

Ecumenical Reception, the Roman Catholic Church, and Receptive Ecumenism

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GETI Final Paper
February 14, 2014

“You are never the same after you attend an ecumenical gathering.”¹ After attending the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan, Republic of Korea, I can attest to this as true. It is a time of radical transformation in our hearts and minds and souls. My previous introduction to and love for ecumenism was mostly as a result of ecumenical friendships. Now, with my academic knowledge increased exponentially because of this opportunity, I left Busan convinced that it was still relationships that would drive my own ecumenical efforts and persistence, but that this would be coupled with directed pastoral efforts and theological exchange. Throughout the Assembly and afterward though, I kept wondering, “how do we spread this message and this enthusiasm?” How does this not get relegated to the passion of a few, who are a crowd of thousands in Busan, but one and two when scattered back to their home countries and schools?

Some of what I was looking for is found in the *Ninth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*. At the Assembly² and after, I heard some regret that this *Ninth Report* was not paid more attention. As a Catholic, I could especially relate to that regret in that this is one of the ways the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) is officially connected to the WCC. The *Ninth Report* is subtitled, “Receiving one another in the name of Christ” and the appendices are “Reception: A Key to Ecumenical Progress” and the “Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism.” The two appendices together are meant to be mutually enriching dimensions of a holistic response to Saint Paul’s exhortation to “Receive one another in the name of Christ.” I posit that the report was underreported at the Assembly partially because the gems of the report are actually the appendices and that the appendices were not

¹ Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Ninth Report, 2007-2012: Receiving One Another in the Name of Christ*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 128.

² Roman Catholic confessional meeting at the 10th Assembly in Busan, November 7, 2013.

sufficiently original or prophetic enough to warrant the scrutiny of the magnifying glass that is a General Assembly.

This paper will explore these two appendices, most specifically, the “Reception” one, as a needed foundation to the popular spread of the ecumenical movement, or rather, the spirit of ecumenism, specifically in the Catholic Church, and then will suggest that continued growth of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’ is the next needed step, especially for Catholics, to further the energy and passion of ecumenism, as we work together “so that all may be one.”³

It is first necessary to explore the “Reception” appendix, along with supplementary material on reception, so as to have a current understanding of this process that can hopefully lead to an ecumenism that is lived out by the common members of a church. The “Reception” appendix to the Ninth Report defines reception using the *Eighth Report*: reception is “the process by which the churches make their own the results of their encounters with one another, and in a particular way the convergence and agreements reached on issues over which they have historically been divided.”⁴ The Faith and Order Commission report in 1968 defined it similarly but more narrowly as, “the process by which local churches accept the decision of a council and thereby recognize its authority.” Simply put, reception in this ecumenical context refers to churches being affected by the dialogues and exchanges between churches, instead of the formal encounters having no effect on the life, faith, and theology of a particular church. The appendix goes on to say that reception is fundamental to the life of the church,⁵ and to receive, is essential to the experience of Christians.⁶ Frederick Bliss notes that this is because the Christian history

³ John 17:21

⁴ JWG, 43.

⁵ JWG, 44.

⁶ JWG, 45.

of each person began as a receiving event, because faith is a gracious gift.⁷ Then, because reception pertains to the individual lives of Christians, it also pertains to the community of the church, for her existence was also received and her life continues to be received. Reception is not just an ecumenical concept but is thus integral to the life of the church. As a process, it has always been part of the history of the church, yet it was forgotten and ignored by the beginning of the 20th century. Jean-Marie Tillard would describe reception as one of the most important theological rediscoveries of the century.⁸ This was thanks to the ecumenical movement's emphasis on it and then especially to the openness and direction of Vatican II.

As we search for a meaning of reception and then work to encourage the process, it is important to note that reception as a concept is not restricted to theology or even ecumenical theology.⁹ It has actually become a technical term in a number of disciplines to describe the action of "receiving" or "transfer" of knowledge.¹⁰ Theologically, reception is best understood in terms of the Trinity.¹¹ The Trinity is a mutual relationship among three bodies who give and receive. With this basis, it is important to remember that reception is an effect and sign of the Spirit's presence, a theological process that is constitutive of the life of Christians and the Church,¹² and thus, it is something we can be open to, not something that can be forced, no matter its worthiness.

