

A NEW ECUMENICAL WAVE

by Gerard Kelly

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This evening I want to speak about receptive ecumenism. It is an area of ecumenical engagement that has received a lot of attention in the last couple of years and has brought with it a lot of energy. You may have already heard talk of “receptive ecumenism” and wondered what it is all about. At the same time, instinctively you probably already know something of it, as reception has been part of the ecumenical vocabulary for many years, especially since the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1982. So we are really dealing with something that is old, but also something that is new. The best way I can describe it is to say that it represents a new wave in the ecumenical movement.

Let’s play with this image for a moment. Waves can be powerful and strike with a lot of force. They can also peter out and leave you sitting waiting for the next best thing to come along. They can give you an exhilarating ride; but sometimes they give you a rough ride. Sometimes in a perverse sort of way, the rougher the ride the more exhilarating it is. This image of a new ecumenical wave suggests some questions that all of us can ponder. Do you want to ride this wave? How might you catch it? Where will it lead you? Are you ready for the unexpected?

The New Ecumenical Wave

This wave started in Durham, England. It is the brainchild of a Roman Catholic lay theologian at the University of Durham, Dr Paul Murray, and has taken shape around two international conferences. The first was held in 2006 and was called “Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning”.¹ This was followed by a conference in January 2009 on “Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Ecclesial Learning”. Both conferences assembled some of the most significant people in the ecumenical movement from across various church traditions and from significant ecumenical bodies such as the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission. The second conference had a broader focus and gave space for several traditions to reflect on how they learn and what they are learning and can learn from others. The first conference had done the same thing, but with a focus on learning for the Roman Catholic Church. It seems to me that one of the coups that Paul Murray has been able to pull off is to receive the support of church leadership at the highest level for this new wave. From the moment he started to plan the first conference he involved the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. They became keen supporters of both that conference and the second one. They saw many areas of overlap between the receptive ecumenism wave and their own project of harvesting the fruits of the ecumenical dialogues.²

More generally we can say that the time seemed ripe for this new wave. Over forty years of intense dialogue, both bilateral and multilateral, have set our churches in a new relationship with each other. Most of the suspicions of an earlier era have disappeared: at the

¹ See Paul D. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

² See Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009).

congregational level, people from different communities mix easily with each other; and at the level of church leadership, there are structures in place that give heads of churches the opportunity to meet regularly. So, despite the formal divisions that still exist among us, there is an awareness that more unites us than divides us. My own sense is that for some time we have been doing much to nurture what we already share together.

But, of course, we can never be satisfied with this. Many of us feel that we are at an impasse. Despite years of dialogue and the overcoming of some of the major doctrinal issues that divided us, we often appear to be lost and looking for a way forward. This is another reason why the time is ripe for a new ecumenical wave – one that may help to give new energy to the ecumenical movement, and one that helps us concentrate on different areas.

Description of Receptive Ecumenism

So what exactly is receptive ecumenism? Paul Murray says that the central idea requires that churches make what he calls a programmatic shift from asking what do our dialogue partners need to learn from us, to asking what do we need to learn and what can we learn from our dialogue partners.³ He contends that the bilateral and multilateral dialogues, if taken in isolation, are not capable of “delivering the self-critical openness to practical conversion, growth and development”.⁴ In other words, the focus in receptive ecumenism is not exactly the same as for traditional dialogues, which are concerned with matters of faith and order. This is not to say that matters of faith and order might not be relevant, but the focus will be different. The question might now be: given the consensus that has been reached in the theological dialogue, what can my church learn from the other? Framed this way, the question is about a willingness to be self-critical and to be open to grow through learning from others. By and large the theological dialogues have produced important theoretical outcomes. Receptive ecumenism should take churches to the next step, building on these theoretical outcomes and looking for concrete expressions in each church’s own life.

A further characteristic of receptive ecumenism is its potential to help churches look with fresh eyes at their own situation, particularly the challenges and threats they face. It is obvious that at this time many of our churches face critical questions in relation to their internal life. Some have even reached an impasse on important matters of faith and witness. Think of the struggle many of us face in dealing with matters of authority and power in the church, or of ministry in the church and its adequate provision as the number of clergy decrease. Think too of the demographic change that many of us face as our congregations age, and the challenge we face to retain our young people. Many of us face difficult questions about gender and sexuality. All of us, in some manner or other, are likely to be thinking about how to present the gospel in the postmodern world where indifference has often been replaced by hostility. Receptive ecumenism may offer a way to learn from others in facing up to these challenges. In some cases it could result in breaking through the impasse.

