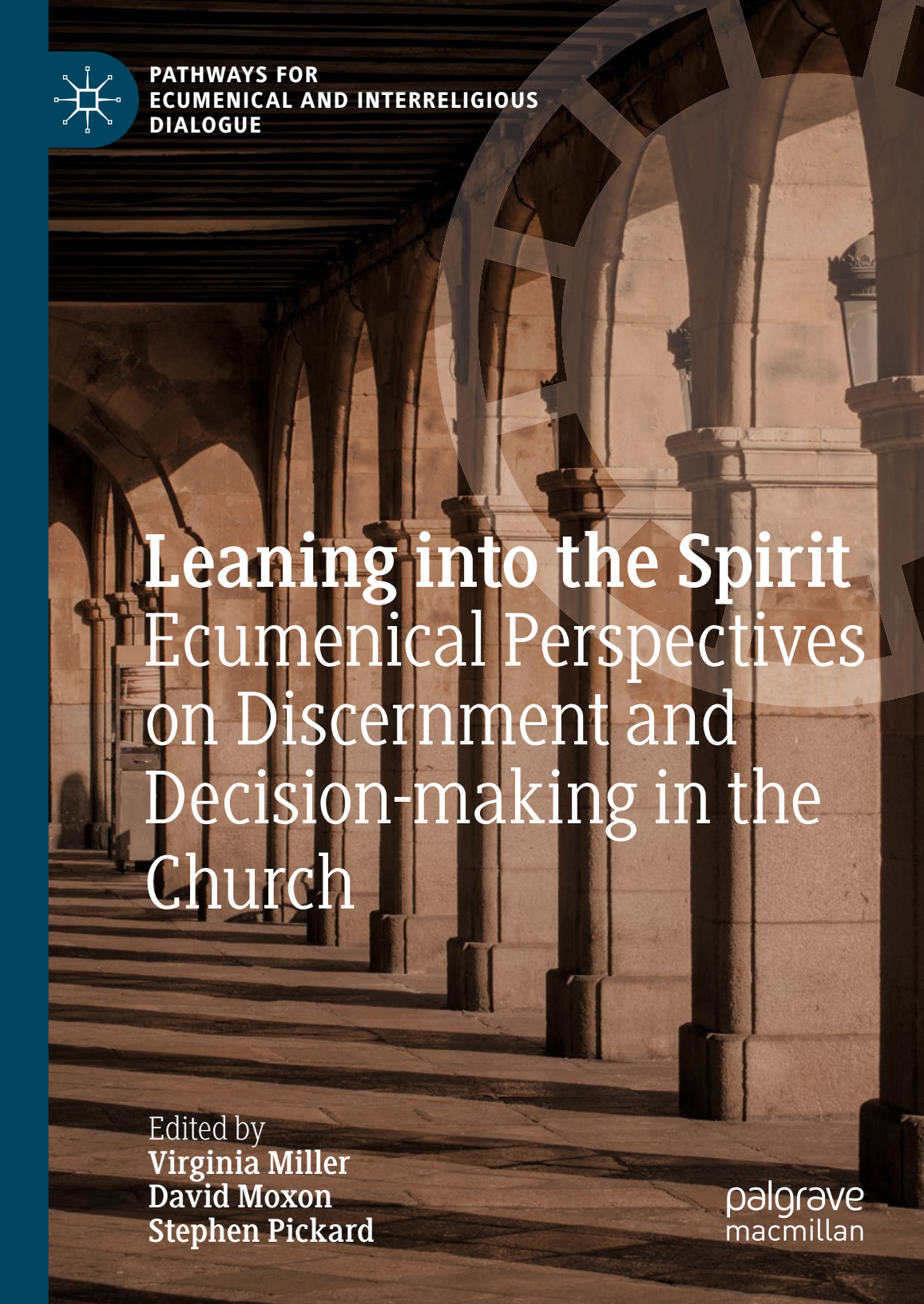

PATHWAYS FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Leaning into the Spirit
Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church

Edited by
Virginia Miller
David Moxon
Stephen Pickard

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Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

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Georgetown University
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Editors
Virginia Miller
Centre for Public and Contextual Theology (PaCT)
Charles Sturt University
Barton, ACT, Australia

The Rt. Rev'd. Prof. Stephen Pickard
Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
Charles Sturt University
Barton, ACT, Australia

The Most Rev'd. Sir David Moxon
Archbishop Emeritus of the Anglican Church, Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia

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The ongoing friendship and collaboration of Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby

Foreword: The Ecumenical Endeavour

It is a curious feature of the twenty-first century that the tribal-religious identity conflicts that dogged Christianity for half a millennium now seem to be a thing of the past. Paradoxically, ecumenism itself can sometimes seem as though it belongs to a bygone era of inter-denominational rivalry—the kind in Great Britain, for example, that can now only be found in Northern Ireland, Liverpool or parts of Glasgow. For most of the developed world, however, religious identity is no longer centred on inheritance, but rather on consumerism. Ecclesial 'brand loyalty' is arguably a dying phenomenon.