There are many aspects of this theological process. The "ingredients" of reception include personal understanding that leads to the establishment of conviction, then greater or lesser involvement of a community in the process, and the contribution of cultural settings in

⁷ Frederick M. Bliss, *Understanding Reception: A Backdrop to Its Ecumenical Use*. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1993), 19.

⁸ Rusch, 33.

⁹ Bliss, 12.

¹⁰ Rusch, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

particularizing the content of what is given and received.¹³ Within these ingredients is where my interest primarily lies, in that the question is how to “spread reception,” or how to move from personal conviction—often the personal conviction of church leaders or committed theologians and aspiring ecumenical students—to the involvement of the whole community, in a way that engages the world around and outside the church itself.

Thus, the *Ninth Report* goes on to clarify that reception is more than recognition; it involves appropriation and assimilation of what is received in concrete communities with concrete gestures of communion.¹⁴ Thus, to speak of reception, is to speak of churches that are living ecumenism, embracing not only relationships, but finding common theological ground, sharing liturgies, and cooperating in service. If everyone is involved in receiving, then everything that the faithful and ministers alike are involved in, from worship to service to daily life, will be transformed.

And this is where it is piercingly clear that the “Spiritual Roots” appendix is the needed complement to the “Reception” appendix, because our spiritual roots open us with humility to transformation. The “Spiritual Roots” document notes that it is this very calling to repentance and conversion that is a basis for unity because it is sin that has led us away from communion with one another.¹⁵ Not only are we united when we express repentance, as the document states, but we are made ready to receive one another from a posture of humility. Reception is only possible when our shared spiritual roots challenge the pride that plays a role in keeping us apart as we claim to have a monopoly on truth. Bliss notes this necessary spiritual aspect of reception: “Reception is clearly a spiritual journey, along which persons and communities explore the mystery of the Godhead, the nature of the church and the bonds which cement Christians

¹³ Bliss, 42.

¹⁴ JWG, 45.

¹⁵ JWG, 113.

together. Deprived of this experience all other forms of reception are without life.”¹⁶ It is the work of the Spirit that compels ecumenical effort and makes it into a “movement” and a “process” instead of a program. Anything less fluid and open will be subject to stagnation and failure.

Rusch reminds us that this does not mean ecumenical reception is vague or nebulous, but should actually be more demanding as churches strive to remain open to the mind and will of Christ himself.¹⁷ The “Reception” appendix notes that “reception is born with the discovery of those brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we are called into fellowship.”¹⁸ Discovery is actually part of reception, when we learn to appreciate other churches and traditions and recognize the presence of Christ in them. It is when this discovery has already taken place, that the fruits of dialogue and theological insights and convergence as expressed in documents can be ready to be received. But this discovery can only happen if we have experienced a conversion of heart and mind, of mutual repentance and humility.

A next key aspect of the reception process is that it cannot be the work of just the church leadership, whether lay or ordained, or reception will never take place. This means that ecumenical reception involves the active and distinct participation of the entire people of God—the theologians, the faithful, the ecclesial ministers, and the bishops.¹⁹ This also applies to the wider context of spreading ecumenical understanding and energy, not just to the reception of particular fruits of ecumenical dialogue. If only the leaders are engaged in the reception process and/or the wider process of engaging ecumenical efforts, then they will ultimately fail because the church is more than its visible leaders. The JWG nods to this reality when it recommends in

¹⁶ Bliss, 154.

¹⁷ Rusch, 71.

¹⁸ JWG, 55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 48.

the “Reception” appendix to “encourage all Christian leaders and the faithful to take responsibility for the ecumenical process by a commitment to concrete action.”²⁰ This should be self-evident, but it necessitates emphasis because this is exactly where the creativity is needed: how to engage the whole of a confessional tradition in embracing the results of an ecumenical council and even better, engage in ecumenical living, where unity is truly found in our diversity? Really, what is asked of church leadership in this process is not “reception” but energetic contribution and the initiation of a spiritual process, and effective planning.²¹ Consciousness-raising and sustainable planning are the jobs of church leaders, but the sole weight of responsibility, cultivation, and ultimately the “receiving” of ecumenical efforts does not fall to the leaders. Rusch reminds that before official, institutional action by church leadership occurs, a much more extensive process must take place. This process is less formal, is more gradual, and will prepare the ground for the more formal acts that are part of ecumenical reception. Without this broader acceptance of the faithful, of the people of God, the reception process will fall flat, and the church will be no closer to visible unity in Christ, because reception is evident in the bearing of fruit.²²