Reception is an old idea

I have called receptive ecumenism a new wave – and indeed, there is something new here. But we must also remember that reception is an idea that goes right back to the earliest Christian witness. An appreciation of something of the nuances of this idea will help us understand better the potential of receptive ecumenism. Let’s start with the New Testament,

³ Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning Receiving Gifts for Our Needs”, *Louvain Studies* 33(2008): 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

in particular Paul's words that he handed on what he received. The point here is that the apostolic faith must always be received before it can be handed on. When it is received it takes on a life in a new context among a new people. The example I am thinking of is 1 Cor 11 where Paul is dealing with division among the community at Corinth. He refers to what he received concerning the Last Supper, and uses this to admonish the practices at Corinth: some go hungry while others are gluttons. Paul is not simply repeating the account of the Last Supper; rather, he is asking his readers to receive it in such a way that it speaks a fresh word in a new context. He challenges those at Corinth to receive this teaching of Jesus. As long as there are factions among them, he says, they will have failed to receive the teaching. Here reception amounts to hearing the words of the Lord and appropriating them in such a way that they shape the concrete life of the community. Reception is integral in shaping the faith, life and witness of this people.

The notion of reception was also prominent in the early centuries of the Christian movement, particularly in the conciliar period. In brief, reception is a way of describing what happened to the decisions of the ecumenical councils as they entered the life of the church. Two things are to be noted. First, and more formally, the decisions of a council were ratified, as it were, at a subsequent council. Now this was a quite formal process and a necessary one; and reception at this level was formal and juridical. But something else also happened: there was a spiritual process by which the decisions of a council became part of the life of the local church. This normally happened through the liturgical, spiritual and theological life of the church. This in fact was a long process as new ways of thinking and speaking gradually had an impact on an already existing tradition of faith, life and witness.

Reception in the Ecumenical Movement

It is this latter idea – of reception as a spiritual process – that I believe has been important in the modern ecumenical movement, especially since the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1982.⁵ In presenting the text the WCC (or at least the Faith and Order Commission) called for a reception process within the churches. This, however, was a new idea for the churches. It is not surprising then, that in the years immediately following BEM numerous studies were undertaken about reception.⁶ While these helped recover the central ideas of the early centuries, they also acknowledged that our modern situation is different from the ancient undivided church: our starting point has to take account of the fact of our division. To assist this process the Commission presented, in the Preface to BEM, a series of questions for the churches.

The first question asked whether the churches could recognise in the text the faith of the church through the ages. A largely positive response to this question would lead to the subsequent questions. The point of this first question was to help the churches face up to alternative expressions of the doctrines of baptism, eucharist and ministry. If they recognised the faith of the church in the text then they would inevitably be confronted by ways of expressing that faith that were different from their own. This question was taking the churches outside their normal modes of expression in order to facilitate reception of a broader

⁵ For a more detailed study of this spiritual process see Gerard Kelly, *Recognition: Advancing Ecumenical Thinking* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

⁶ For example, a whole issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21(winter 1984) was devoted to the reception of BEM. See also Edward J. Kilmartin, "Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon and its Significance", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21(1984): 34-54; William G. Rusch, *Reception: An Ecumenical Opportunity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). Also important is the earlier study of Yves Congar, "La reception comme réalit  eccl siologique", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et th ologiques* 56(1972): 369-404.