Once upon a time, denominational names mattered a great deal, although their origin is often forgotten. It remains the case that very few denominations chose their own name—Christened themselves, so to speak. 'Anglicanism' is a term that was popularised by James VI of Scotland, and contains a degree of mocking irony. Similarly, 'Anabaptists' had their family name bestowed upon them by their detractors. Likewise, Lutherans and Calvinists. Equally, 'Methodist' can also be read as a dubious compliment—another mildly derogatory 'nickname'. 'Roman Catholic' is arguably an attempt to meekly particularise the universal.

Yet now, in the twenty-first century, the Ecumenical movement has not yet sighted the promised land of Unity. If anything many churches seem to be specialising in fragmentation and exacerbating their differences. Arguments over gender, sexuality and other issues seem to mock the prayer of Jesus, 'that they may all be one' (John 17: 21).

I welcome, therefore, this fine volume that addresses the deeper pulses that still drive the ecumenical endeavour. These include reception and

hospitality, mutuality in learning, the valuing of diversity and difference, and dialogue and discernment. I am well aware that many regard these pulses—or valid, valued ecclesial concepts—as dangerous. For each in their way calls for a degree of openness and vulnerability. But to detractors, it only presumes that our most cherished theological and ecclesial proclivities are about to be watered down, or negotiated away. Correspondingly, there has been an assumption that ecumenism, as an agent or catalyst, has some kind of liberal agenda—a kind of reductively driven homogenisation and pasteurisation of 'organic-raw' truth.

Of course, ecumenism is no such agent. Moreover, the appeal to mutuality, hospitality, mutual learning and dialogue are well-scripted in the scriptures. I will go further here and say that we can find Jesus practising a kind of ecumenism in the gospels. Jesus regularly praises the faith of foreigners, gentiles and those outside his own tradition. Jesus is something of an itinerant cross-border trespasser, reaching out beyond and telling stories about Good Samaritans, ministering in non-Jewish territory, and affirming what he finds beyond his own margins and faith precincts.

Here, and in many respects, Jesus is the 'body language of God'. Simultaneously communicative and receptive; mutual, yet firm; learning, yet teaching. Jesus, moreover, sees the unseen, hears the unheard and touches the untouchable. His body is richly sensate and unafraid of receiving as well as giving.

The link between the incarnation and activity of Christ, and of pneumatology and missiology, freckles the pages of the New Testament and is even rehearsed in the Old Testament. Time and again, the people of Israel are aided by foreign agents who function as instruments of their salvation. Just as the early church had to learn that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on all flesh, and that salvation would not come not only to, but also through gentiles. Ecumenism, then, when it stresses mutuality and reception, hospitality and humility, merely traces the shapes of what the scriptures have already spoken.

To root this in an example, I have only to think of the encounter between Jesus and an un-named woman at Jacob's Well (John 4: 1–42). The well is still in Israel, and in Nablus, on the West Bank (Palestinian). Built over it is a Greek monastery, and it was here, in 1979, that Sophocles Hasapis, the parish priest and guardian of the well, lost his life. He was viciously killed by fundamentalist Jewish settlers, who resented the presence of the small community of monks there, and the Christian shrine built on and over what they felt was a sacred Jewish site. Then they threw

a grenade into the church. The Well could not be more contested: Jewish, Christian, Muslim—ancient and modern, it resides oddly in a sprawling Palestinian town, living with its multiple identities.

Religion is an affair of the heart as much as the head. It inspires great passion—love, and of course, hate. To some extent, the encounter that Jesus has at Jacob's Well with the unnamed woman is rooted in those same dynamics. Contested space and arguments over what is sacred; hatred and fear of people who see faith differently.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that purity and power are only issues for small and kraal-like religious groups. Purity and power are issues for all Christians and all churches, and fundamentalism and extremism, as a phenomenon or subject to study, is simply a concentration of a 'problem' that affects many different faiths, including all forms of Christianity—including those that espouse liberalism or openness. Boundaries of definition can quickly become borders marking territory and, ultimately, evolve into barriers.

