R1] in order to demonstrate the relevance of a coherentist approach to doctrinal assessment and development in the specific context of receptive ecumenical engagement [e.g. R6].

3. References to the research

- R1. Paul D. Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).
- R2. Paul D. Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda", in Paul D. Murray (ed.) *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 5-25.
- R3. Paul D. Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture, and Society* 51 (2014), 1-8.
- R4. Paul D. Murray, "The Reception of ARCIC I & II and the Agenda for ARCIC III", in *Ecclesiology* 11(2) (2015), 199-218.
- R5. Paul D. Murray, "In Search of a Way – Ecumenical Methodology", in Geoffrey Wainwright & Paul McPartlan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600847.013.45.
- R6. Paul D. Murray, 'Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: Notes on Being Reasonable and Responsible in Receptive Ecumenical Learning', in *Leaning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church*, Virginia Miller, David Moxon, and Stephen Pickard (eds.), (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan [Springer Nature], 2019), pp. 217-34.

The quality of this work is demonstrated by publication with leading academic publishers and peer-reviewed journals, by the range of international scholars who have engaged with the project, and by the 5 international conferences dedicated to this subject (detailed below). Reviewing R2 in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Nicholas M. Healy noted that "this collection of 32 high-quality essays makes a good case for a bold new strategy based on the principles of 'receptive ecumenism' and 'catholic learning'". Further evidence for

the quality of the research is external funding totalling GBP397,762 awarded by The British Academy, Porticus International, and others.

4. Details of the impact

Since REF2014 the underlying research has resulted in direct material impact in three main areas: 1) International Ecumenical Bodies; 2) National and Local Church Practice in the UK; and 3) National and Local Church Practice outside of the UK

1) International Ecumenical Bodies

The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. *The PCPCU is the Vatican body responsible for ecumenical matters, representing approximately 1,200,000,000 Catholics worldwide, including 500,000 clergy in nearly 3,000 dioceses.*

The concept of RE has been recognised by the Pope, which is a significant development in how the world's largest Church approaches relationships with other Christians. Murray's research has provided the Catholic Church with new perspectives and tools for dealing with ecumenical relations. Addressing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2014, and again in 2017, Pope Francis presented the distinctive principle of RE as a guide for the Church: "Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other's gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, without waiting for the others to learn first." [E2]. Papal teachings, even simple addresses such as these, are influential factors in determining Catholic policy and practice at every level, and their influence persists due to the weight of authority given by papal endorsement, and by inclusion in the Vatican online archive. Similarly, and more formally, the endorsement and adoption of RE by the PCPCU has been further extended since 2014. The official Catholic Response to a major World Council of Churches study in 2019 affirms: "The Catholic Church commits itself to the new paths opened by receptive ecumenism." [E1b]

Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)

As detailed below, RE was adopted by the PCPCU as the method for ARCIC III. [E1a] As ARCIC represents the most mature English-language bilateral dialogue, the impact of this adoption goes beyond Anglican-Catholic dialogue to represent a significant shift in wider ecumenical dialogue and changes to church practice [E2]. Notable here is American Episcopalian use of RE via the ARCIC III documentation to consider learning from recent Catholic teaching in opposition to the death penalty [E3].

As reported in REF2014, RE was endorsed as a method for ecumenism by both partners in the ARCIC process. Since 2014, this endorsement has been realised in the publication of a major document, *Walking Together on the Way (WTW)*, drafted between 2014 and 2017, which employs the method of RE throughout [E4a]. The official Anglican commentary notes that "the methodology of the document is profoundly shaped by the insights of receptive ecumenism, pioneered and developed by Professor Paul Murray" [E4b].

WTW is a "ground-breaking" document with "the potential to restore ecumenical dialogue to good health" [E5] as a result of the use of RE, providing a pattern for future dialogues: "*WTW* has admirably demonstrated the advantages of the receptive ecumenism approach" (official Catholic commentary, [E4a]). The Anglican commentary notes, "*WTW* opens up a whole new vista in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations... For Anglicans, the Lambeth Conference of 2020 (postponed to 2022 as a result of Covid-19 restrictions) provides an obvious and timely moment to formally receive this work and to discern how our own structures might put this mutual receptive learning into practice" [E4b].

As a result of the use of RE in *WTW*, potential Catholic learning regarding the laity, married clergy, and female deacons was identified. Potential Anglican learning includes examining successful models of communion and unity in the Catholic Church [E4]. The significance of this can be seen in the biennial gathering of UK Catholic and Anglican bishops under the auspices of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARRCUM) in 2019 which was entirely devoted to discussion and reception of *WTW*.

2) National and Local Church Practice in the UK

The impact of RE on churches in the UK has also been substantial, arising directly from dissemination of the research in print and presentations to ecclesial and public audiences. It has influenced church leaders and organisations, with corresponding impact on ecumenical dialogues, formal written strategies, and local church practices. Of particular significance is the adoption of RE by the Church of England for ecumenical dialogues with partners other than Catholics, showing how RE has extended its reach beyond the predominantly Catholic context documented in REF2014. Key examples are:

The Church of England. *The Church of England has approximately 25,000,000 members in over 12,000 parishes and is one of the 40 churches in the worldwide Anglican Communion which extends to 165 countries.*

In 2018, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave the keynote address to the World Council of Churches 70th Anniversary celebrations. He devoted a section of his speech to RE, saying that “One of the most important of recent ecumenical developments has been the concept of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’... based predominantly on the work of Professor Paul Murray at Durham University ... It turns negotiated frontiers into open borders” [E6].