Tradition. In other words reception would ultimately have to deal with diversity of theological expression. This, of course, means that they would have to confront new or different ways of thinking about these central questions of faith and order. While this might begin in a fairly formal way by making a judgement about the BEM text, it was ultimately a spiritual process that would have an impact on the faith, life and witness of each church. It had the potential to lead to practical and concrete changes in church life in each church. This spiritual process was summed up well in these words from the Preface to BEM: “In the process of growing together in mutual trust, the churches must develop these doctrinal convergences step by step, until they are finally able to declare together that they are living in communion with one another in continuity with the apostles and the teachings of the universal Church”.⁷

The second and third questions took the process to a deeper level. One asked about the implications for relations with other churches, particularly those that were able to recognise in BEM the faith of the church through the ages. This question was intended to build on the outcome of the first question. It was not so much asking the churches to compare themselves with each other but to consider their relationship in the light of the degree of recognition each had in relation to the independent text. The process of reception envisaged here is still quite rudimentary, while at the same time being challenging. It was not a question of one church receiving into its own life aspects of the teaching, worship and witness of other churches. At this stage it was more a matter of beginning to see the teaching, worship and witness of the other in a different light, on the basis of a common recognition of the apostolic faith in BEM. The presumption is that this process will be on-going and that step-by-step these churches will grow closer together. No church was being asked to give up anything by recognising the other as an authentic witness to the apostolic faith. But reception will involve facing up to diversity. It will involve discerning to what extent the diversity is able to build up the unity of the church, but also to what extent it represents difference that destroys unity.

The third question focused quite deliberately on each church itself, asking about the consequences of the acts of recognition that it had been able to make. In other words, where recognition had been possible a church would probably have come across different ways of expressing the faith. Using the text as a guide, churches were now asked about whether they could recognise in themselves a genuine continuity in the apostolic faith. To enter into this spiritual process of reception means that potentially the churches might recognise that there are aspects of their own faith, life and witness that need renewal. It may be that over time certain elements of the apostolic faith had become distorted or even forgotten. It may also happen, particularly in the light of the second question, that a church comes to recognise not only that there has been distortion or neglect in its own faith, life or witness, but also that the apostolic faith can be seen more clearly in another church. Recognising this can lead to renewal in one's own church.

The premise at work through these questions is that reception begins with various acts of recognition. Taken together, this is understood as a spiritual process that leads to renewal and reform. There are echoes here of the famous dictum from the 1961 WCC Assembly in New Delhi: “The achievement of unity will involve nothing more than a death and re-birth of many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice”.⁸ When you think about it, this is surely the point made in other well-known principles in our churches, such as the Reformation *semper reformanda* or Vatican II's *semper purificanda*.

⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982), ix.

⁸ W.A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 117.

To express this another way, reception requires churches to be self-critical, and to be open to conversion and renewal. It is this idea that is at the centre of this new wave in the ecumenical movement, receptive ecumenism.

We are all very familiar now with the results of the reception of BEM. The spiritual process of reception, which affects the deeper aspects of the church's life, has now been going on for more than two decades. We now have some idea of how the churches have engaged with the second and third questions. There are indications of positive outcomes. For example, many churches have used the insights of BEM in preparing new Eucharistic Prayers or Thanksgiving Prayers. In particular, there is a growing reception of the epiclesis as a central part of these prayers. Again, many churches have taken up the question of personal episcopal ministry as something they need to consider, and some have raised the possibility of introducing the threefold order of ordained ministry. Again, some churches that do not practise water baptism have begun to study this practice more intently and to ask whether they might adopt such a practice. All of these examples suggest that the spiritual process hoped for at the time BEM was published is taking place within the life of the churches. This is receptive ecumenism and it is having practical outcomes.

Receptive Ecumenism and Traditional Methodologies

This description of BEM and the reception process into which it invited the churches raises a question for me. Is this what the Durham conferences were about? I think the answer is both yes and no – or maybe it would be better put as “yes, but more”.

There is no doubt that the reception BEM called for was meant to take the churches beyond the dialogue phase of ecumenism, yet it depended on the dialogue. The dialogue could take the churches so far, but the next step required that they look at both themselves and their dialogue partners in terms of teaching, life and witness. So reception followed dialogue.

I suspect, however, that most churches working with BEM thought of it primarily as a means of focusing on their relationship with their dialogue partners. Yet, in practice it has probably had just as great an impact on their self-understanding and self-identity. Indeed, many commentators acknowledged that one of the spin-offs of BEM was a renewed confessionalism among the churches. Now this can be positive or negative. It is negative if it builds walls around churches, effectively entrenching division. Sadly, in some cases this has happened. The positive dimension of this movement is probably better not labelled as confessionalism, but rather as the renewal of ecclesial identity. In this case it leads to a more authentic expression of church life, learning from the richness of the whole *oikumene*.