And it is into this that Jesus walks. He has started to go back to Galilee, where we are treated to a story about water and wells that never run dry. But before he can get to Galilee from Judea, he must pass through Samaria—he has to cross a region that is, by definition, a place of taint and compromise that is normally to be avoided. But Jesus does not need to pass through Samaria; he could have chosen the route that follows the Jordan Valley, and avoids Samaria. So John, in stating that Jesus 'had' to pass through Samaria is not making a cartographical point. Jesus chooses this route in the same way that the Son of Man 'must' suffer (Mark 8:31). The accent is on Jesus' obligation to a deeper path that remains concealed from most of those who follow him. This is why Jesus arrives at the town of Sychar (John 4: 5–6), taking a seat at Jacob's Well (thereby linking Jesus with the Patriarchs), with John telling us that Jesus is 'tired'. It is the sixth hour.

It is here that the Samaritan woman enters the story (John 4: 7). The time of day for entry is critical, as it suggests her marginality. Water is traditionally drawn at dusk or early in the morning, when it is cool. But the sixth hour is noon, when the sun is at its hottest, suggesting that this woman's company is questionable; she is something of an outsider even within her own community. The woman is also unnamed—possibly a coding her as 'undesirable', or as a 'sinner'. What is startling, therefore, is Jesus' direct address to her: 'give me a drink'. Furthermore, notes John, the disciples have all left to buy provisions: there is no mutual hospitality

between Jews and Samaritans. This means that Jesus and the woman are alone.

On one level, this request can be read as a gesture of reconciliation. Jesus asks something of a Samaritan, and a woman. Jesus needs her help, and he asks for it. But this gesture is, of course, met with astonishment: 'how can you ask anything of me, a Samaritan?' And the response from Jesus only serves to widen her eyes, for Jesus states that if she knew who she was talking to and what God gives, it is she who would be asking for water—'living water'. Or more accurately, in the Greek, this is 'running water'—an echo of that which *flows* from the rock in the desert from the staff of Moses (Exodus 17: 5; Numbers 20: 11).

John is, in other words, making a contrast between the still, perhaps even stale water of the well, and the water of life that Jesus speaks of. This is a water that, literally, brings life. The conversation, like the depth of the well, goes another stage deeper at this point. The woman's question becomes laced with rhetorical tropes: are you greater than Jacob? Where do you get this living water from? John turns the woman's astonishment into curiosity—she wades into the deeper waters of the conversation. And again, the conversation turns on—what to us, must seem like a staged artificiality—to draw the woman in even deeper. Jesus says: 'anyone who drinks from this well will be thirsty again … but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again'.

The Well, just as it was violently contested in 1979, was also contested in Jesus' day. Here we have a sacred site in disputed ownership. But Jesus' ministry returns the Well to Common Ownership. By reaching out to the woman, and talking about the true water of life, he is asking us to put our differences aside, and focus on the deep unity we share.

A vital key to ecumenism may lie here, and it is one that this volume, the editors and authors, are fully alive to. If one denomination can learn to live in humility and grace with its profound differences—and not allow itself to be destroyed by pride and anger, or by self-righteousness, or by imputing denigration on another denominational path—then there may be hope for deeper cross-party denominational rapport to develop. Ultimately, unity cannot be imposed: it has to be discovered and cultivated, organically.

I am often struck by Jesus' teaching on purity, and his ecumenical credentials are especially sharp in this respect. 'Beware the leaven of the Pharisees' (e.g., Luke 12: 1–3) might appear to many readers to be a clear and hostile warning about a branch of faith. That most Bible translations

substitute 'leaven' for 'yeast' does not help us, as yeast is an ingredient that is separate from dough, and added to it to make it rise. But the hearers of Jesus' original words would have understood him quite differently. Because yeast was a virtually unknown ingredient in bread-making in the ancient world, it is the 'leaven' that we should attend to. Leaven comes from yesterday's bread, and are the naturally occurring sourdough microbes that produce the slight ferment in the dough, causing it to rise. Each batch of bread will be made fresh, daily. But each loaf uses a tiny amount of yesterday's bread, with its natural 'mould', to make the new loaf lighter, and to rise. Paying close attention to Jesus' words, we also note that he does not reject the leaven of the Pharisees—only that we should beware of it.