In the search for how reception works and its relation to how the spread of ecumenical passion and energy and spirituality happens, it is necessary to acknowledge the challenges to the reception process. The “Reception” appendix notes several of these in the section, “When Ecumenical Reception is a Struggle.” There are often ongoing issues such as the ordination of women and conflicting approaches to marriage and family, sexual ethics, bioethics and economic ethics that affect relationships and thus, reception.²³ Churches are reluctant to receive one

²⁰ JWG, 63.

²¹ Bliss, 152.

²² JWG, 56.

²³ Ibid., 89.

another, even in dialogue over theological issues, when they do not see any possibility on agreeing on ethical issues that affect people's everyday lives. Another salient challenge is the debate *within* the church traditions on varying interpretations of their beliefs and practices. Confessional traditions have a hard enough time finding unity within themselves, so this of course has a negative impact on their ability and desire to seek unity across traditions. Further, "it is no exaggeration to speak of an ecumenical overload of texts and response processes."²⁴ It can feel like too much at one time for each confessional tradition to receive the fruit of the dialogue of their leadership. Often, reception does not seem to be a priority of some national or local churches, as the topics often are seen as issues from a bygone era.²⁵

It is also important to remember that there are many non-theological factors at play in the processes of reception, including sociological factors of class and race, cultural differences, and imperial history, which bring radically different perspectives to the questions under consideration.²⁶ Also, there is the very human fear of surrendering power, which can be what it feels like when clarifying matters of doctrine. This relates back to how the search for reception is a spiritual process that requires the gift of humility for a church to engage in it with an open heart.

The last main important part of the "Reception" appendix is the section on ecumenical formation. At the 10th Assembly in Busan, I was particularly attentive to this process because I was partaking in ecumenical formation, as part of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI). As GETI students, we were being formed to be ambassadors of the ecumenical movement, to bring the passion of ecumenism back to our local parishes and schools and to continue to develop ecumenical theology. The appendix states, "one of the primary goals of

²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵ Ibid., 92.

²⁶ Ibid., 92.

ecumenical formation is to awaken the hearts and souls of Christians to the ecumenical imperative.”²⁷ It goes on to talk of ecumenical formation as a way of consolidating reception and how ecumenical formation has gained more and more interest and centrality as a key factor in the search for visible unity in recent decades.²⁸ This is true and a necessary step for the reception process to actually occur but it is a step that still focuses on the leaders—the pastors and theologians—who are crucial for guiding the process, but it is not a “solution” in itself to the popular spread of an ecumenical mindset and specific reception. It is, however, the impetus for my search for how to inspire ecumenical action among the faithful, because I am being ecumenically formed myself. It is also an indispensable part of the answer to my search, but only a part of it.

This “Reception” appendix, in dialogue with the “Spiritual Roots” appendix to the *Ninth Report* are good reminders to the ecumenical movement about necessary foundations to the popular spread of ecumenism, but as shown especially through a deeper look at the “Reception” appendix, the information in itself is not new or forward-looking; it is more a summary of work and reflection that has been ongoing for decades. Yet, the Joint Working Group, with the participation of the Roman Catholic Church is in a particularly poignant place to reflect on these foundations given the RCC’s later entrance into the ecumenical movement, its hierarchical structure with a history of not being “receptive” to the gifts of other churches, and its own case study on reception—if Vatican II is considered as an ecumenical council needing to be received by the faithful. Thus, given this vantage point, as well as my own perspective as a Roman Catholic, a narrower assessment will now be conducted on the particularity of reception in

²⁷ Ibid., 94.

²⁸ Ibid., 93-94.

relation to the RCC and the papacy and how the RCC is doing in terms of its reception of the ecumenical movement.