This, I believe, is the point of this new wave – receptive ecumenism – and what sets it somewhat apart from the traditional notion of reception. It will help our churches focus on their identity, but not in a narrow sectarian way that is not open to change. Rather, receptive ecumenism is a way for churches to learn, to grow and to change. In this way they become truer to their apostolic origins, and thus more able to offer a precious gift to the whole church. So, instead of confessionalism we have genuine ecclesial learning!

Reception and Ecclesial Learning

I want to sound a word of caution here. Despite this rather positive outlook, there is something else that we need to be aware of, and that is that there can be many non-theological factors that prevent ecclesial learning. Each church will have to ask itself “what prevents ecclesial learning from taking place?” Of course, there can be many factors, including

organisational, psychological, sociological and cultural.⁹ Often churches must begin with these before they can go any further.

Moreover, before we rush headlong into the future, championing receptive ecumenism as the solution to all our woes, we need to be confident that it is something that our own church can embrace willingly. Let's not forget that the bottom line is that we are talking about change in churches – not other churches changing, but my church changing. Change is never easy! In a paper given at the first Durham conference Ladislav Orsy cautioned in his opening remark: “receptive ecumenism among Christian churches is a delicate operation: it is authentic when it is marked by truth and transfused by prudence”.¹⁰ He went on to speak of three criteria for authentic reception. All churches will want to be familiar with these criteria if they are to be confident that engagement with the other will facilitate genuine ecclesial learning in their own church.

The first criterion relates to identity and its preservation. No church can be expected to embrace a change that leads to a watering down of identity. At the level of Christian identity this is self-evident, as any change that dilutes our core belief in Christ or transforms the content of the basic formulas of faith shared by all churches would fundamentally destroy the apostolic faith. But what about confessional identity? After all, it is here that our major differences are to be found. Orsy, referring to the work of the Groupe des Dombes, asks whether we are now at a time when each Christian denomination needs to look inwards and ask how much of their confessional identity could be sacrificed in order to move closer to other churches. He is suggesting a spiritual process of self-emptying or *kenosis*. But this will only be authentic if it is a move towards a more authentic Christian identity.¹¹ We thus have a two-stage process: on the one hand we are speaking about churches looking inwards, examining themselves to discover their own limitations and incompleteness; and on the other hand we are speaking about churches looking outwards towards other churches, ready to find gifts and insights about the faith and how it is lived. This process is not about destroying diversity; on the contrary it recognises that the limits of diversity are defined by its capacity to express the mystery of Christ in all its richness.

The second criterion flows from this and relates to truth and falsity. The basic question each church has to face is this: how do we know that a new understanding or practice of the faith, as we are learning it from the other, is an authentic development of doctrine and not the abandonment of our Tradition. Relying on John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* he names three signs of true development.¹² First, the new insight confirms the identity and foundational components of the particular doctrine or institution. In other words the new idea does not destroy what has been fundamental to a particular idea or identity. Second, the new development blends into the old tradition or expression harmoniously. In other words, there is continuity between the old and the new, and the new can be seen as a further unfolding of the original insight. The third sign of authentic development is that it brings new life and vigour to the community. These three signs taken together should give churches confidence about what is authentic ecclesial learning.

The third criterion for authentic reception that Orsy gives is more practical and relates to prudent judgement. There comes a point when a community and its leaders must look

⁹ Cf. Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning”, 36-37.

¹⁰ Ladislav Orsy, “Authentic Learning and Receiving – A Search for Criteria”, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43.

beyond the theoretical and abstract findings of joint studies and make judgements about concrete, particular situations.¹³ This will involve a judgement about the capacity of the receiving community to embrace any change that may be suggested. It may also involve a judgement about the pace at which any change might take place in this community. We shouldn't imagine, however, that this judgement is simply a human decision. It should be a decision that involves a discernment of the Spirit, remembering that the Spirit fills the whole community with a supernatural sense of the faith so that it may be lived more authentically in the decisions and actions of daily life.