So Jesus' warning about leaven constitute a far more subtle image than it first appears. We are being inducted into an arresting allegory, for Jesus is inviting us to see that we are composed—in our faith tradition—through the new and the old, and through the fresh and the mouldy. No one would sit and eat yesterday's moulding dough. But you cannot make new bread without it. There is something in the words of Jesus, therefore, that invite us to contemplate kneading, proportionality and purity. Jesus is arguing against radical purity, and asking us to recognise that even in new expressions of faith, there will be shared ingredients, and a blend.

Jesus' words remind us that just as the fresh bread of his day needed to be baked with a small amount of the moulding dough of the previous day, so our faith needs to be remember that we can never be fully set apart from those (like the Pharisees) that we now regard ourselves as being so utterly unlike. 'Leaven', therefore, is a cipher: it emphasises the need for charity, reception and discernment. For we are connected. And the hearers of Jesus' words would have understood that the leaven meant that even in a new expression of faith, some of the old would be present, necessary and generative.

In view of the lesson of the leaven, what can we learn from Jacob's Well, Jesus and the Samaritan woman for our own ecumenical endeavour? The story ends as it began—with a tale of an unexpected encounter, with themes of taint, surprise and boundary crossing redolent in the text. A group of Samaritans now come to see Jesus, prompted by the un-named woman. This in turn prompts an excursus from Jesus about the harvest—a cipher for God's abundance, but also judgement. But it is now obvious (if also perhaps puzzling to the disciples) that Jesus, throughout this

encounter, is making a profound series of political statements about the nature of the kingdom and the Messiah. We can summarise these briefly.

First, it is God, who in Christ, comes to the Samaritans, and engages with them on their own territory and in their own idiom and dialect. This was not the obvious route for Jesus to take to get to Galilee—he chose to deviate, and allowed himself to be purposefully distracted.

Second, the message to the Samaritans is not 'become a Jew like me', but rather 'there is a time when tribal boundaries will cease to matter', and genuine faith will not be about which party, sect or denomination one belongs to, but instead be about 'spirit and truth'. Christians—or perhaps we should say, denominations—need to be reminded that the establishment of the Kingdom of God is the main project, and not the maintenance of churches.

Third, this is a story radical inclusiveness. Indeed, in some respects, this is a story about reception and convergence, and commonality. As is so often the case in the gospels, Jesus is fraternising with people that raise questions about his taste, discernment and even purity. But Jesus is not interested in the labels we impute upon each other. This is all about abundant grace. Jesus meets us all on the one, same level.

Jesus' work with the Samaritans carries an important message for us in ecumenical endeavour. For Jesus, in reaching out to the Samaritans as equals, makes a decisive contribution to that elusive search for true unity—one that respects the dignity of difference. Ecumenism is not driving towards a kind of reductively driven homogenisation and pasteurisation of 'raw' truth in order to manufacture something that is a compromise for all tastes. Rather, it is a search for the genuine differences between us that will further illuminate our pilgrim journey together, even as we also celebrate our shared commonalities.

I welcome this fine volume on ecumenism, which stresses the open nature of learning and mutuality—if we are to discern the pedagogy of the Holy Spirit. The editors are to be congratulated on assembling a prescient, rich and vibrant range of perspectives, who speak into the heart and soul of what it is to travel together, celebrate our unity, confess our divisions, but rejoice in our diversity. In the midst of this, what ecumenical endeavour has taught us is that difference is not a sign of weakness, but rather of strength. The diversity within the wider church has always been one of its most glorious treasures, and a true 'sign' that no one denomination can fully reflect or reify the mystery of God. Ecumenism celebrates this, and it has created a variety of dialogical possibilities; of staying within a faith yet

changing; and of moving to and from traditions, yet without abandoning our denominations.

Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread. It is bread for the world. And ecumenical endeavour is something of a leaven for churches and denominations as they seek a unity that might feed and nourish the wider world. In this, Christians need pray only one prayer: 'may we all be one' (John 17: 20–21). But we still thank God that we have been created as distinct and different, each of us in the image of the one who fashioned us. Ultimately, the ecumenical endeavour witnesses to that simple truth: we are better together than apart. Unity, not uniformity, remains our truest calling.