With its later entrance into the ecumenical movement, the RCC makes a prime case study for reception. Vatican II changed the way that the RCC viewed other churches and this is one reason that Vatican II is still in the process of reception in the RCC 50 years later. Rusch claims that the ultimate reception or non-reception of Vatican II will greatly influence RCC's relationship with ecumenical movement.²⁹ This is true in large part because “the reception of Vatican II will commit the RCC to concepts that are conducive to ecumenical advance, such as an understanding of the church as *communio*, a view of the laity as more than the passive and obedient receivers of the Church's teaching, an increased appreciation of the collegiality of all bishops, and a sense of religious liberty in the world.”³⁰ Accepting the mindset of Vatican II is a reception process in itself, and it leads to questions about reception of dialogue with other Christian traditions. More importantly, it leads to an assessment of whether Catholics view other Christians as “not full Christians” who should ideally be converted to Catholicism or if they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. On a popular level, it would seem that Catholics do view other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ, but thus, ironically, that does not translate into a need for explicit ecumenical efforts.

Given this question of the state of ecumenical reception among Catholics, however, it is important first to look at a unique aspect of the RCC—the Papacy—and how that role can, does, and should relate to Christian unity. Every human group or community needs structure and

²⁹ William G. Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2007), 43.

³⁰ Rusch, 43.

leadership if it is to last beyond its original moment of “togetherness.”³¹ In Christian communities, such headship is always exercised representatively (for our triune God). The RCC has a more defined structure that is headed by the “servant of the servants,” the Pope, whose ministry fills the same role among all Christians that Peter in the New Testament received from the Lord—to be an instrument for preserving and building communion both within the Catholic family and among all communities of Christians.³² An often contentious idea among Christian traditions is the concept of papal primacy, but the notion is actually about promoting the unity and continuity of all Christian communities in faith, life, and worship. It is about communion.³³ The Pope’s ministry is in service of the Church’s unity. All of his oversight is essentially related to elements of word, sacrament, and ministry which Jared Wicks notes, “Lutherans cherish [these] and Catholics believe [them] to be creative of ecclesiality.”³⁴ He goes on to show why this is a crucial understanding, specifically with Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical dialogue because it allows for Catholic respect for the Lutheran confessional bodies because of their emphasis on word, sacrament and ministry, but it also invites Lutherans to consider the Petrine ministry because it serves those principles—word, sacrament, and ministry—that we have in common.³⁵

Harding Meyer goes on to say this visionary statement, calling both traditions to more:

“If ever, after centuries of radical divergence, the trajectory of Lutheran and the trajectory of Roman Catholic understanding of papal ministry should converge, this will happen only if papal ministry, in its very essence, is being conceived as a personal ministry of unity for the church universal, a ministerial service that is directed to

³¹ Brian Daley, “The Ministry of Primacy and the Communion of Churches,” in *Church Unity and the Papal Office*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 30.

³² Daley, 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁴ Jared Wicks, SJ, “How Can the Petrine Ministry Serve the Unity of the Universal Church,” in *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?*, ed. James Puglisi. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 363.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Christendom itself but also beyond, towards the world and society representing Christendom, its message and its concerns."³⁶

This would require a humble openness on the part of both traditions. Not only must the Lutheran (and other) confessions be willing to consider the primacy of the papal ministry as possible and the papacy would have to truly aim to be this Petrine ministry of service to unity, but the papacy and the whole Roman Catholic Church must clearly accept, in a more serious way than it sometimes has up until now, the reality of Christian diversity as something willed by God and compatible with communion.³⁷ Otherwise, papal primacy at the service of unity will never be possible because papal primacy will always be perceived as a top-down idea at the service of conformity and superiority.

Daley suggests that a collegial structure of decision-making is needed if John Paul II's renewed vision of a universal Petrine ministry is to have real credibility.³⁸ Ministry is exercised in community, in the image of the relationship of the Trinity, and this should not cease to be the case for the Pope. He goes on to say that there will probably be few future popes who will share the dazzling abilities of John Paul II to communicate with crowds, to speak in other languages, to make an impression on the young, etc. Writing in 2001, he of course did not know yet what gifts Pope Francis would bring to the universal church. Indeed, this paper is very different today than if it had been written a year ago, before the election of Pope Francis.

Given the ecumenical ideal that the papacy be conceived as true Petrine ministry at the service of the unity of the church, this new papacy of Pope Francis presents a time to re-take the temperature of the RCC and its openness to ecumenical efforts and to assess the papacy in its

³⁶ Harding Meyer, "Towards a Common Lutheran/Roman Catholic Understanding of Papal Ministry," in *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?*, ed. James Puglisi. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 336.