Seen in the light of these criteria, ecclesial learning is a creative process. Like any good learning it will only be effective if each church takes an active part in it. Education theorists tell us that the most effective learners are those who assume control and responsibility for their own learning. Ecclesial learning should take an individual church a long way beyond simply taking what it sees in the other and trying to do the same thing. Rather, a church will chew over what it sees and hears, ponder what this could look like in its own, perhaps different, circumstances, and use all of its own traditions and resources to develop something that is fitting for this particular community.

Two Examples

I would like to give two quite different examples of what I have been talking about. The first, I hope, will give you a feel for how the idea of receptive ecumenism is having practical outcomes in Durham and the north east of England. I choose this example because in it we see the potential for receptive ecumenism as envisaged by Paul Murray and the Durham conferences. The second example will be more personal and local and will refer to my own church.

The Durham Project on Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church

So let's look at Durham. There we have a project that is planned to take three to four years, and which involves nine denominational groupings in northeast England.¹⁴ Each of the participating churches has agreed to make available data about their church life. The project is looking at three areas. The first is governance and finance, and considers how the churches are organised and administered. It looks at the connection between financial administration and pastoral strategy – on the principle that a business plan or budget is really about putting numbers on a pastoral plan. The second area is learning and formation. It asks about the structures and processes that promote the transmission of Christian identity, faith and mission. It is also concerned to identify what impedes learning. The third area is leadership and ministry. It is asking questions about how the churches are responding to issues surrounding the declining numbers of clergy and ministers. It is also concerned to identify how churches nurture active congregations.

Let me say that I think the remarkable thing about this project is that so many churches have agreed to participate in it, and that they have been willing to open their books, as it were, to outside scrutiny. I think our churches are quite used to letting others see their particular ecclesial culture; perhaps we are not so used to letting others see the hard numbers about ourselves. The purpose of the project is to gather data and analyse it so that all the

¹³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴ See Paul D. Murray "Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning", 43-45. See also the newsletter "Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: A Regional Comparative Research Project" at <http://www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Receptive-Ecumenism-Newsletter.pdf>, accessed 28 June 2010.

participants might learn something about how the difficulties they experience in their own cultures and practices might be fruitfully addressed by learning from each other, and receiving examples of “best practice” from each other.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity, with a small group in Sydney, to meet with Professor Geoff Moore, from the Durham Business School, who was visiting Australia. He is one of the key research people involved in this project, and is focusing on matters of governance, strategy and finance. He spoke to us about some of the results that are emerging. The project is at the stage where the data from all the churches has been analysed and each church has received a copy of its own results. A summary of the data relating to all the churches is also being prepared and will be shared among the participants. Already some churches have been surprised at the picture see reflected back to them by the researchers. Geoff Moore noted that most churches are struggling with what it means to think strategically. Strategy feels like the wrong word for them; it feels alien to being church. He also observed that the capacity to think strategically is very closely related to the governance structures of the particular church. This is raising ecclesiological issues for the churches.

In a recent interview for the Faith and Leadership Centre at Duke University in the USA, Moore spoke about his hopes for the receptive ecumenism project in these words: “I hope that the project will do two things. One is that it will make a difference to the local churches. If it doesn’t have an impact in the local churches, we’ll feel that in some sense the project has failed. On the other hand, the impact is likely to be felt over a number of years; it’s not going to be easy to say, ‘They did that because of this.’ There are a lot of other factors in play here and things take time in any organization to work their way through. If in five or ten years the churches that participated don’t look back and say, ‘That was actually quite a significant project that helped us to move from where we were to where we are now,’ then I think in some sense we’ll feel we didn’t quite do it as well as we should have. That’s making a difference locally. The question then is, will it make a difference nationally and internationally? There’s no doubt that the project itself has a very international dimension, a range of people from different countries, churches and so forth engaged with it. The bigger question is, does this local practical project end up speaking to the churches and changing the way they see themselves and, hence, move us towards a fuller unity?”¹⁵

As you can see, this ecumenical work is a very different paradigm to the normal ecumenical methodology, which is characterised by theological dialogue. The focus here is on the practical and the organisational. The three areas of exploration were chosen because they are crucial areas where all churches are confronted with questions about best practice and how to respond to the demands of modern organisational and economic life, while at the same time remaining faithful to the gospel. The practices can vary greatly, and they have often developed from certain theological presuppositions. Eventually this will open doors onto the theological, but only after travelling a very different route from the normal paradigm.