Christ Church
Oxford, UK

The Very Rev'd. Prof. Martyn Percy

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Notes on Contributors

Paul Avis The Rev'd. Prof. Paul Avis is the Editor-in-Chief of *Ecclesiology* and the editor of the series *Anglican-Episcopal Theology and History*. He was General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity (1998–2011), Theological Consultant to the Anglican Communion Office (2011–12), Chaplain to HM Queen Elizabeth II (2008–17) and Canon Theologian of Exeter Cathedral (2008–13). He is an honorary professor in the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham, and an honorary research fellow in the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Exeter, UK. He is a member of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order. He is the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (2018) and, jointly with Benjamin Guyer, of *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose* (2017). His own books include *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (2014), *Becoming a Bishop: A Handbook of Episcopal Ministry* (2015) and *The Vocation of Anglicanism* (2016).

Peter Carnley The Most Rev'd. Dr. Peter Carnley AC was Archbishop of Perth from 1981 to 2005 and Primate of Australia from 2000 to 2005. He holds many honorary doctorates and a Lambeth DD (2012), and is an honorary fellow of Trinity College (Melbourne), Emmanuel College (Cambridge) and St John's College (Cambridge). In the 1980s Carnley supported the ordination of women and, on 7 March 1992, he ordained the first women priests in the Anglican Church of Australia at St George's Cathedral, Perth. From 2004 he was Anglican Co-Chair of Anglican-Roman

Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) II and a member of International Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) at its inception, and worked on Anglican-Lutheran relations from 1988 onwards. He is the author of the following books: *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (1993/1987), *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Sermons* (2001), *Reflections in Glass: Trends and Tensions in the Contemporary Anglican Church* (2004), *Resurrection in Retrospect: A Critical Examination of the Theology of N. T. Wright* (2019) and *The Reconstruction of Resurrection Belief* (2019).

Adelbert Denaux The Rev'd. Dr. Adelbert Denaux is professor emeritus at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), where he taught exegesis of the New Testament, Biblical Greek and Ecumenism. He is dean emeritus of the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, the Netherlands. His publications are in the field of Bible interpretation, Biblical Greek, Ecumenism, spirituality and new religious movements. He was a member of Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) II and ARCIC III.

Stan Chu Ilo Prof. Stan Chu Ilo is Research Professor of World Catholicism and African Studies at both the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology and the Center for African, Black and Diaspora Studies, DePaul University, Chicago. He holds two doctorate degrees, one in theology and another in sociology of education. He coordinates the African Catholicism Project, a research initiative of over 50 African Catholic scholars which has led to the publication of the forthcoming *Handbook of Catholicism in Africa*. He is the President of the international Catholic charity Canadian Samaritans for Africa, Toronto, Canada. He is the 2017 winner of the AfroGlobal Excellence Award. He is the author of *The Church and Development in Africa; The Church as Salt and Light* (ed), *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis, Wealth, Health and Hope in African Christian Religion: The Search for Abundant Life* (ed) and two forthcoming volumes, *Love, Joy and Sex: African Commentaries on Amoris Laetitia and Gospel of Family in a Wounded World* (ed) and *Pentecostalism, Catholicism, and the Spirit in the World* (ed).

Gerard Kelly The Rev'd. Prof. Gerard Kelly is Professor of Theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, a member institution of the Sydney College of Divinity. He is co-chair of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic

Dialogue in Australia. He is chair of the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and a Catholic representative at the NCCA Assembly.

Virginia Miller Dr. Virginia Miller is a research fellow with the Centre for Public and Contextual Theology (PaCT), Charles Sturt University, Canberra, Australia. Miller received her doctorate at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia in the area of Old Testament studies. She studied Biblical Hebrew at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She has published works in the areas of biblical studies, systematic theology and public theology. She is the author of a book about Bonhoeffer's conception of grace titled *Grace: Free, Costly or Cheap?* (2012). Her latest book concerning King David is titled *A King and a Fool? The Succession Narrative as a Satire* (2019). She was a scholar in residence at the Anglican Centre in Rome in 2017 and Crawford Miller visiting scholar at St Cross College, Oxford, in 2019.

David Moxon The Most Rev'd. Sir David Moxon served as a Parish priest in New Zealand from 1979 until 1987, when he became director of theological education by extension for his province. In 1993 he was consecrated bishop of Waikato and in 2008 appointed Archbishop of the New Zealand dioceses. In 2013 he was appointed as the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative to the Holy See and Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. He is the Anglican co-chair of Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) III. He is a graduate of Canterbury, Massey and Oxford universities and was knighted in 2014.