³⁷ Daley, 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

ministry of unity. Given the totally subjective, small, and biased sample size of people at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, it does seem that the new Pope has an energy about him that is conducive toward unity of the church. At a Catholic confessional meeting, many of us Catholics there concurred that something we kept hearing from many people was, “We like your Pope!” to any of us who shared that his/her confessional tradition was Roman Catholic. That was a tangible experience of the unifying ministry of our Pope. Further, Pope Francis is clearly a popular figure even outside of Christianity, having been named *Time*’s Person of the Year, *The Advocate*’s Person of the Year, as well as being featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, among many other popular news and culture media outlets. His unifying role expands beyond the walls of explicit Christianity, as any true movement towards oneness will have to be. Whether this is true and lasting evidence that Francis conceives of his role in this way or whether this is a just a passing byproduct of his personality that will not last beyond Francis, of course remains to be seen. But for the time being, he has raised the level of openness in our church, among lay and ordained alike.

Therefore, it is a prime time to reassess where the RCC is in regards to reception of the ecumenical movement. The positive energy in the RCC has certainly been felt from inside and outside the Church with the humble obedience of Pope Emeritus Benedict resigning and with the election of Pope Francis. This energy seems to signal a positive movement toward openness among the faithful, which hopefully extends into a continued reception of ecumenism and a working towards oneness in the Body of Christ. The RCC, especially in my U.S. context, but also globally, has been plagued by a polarization that seemed to be threatening any semblance of unity even within our tradition, and was threatening any focus on a broader oneness with our brothers and sisters in Christ of other traditions. Pope Francis’ energy and tone have seemed to

create an atmosphere in the church where those lines feel less stark and where more energy can be spent on being the Body of Christ instead of fighting over who is in and who is out. Further, Pope Emeritus Benedict's witness of humility and obedient listening to God and relinquishing power has been and could continue to be a needed example for our church as we relate to the ecumenical movement.

As reminded by the "Reception" and "Spiritual Roots" appendices, our ecumenical efforts and the reception of them need both openness to the Spirit and humility and repentance. For far too long, the RCC was known more for its self-righteous stance that "there is no salvation outside the Church." This tone and theological understanding was drastically updated with Vatican II, but it has "only" been 50 years since that Council, which is short in the lifetime of the Church, especially for such a drastic transformation. The transformation of the Vatican's views on ecumenism from before the Council to now has to be listed as one of the greatest examples of organizational conversion in the history of the world.³⁹ The faithful have erred in the receptive direction of this ecumenical mindset, but without fervor for explicit ecumenism. Reese claims Catholics in the United States have accepted the ecumenical direction of the Catholic Church since Vatican II, even more than the hierarchy, which could experientially be affirmed, but this acceptance is also coupled with a resistance to any of the discussion and hard theological work of ecumenism.⁴⁰ Pope Emeritus Benedict's witness of humility is one that hopefully will continue to be a reminder for Catholics not to choose a mindset of superiority, but always to be open to the gifts of wisdom from other traditions.

³⁹ Thomas J. Reese, SJ, Reese, "Organization Factors Inhibiting Receptive Catholic Learning, in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 353.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 347.

This reminder is already occurring in the RCC and other churches. This idea of openness to the gifts of other traditions is officially called ‘Receptive Ecumenism.’ Ecumenism is receptive by nature, yes. Indeed, the fact that reception is going on within ecumenism is the grace that allows the ecumenical movement to continue.⁴¹ But Receptive Ecumenism arose out of the realization that the dynamic of reception is not taken seriously enough. Receptive ecumenism specifically holds up part of the process of ecumenism—reception—for attention, reflection, and action.⁴² Fundamental to Receptive Ecumenism is the conviction that the life, personally and communally, or better yet, ecclesially, is always essentially a matter of becoming more fully what we already are; “what we have been called to be and are destined to be and in which we already share, albeit in part.”⁴³ The proper stance of Christian tradition holds continuity and change together.

Receptive Ecumenism began in the RCC, as it needed to, not because of continued notions of superiority and leading the way, but because we have held a posture of superiority for far too long. The default stance of official ecumenical engagement, particularly in the RCC is one that is fundamentally critical of its dialogue partners. The rhetoric of official Roman Catholic ecclesiology proclaims the completeness of the RCC in which the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ ‘subsists’ and says of those churches or ecclesial communities that are not in communion with Rome that they lack the fullness of the Eucharistic mystery that the RCC enjoys.⁴⁴ If the RCC is complete, there is no room for ecumenism. But the RCC also believes and practices ecumenism. Receptive Ecumenism bridges this paradox.