As Paul Murray says, the purpose of this project is to assist the churches to learn. Each will learn things that will help it grow in its capacity to respond to the demands of contemporary life. Rather than the focus being on what other churches can learn from our church, it is now clearly on what our church can learn from others.

The Reception of the Joint Declaration on Justification in the Roman Catholic Church

The second example I want to speak of is much more traditional in terms of the way we think of reception and also much more closely connect to religious and theological issues.

¹⁵ “Geoff Moore: A Fuller Unity”, at <http://faithandleadership.com/qa/geoff-moore-fuller-unity?page=0,1>, accessed 28 June 2010.

It is also closer to home. While this is a somewhat personal story and concerns my own church, I'm sure that each of us could translate it into similar activities in our own churches.

Last year we marked the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. An anniversary like that was a time to take stock of what has happened over that ten year period. I was invited, together with a Lutheran Pastor, to address the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference about the Joint Declaration. For me the appropriate way to speak about the past ten years was in terms of reception. I said to the bishops that I wasn't much interested in talking about the theological issues around justification or the respective theologies of our churches. In a way that ground had already been covered in the dialogue that led to the Joint Declaration – although I do acknowledge that the Declaration itself pointed to further areas of study. I was more interested in thinking about how the doctrine of justification has been shaping the lives of our churches and our people over the last ten years. In other words, I was interested in the reception of the Joint Declaration. I put it to the bishops that the question they should be considering was: how has the doctrine of justification been shaping the spiritual life and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church since the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1999?

I appealed to the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who said of the Joint Declaration: “in the richness of the other we discovered our own richness. This new perception and re-reception is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us into the whole truth”.¹⁶ So the question for Catholics is: how has our recent encounter with Lutherans and the doctrine of justification helped us discover our own richness? This is not an easy question to answer because – as I heard someone put it once – Catholics don't do justification. Well, that is not quite right. We don't do it the way our ecumenical partners do, and we don't speak of it the way they do. Justification is not part of the language and piety of your ordinary Catholic. It is not much in any of our major schools of spirituality. So there is something for us to learn in our present situation.

The problem isn't just how to translate a doctrine into the experience of Catholics. I imagine that for Lutherans as well as Catholics – and all other Christians for that matter – it becomes a question of how to translate the experience of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century into a language that communicates something to people today. His teaching on justification sprang from a deep personal crisis, from the burden of guilt and sin, and from fear of God's judgement. Once again I found Kasper's commentary helpful: “We no longer feel the burden of guilt and sin as Luther did, we no longer live in the fear of God's judgement; we have all become too deistic, seeing God as quite withdrawn from our world and our everyday existence. Hence the question of a merciful God, which moved Luther so deeply, leaves us somewhat cold. The question of justification seems to be somewhat at odds with our modern experience”.¹⁷ In presenting these words to the bishops I said that I believed Kasper's point was that our reception of the Joint Declaration – especially how it will be brought into the heart of the Catholic Church and received in our parishes and communities – is less about the finer points of the doctrine, and more about human and spiritual experience, and about how we encounter God. Our process of receiving the Joint Declaration is surely demanding that we help our people open up and interpret their experience, particularly the experience in many places of hopelessness and the search for meaning.

This, I suggested, goes to the heart of our pastoral mission. The Joint Declaration has given us a new way of considering both the questions and the answers. For Catholics there is

¹⁶ Walter Kasper, *That They May All be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London/New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 125.

¹⁷ Kasper, *That They May All be One*, 132-133.

a gift to be received from our ecumenical partner, and it may help us see or grasp something that we haven't noticed before, or help us understand with new insight something that has always been familiar.

Conclusion

I began this talk by referring to receptive ecumenism as a new wave in the ecumenical movement. I chose this analogy deliberately because it suggests movement and energy. In this sense the Durham Conferences and receptive ecumenism have offered a new way to invigorate the ecumenical movement when it seems to many people to have lost momentum. I hope, though, that I have also shown that just as a wave has its origin a long way from where we catch it near the shore, reception is an idea with deep roots in the Christian tradition and in the ecumenical movement. These deep roots suggest that receptive ecumenism is not an ephemeral moment in ecumenical time, but has the potential to develop into a lively instrument for ecclesial learning.