Paul D. Murray Prof. Paul D. Murray is Professor of Systematic Theology at Durham University, where he is also Dean of the Centre for Catholic Studies. He has served on the editorial board of Concilium International, and is a former President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and a member of the third phase of work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III). He has also served as a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. His publications include *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (2004), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (ed.) (2008) and *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (co-ed. with Gabriel Flynn) (2012). He has also contributed many essays to leading journals and scholarly collections. His monograph project is titled *Catholicism Transfigured: Conceiving Change in the Church.*

Keith Pecklers The Rev'd. Dr. Keith F. Pecklers, S.J. is Professor of Liturgy at the Pontifical Gregorian University and Professor of Liturgical History at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute, Rome. His latest book is *Liturgy: The Illustrated History*. He is a member of the Malines Conversations Group Steering Committee. He is Founder and Director of the International Caravita Community in Rome and Founder and President of the International Jungmann Society.

Stephen Pickard The Rt. Rev'd. Prof. Stephen Pickard was Head of Charles Sturt University's School of Theology from 1998 to 2006. Since then he has served as an Anglican Bishop in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, a visiting fellow at Ripon Theological College, Cuddesdon, Oxford; acting CEO of Anglicare Canberra & Goulburn and a priest in a Canberra parish. He is an Assistant Bishop in the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese and is the author of several books, including *Seeking the Church: An introduction to Ecclesiology* (2012) and *In-Between God: Theology, Community and Discipleship* (2011). Prof. Pickard was appointed Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and Professor of Theology at Charles Sturt University in September 2013.

Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel The Rev'd. Prof. Dr. Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel lectures in Ecclesiology and Church Polity at the Stellenbosch University. She is the holder of two doctorates, one in Systematic Theology and one in Church Polity. Since 2013 she is the President of the World Council of Churches representing Africa. Prof. Plaatjies-Van Huffel has had works published mainly in accredited journals and books, for example: *The Relevance of Reformed Church Polity Principles: Revisiting the Concept in Protestant Church Polity in Changing Contexts* (editors: Leo Koffeman and Allan Janssen), *LITLAG 2014, Natural Law in the Reformed Tradition in Natural Law and Christianity* (editor Norman Doe), Cambridge Series 2017; 'From Conciliar Ecumenism to Transformative Receptive Ecumenism' in *Hervormde Theological Studies*, 2017.

Paul Pulikkan Dr. Paul Pulikkan, a priest of the Archdiocese of Thrissur in Kerala, is the Director of the Chair for Christian Studies at the University of Calicut and is a resident professor at the Marymatha Major Seminary, Thrissur. He also teaches at the Institute of Theology, Trichur, and the Pontifical Seminary, Alwaye. He is the Chief Editor of *Eastern Journal of Dialogue and Culture* and a research guide at the Faculty of Social Sciences,

Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, and member of the International Board of *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique—Louvain Journal of Church History*. For his doctorate in Theology from KU Leuven, Belgium, he specialised in the Indian Church's Participation at the Second Vatican Council (published as *Indian Church at Vatican II*). He is the author of several books and articles. He is a member of the following research projects: *The Second Vatican Council—Heritage and Mission*, Vallendar, Germany, and *History of the Desire for Christian Unity*, Bologna, Italy. He is the editor of *The Living Legacy of Vatican II: Studies from an Indian Perspective* (2017) and *The Church and Culture in India, Inculturation: Theory and Praxis* (2010). He is the Archdiocesan Director of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue.

Thomas Rausch The Rev'd. Prof. Thomas Rausch S.J. is Emeritus T. Marie Chilton Professor of Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University. A systematic theologian specialising in the areas of Christology, ecclesiology and ecumenism, he has written 24 books and over 300 articles and reviews. His book *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* examines the theology of Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus. Fr. Rausch is an active participant in the ecumenical movement. In 1983–1984 he was appointed by the Secretariat for Christian Unity as Catholic Tutor to the Ecumenical Institute, the World Council of Churches study centre at Bossey, Switzerland. He was a member of the US Catholic/Southern Baptist Conversation 1994–2001 and one of the signatories of the Richard John Neuhaus/Charles Colson Evangelicals and Catholics Together 1997 document, 'The Gift of Salvation'. In 2001 he was appointed to the Roman Catholic/World Evangelical Alliance Consultation and serves as a co-chair of the Los Angeles Catholic-Evangelical Committee. He is a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation, USA. He also co-chairs the Theological Commission of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. From 2010 to 2015 he was a member of a secretariat that advised Jesuit Superior General Father Adolfo Nicolás on ecumenical and interreligious relations.