⁴¹ Paul Avis, “Are we Receiving ‘Receptive Ecumenism?’” *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012): 224.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴³ Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

⁴⁴ Avis, 232.

To bridge it, it is not necessary to retract the claim; Jeff Gros reminds Catholics that we can nonetheless affirm, penitentially and humbly, that the one, true church subsists in the Catholic Church, but this affirmation must infuse Catholic identity with the challenge to openness and outreach to *engender* the fullness of that unity with all Christians. This requires internal renewal, personal conversion, and institutional reform.⁴⁵ *Engendering* this fullness is where Receptive Ecumenism is needed and the paradox is transcended. It is more than just theology. Avis suggests what churches need to receive each other is not “beautiful thoughts about the church,” but rather what he would call a *a praxis of unity*, a certain concrete way of living out what it means to belong to the church of Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ This is the receptive ecumenism that the Catholic Church needs, not more language, more eloquent theology, but the reception of concrete praxis, of reflection and action.

Receptive Ecumenism reminds all churches that they are wounded and incomplete and need to be made whole by divine mercy. Receptive Ecumenism necessitates this humility, therefore inviting the language that looks to Christ for healing in his Church, instead of causing harm by claiming fullness for oneself.⁴⁷ As suggested, by resigning from the papacy, Pope Benedict was a powerful witness to an attitude of humility that is needed in Receptive Ecumenism. Receptive Ecumenism invites churches to ask, “What do we need to receive” and not just, “what can our ecumenical partners learn from us?”⁴⁸ It asks us whether we can honestly look at our own Christian tradition, not disparagingly, but objectively, and look first to what we can receive, rather than what we can give.⁴⁹ This would be a big shift if the RCC embodied

⁴⁵ Jeff Gros, “The ecumenical calling of the academic theologian to spiritual pilgrimage in service of Gospel unity,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44 (2009): 374.

⁴⁶ Avis, 227.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

receptive ecumenism. From a popular perspective, it might be easier to be part of a church whose language and attitude is more humble and open. This feels like that moment for the Roman Catholic Church, with the internal renewal of our changing Popes and the movement that has inspired within the People of God, the amount of people who have re-opened themselves to faith, and the prospect of institutional reform that is being cultivated in many places.⁵⁰

But Receptive Ecumenism is not “just” spiritual ecumenism or pragmatics of ecumenism. It builds on theological dialogue but also calls on this dialogue to generate and resource receptivity throughout the life of the churches, to feed into Receptive Ecumenism at every level. Receptive Ecumenism and dialogue are mutually dependent on one another. If the ethos, the attitude of Receptive Ecumenism were taken to heart throughout the church, ecumenism would recover its authentic character and be infused with fresh vitality.⁵¹ The conviction here is that unless this commitment to transformational receptivity be made the explicit driving force of ecumenical engagement then no amount of refined conceptual clarification and reconciliation of differing theological languages will lead to real practical growth and change in the respective lives of the participating churches.⁵² Receptive Ecumenism is what will keep the movement moving.

This ethos is what is missing from the foundation laid in the JWG’s appendix on reception. It is a good document on the needed foundation but that foundation has been theorized on for decades now. Specifically, from an assessment of where the RCC is today, what is missing from a document partially issued by the RCC, is that prophetic call to humility, to not just “receive” dialogue between confessional leaders, but to be open to the gifts of other traditions, not just ready to spout the gifts of our own. This is not to say we should not love and

⁵⁰ In the Vatican, with the impetus of Pope Francis, yes, but also through the continued work of many lay groups.

⁵¹ Avis, 234.

⁵² Murray, 14.

cherish and share the gifts of our own traditions, but that our identity should be both giver *and* receiver. A brief assessment of where the RCC is today, coupled with the foundations of the appendices on “Reception” and “Spiritual Roots” show that this is not only what is needed, but that the church is ripe for Receptive Ecumenism, for a new praxis, for a new ethos of openness. Hopefully, this new ethos will inspire an ecumenical revival on the popular level so that ecumenism is more than the endeavor of professional ministers and theologians like those of at the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan..

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