RE has been incorporated into Anglican dialogues with Methodist, Pentecostal, and United Reformed churches [E7a, b]. The Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England notes that RE is a “valuable tool ... proving particularly useful in the developing dialogue between Pentecostals and the Church of England ... Receptive Ecumenism is proving valuable to the churches and is contributing to deeper unity ... among an ever-wider circle” [E8].

North East Churches Acting Together. *NECAT is the intermediate (i.e. regional) body for Churches Together in the North East of England. 6 major denominations are represented in its Northern Church Leaders’ Group and in its Ecumenical Officers’ group.*

The Final Report of the Durham University project on RE and the Local Church (involving 8 church groupings from North East England) was published in 2016 [E9]. RE enabled all participant churches to identify areas of difficulty in their local practice, and highlighted potential solutions from another church. In the case of the United Reformed Church, this led to national recommendations on ecumenical practice and church leadership [E7d].

National Board of Catholic Women. The NBCW funded a two-year Durham research project using receptive ecumenism to research women’s’ experience of church in the UK. The practice of RE in these women-only groups ‘led to the empowerment of women ... enabling women to share their stories [including patriarchal attitudes and abuse] and strategies and overcome isolation.’ RE enabled this to be done in new ways, reaching churches which have previously not been involved in inter-church activities (e.g. Assemblies of God). [E10].

Churches Together in England (CTE). *CTE is the national body supporting and encouraging churches from a wide range of traditions to work together in England. It has 2,000 local groups in the UK, with 900 local partnerships and 51 member denominations.*

Churches and ecumenical groups have been provided with new online resources by CTE to open ecumenical conversations in local communities using RE. A 2017 survey commissioned

by CTE noted “the growing popularity of the concept and methods of ‘receptive ecumenism’ [E7c] in contrast to widespread difficulties for the ecumenical movement.

3) National and Local Church Practice outside the UK

Direct impact of the research on church thinking and practice is also evident internationally. For example, in Europe, the adoption of RE resulted in an innovative ecumenical mission pilgrimage in Sweden [E7e]. In Canada, RE refreshed national Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogues, and enabled Anglican-Mennonite Dialogue to be started [E7f]. In Australia, the Dialogue between Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches made RE their “major focus” for 2014-2017, reporting that they “greatly benefitted” from engaging with RE and “remain committed to the RE process”. This new impact emerged directly from an earlier Australian engagement with Murray noted in REF2014 [E7g].

Three international conferences have been developed since the first two Durham-based events: 2014 (Fairfield, Connecticut); 2017 (Canberra, Australia,); 2021 (Sigtuna, Sweden, planned). Each conference brought/will bring together approximately 150 church leaders, ecumenical dialogue partners, local practitioners, and academics from more than 20 countries. In addition to inter-church impact there is potential for further impact in the field of inter-faith relations. Essays by Francis Clooney, and John O’Brien, addressing this aspect of RE are included in a new volume in preparation by Murray’s research team in Durham.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [E1] a. **PCPCU: Letter from Bishop Brian Farrell**, April 2019;
- b. **Official Catholic Response to The Church: Towards a Common Vision** (2019)
- [E2] **Transcripts of Speeches of Pope Francis**, 22/1/2014 and 25/1/2017
- [E3] **Covenant Weblog** “Convention, Pope Francis, and the Death Penalty” (14/08/2018)
- [E4] **ARCIC Walking Together on the Way.**
 - a. *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church—Local, Regional, Universal. An Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III)* (SPCK, 2018). ISBN: 978-0-281-07894-3.
 - b. *Walking Together on the Way: Anglican and Catholic Official Commentaries on the ARCIC Agreed Statement* (SPCK, 2018). ISBN: 978-0-281-07909-4.
- [E5] **Church Times**, Simon Caldwell, “ARCIC: This is What We Can Learn Together” (6/7/2018)
- [E6] **Justin Welby Speech to the World Council of Churches**, (06/02/2018)
- [E7] **Extracts from Church Reports** referencing the adoption or impact of RE:
 - a. **Church of England**: Council for Christian Unity and Lambeth Palace, *The Church of England’s Ecumenical Relationships Annual Report 2018*
 - b. **Anglican – Methodist** Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group *Annual Report, 2016*
 - c. **Theos Report for CTE, 2017** N. Mladin, R. Fidler, and B. Ryan, *That They All May Be One: Insights into Churches Together in England and Contemporary Ecumenism*
 - d. **United Reform Church (URC) Assembly Report, 2016**
 - e. **Christian Council of Sweden and Swedish Mission Council**: S. Gehlin, “Receptive Ecumenism: A Pedagogical Process” in V. Balabanski & G. Hawkes (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning, and Loving in the Way of Christ* (ATF, 2018).
 - f. **Anglican Church of Canada General Synod 2016, Resolution a140.**
 - g. **South Australia Uniting Church** Case Studies of Receptive Ecumenism, Nov 2017.
- [E8] **Letter from Church of England National Ecumenical Officer**, (25/09/2018)
- [E9] **Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church, Final Report**, 2016
- [E10] **Letter from National Board of Catholic Women**, April 2018