Callan Slipper The Rev'd. Dr. Callan Slipper is the Church of England's National Ecumenical Officer. He is an Anglican priest living in a Focolare community and a member of the Focolare's international study centre. He is the author of *Five Steps to Living Christian Unity and Enriched by the Other: A Spiritual Guide to Receptive Ecumenism*.

Michael Welker Prof. Dr. Dr. Michael Welker is Senior Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology (Forschungszentrum Internationale und Interdisziplinäre Theologie, FIIT) at the University of Heidelberg. In 1973 he received a PhD degree in Systematic Theology, Prof. Moltmann having been his advisor. In 1978 he received another PhD degree under the supervision of the philosopher Prof. Henrich. In 1980 he completed his Habilitation in Tübingen, Baden-Württemberg, with his discussion of Whitehead and process philosophy. From 1983 to 1987 he was Professor of Systematic Theology in Tübingen, from 1987 to 1991 he held the chair for Reformed Theology in Münster, and since 1991, he has been Professor of Dogmatics in Heidelberg. From 1996 to 2006 he was the Director of the Internationales Wissenschaftsforum Heidelberg (IWH), and since 2005, he has been the managing director of the FIIT in Heidelberg, which he also co-founded. He has been awarded honorary degrees from the University of Debrecen and North-West University (South Africa), and is an honorary professor of Seoul Theological University. He is a member of the Heidelberg Academy of Science and the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters. Since 2004 he has been a member of the chamber of theology of the council of the Protestant Church in Germany Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) and judge at the constitutional court of the EKD; since 2006 he has been a regular member of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences. He was granted the Medal of Heidelberg University. Since 2006 he has been building a global network of research centres for theology, religious and Christian studies. His books include *God the Spirit* (1994), *Creation and Reality* (1999), *God the Revealed: Christology* (2004), and *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (2000), among others.

Raymond K. Williamson The Rev'd. Dr. Raymond K. Williamson OAM is an Anglican priest who has served in parish ministry in Newcastle, Sydney and Canberra, and has taught at both an Anglican and a Greek Orthodox theological college. For two decades he was the General Secretary of the New South Wales (NSW) Ecumenical College and secretary of the theological commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia; he was a delegated representative at the Canberra and Harare Assemblies of the World Council of Churches (WCC). He was the Honorary Director of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (2009–2018). In 2018 he began a two-year term as President of the NSW Ecumenical Council.

Abbreviations

ACSA	Anglican Church of Southern Africa
AIACHE	All Indian Association of Higher Learning
AIC	African Instituted Churches
ARCIC	Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission
ATF	African Traditional Religions
BEM	*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*
CBCI	Catholic Bishops Conference of India
DACB	The Dictionary of African Christian Biography
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EFI	Evangelical Fellowship of India
IARCCUM	International Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission
NCCI	National Council of Churches in India
PCCC	Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration
REC	The Reformed Ecumenical Council
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UPCSA	United Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa
URCSA	United Reformed Church in Southern Africa
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches
WTW	Walking Together on the Way
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Virginia Miller and The Most Rev'd. Sir David Moxon

In 2017, Charles Sturt University and the Australian Catholic University co-hosted the *Fourth International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism* in Canberra, Australia. This conference was a successor to conferences in Durham and Connecticut and built on ideas that were expressed at these conferences. Receptive Ecumenism is a method of ecumenism that focuses on learning from dialogue partners rather than being preoccupied with teaching dialogue partners. Paul Murray, the originator of Receptive Ecumenism, claims that productive ecumenical dialogue begins with introspection and an awareness of one's own deficiencies and the possibility that one's dialogue partner can assist to correct these deficiencies. It is claimed that this process leads to ongoing shared learning and improvement.

The popularity of Receptive Ecumenism in ecumenical circles, at this time, cannot be denied. Indeed, Receptive Ecumenism is commonly referred to as a movement and not merely as a scholarly undertaking or an exercise in Christian praxis. It might even be said that the term Receptive

V. Miller (✉)
Centre for Public and Contextual Theology (PaCT), Charles Sturt University, Barton, ACT, Australia

The Most Rev'd. Sir D. Moxon (✉)
Archbishop Emeritus of the Anglican Church, Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

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Ecumenism has entered into the common parlance of ecumenical dialogue to express the basic idea expressed above and, presumably, to signal an allegiance to this movement.

However, caution must be exercised in academia with movements. Often, movements are uncritically accepted, and their benefits can be overstated. In this book, we offer a range of different perspectives on Receptive Ecumenism. Notably, this book contains a contribution from Murray outlining methodological advances in Receptive Ecumenism. This book also includes contributions which are, at least in some part, not convinced by the claims of Receptive Ecumenism. For instance, Ray Williamson argues that the basic principle of Receptive Ecumenism is not new, and Peter Carnley argues that Receptive Ecumenism has limited utility. Yet, notwithstanding these criticisms, many of the contributions in this book discuss the utility of Receptive Ecumenism, especially at the local level of the Church.

Most of the chapters in this book were originally presented at the *Fourth International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism*. However, additional scholars were invited to contribute work to this volume. Therefore, many chapters in this book do not mention Receptive Ecumenism. However, all of the contributions in this volume sit within the theme of ecumenism broadly speaking. Furthermore, the contributions in this book represent the conference theme—*Leaning into the Spirit: Discernment, Decision-Making and Reception*. The overarching theme of the conference and also of this book, that of 'leaning into the spirit', implies that it is God who will lead the Church into its fullness in grace. However, this is not to suggest that ecumenism is a passive undertaking. The other elements in the theme denote the kind of active participation that ecumenism requires, that is, discernment, decision-making and reception. Indeed, the authors in this book argue that productive ecumenical exchange presupposes the ecumenist is formed in the principle of Christian love, intellectually prepared for the exercise, free of political agendas, and actively engaged in the pursuit of Christian unity, and/or ecumenical mission work.

The structure of this book conforms to the aforementioned theme and is separated into four sections: each representing a different stage or a different mode of ecumenical inquiry and *praxis*. The first section titled *The Spirit of Ecumenism: Theological Impulses* includes three essays that assist in this first stage of discernment where we consider different theological positions. These essays combine the fundamental areas of systematic theology that are important in ecumenical inquiry—Christology, Trinitarian theology, Pneumatology and Ecclesiology.

The second section of this book is titled *Context for Discernment and Decision-Making*. The contributors in this section discuss the challenges of ecumenism in different contexts. For instance, Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel discusses her work with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) as well as at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Stan Chu Ilo discusses ecumenism in the context of Africa. Paul Pulikkan discusses the challenges of ecumenism in India. Callan Slipper offers a reflective account of ecumenism in the context of a religious community.

Section three of this book, *Receiving Through Dialogue: Past and Present*, is concerned with bilateral dialogues. It includes unofficial reports from members of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), the Malines Conversation Group and the Australian Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, and Ray Williamson's response to these reports. This section of the book is concerned with the process of reception. It is our claim that enduring and workable change is dependent on decisive theory.

The last section of this book, *The Spirit of Convergence: A Way Forward?* focuses on the latest developments in ecumenism and/or novel approaches to ecumenism. There are five diverse contributions in this section. In the first section, Paul Avis argues for a method of ecumenism that focuses on what he calls the three 'Cs'—conversation, conversion and communion. Virginia Miller revisits the question of the ordination of women with regard to the notion of complementarity. Thomas Rausch argues that the future of ecumenism must include new Church movements including Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. Paul Murray discusses the latest developments in Receptive Ecumenism. Peter Carnley's contribution argues that Receptive Ecumenism is self-limiting and that the future of ecumenism will be 'genuinely new, and inevitably disturbing and challenging'.

As mentioned above, the opening line of inquiry in this book is concerned with, what we are calling, theological impulses. Michael Welker's first contribution in this section is titled *Spirit Christology: Rethinking Christo-Centric Theology*. In this chapter, Welker discusses the Christology of the Reformers and, in particular, the criticism that this theology is overly focused on a single aspect of the Trinitarian God. He claims that this is a misunderstanding which does not consider the background theology of the Reformers, which is critical of an overemphasis on abstract thought. Welker argues that we come close to God through the humanness of Christ and the Scriptures, not through metaphysical theorizing. Thereby, Welker claims that for the Reformers, the Trinitarian God is