Gregory A. Ryan, (2020) *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity*, Studies in Systematic Theology 23, Leiden: Brill, x + 286 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-43639-8 (pbk), €55.00; $63.00.

In this monograph, originally a Durham University doctoral dissertation (2018), the author sets out to answer the question, 'What does it mean for the church to receive with integrity?' The background to this question is found in remarks made by Pope Francis in his programmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). These remarks had to do with forms of reception of the Christian tradition that 'hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance' (EG par. 41). Instead 'Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with disjoined transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed' (EG par. 35). From this, Ryan distills the criterion of 'integrity' that should be a characteristic of authentic forms of reception of the Christian faith. Yet, and this will be the main theme of the work: what does such integrity consist of, how can it be established and how do its various (possible) dimensions interact with each other? In order to explore this, Ryan takes five steps, in each of which he engages with a distinct voice or set of voices from the field of theology. First, he explores through the work of Anthony Thiselton 'how a hermeneutical approach is relevant not only to interpreting scripture but to appropriating doctrine and tradition' (pp. 10–44). Second, he develops a 'specifically Catholic perspective' to 'complement Thiselton's framework' by studying remarks of John XXIII made at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, regarding the importance of not only the 'substance and presentation of the deposit of faith but also [of] the pastorality of doctrine' (pp. 45–81). In a third step, he discusses Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of a 'broad reflective equilibrium' 'as a model of mutually-critical elements for specifying and assessing the quality of integrity in ecclesial reception' (pp. 82–130). The fourth step is to enter into a conversation with Ormond Rush's work, in particular his appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' approach to reception history (pp. 131–175). The fifth and final step is to consider 'a concrete context in contemporary church life'. This context is found in the approach of 'receptive ecumenism' (pioneered by Durham's Paul Murray), which Ryan proceeds to discuss (and to develop further) from the vantage point of the authors and sources researched in the earlier parts of the book, focusing on receptive ecumenical learning in particular (pp. 176–223). In doing so, Ryan intends to make three kinds of contribution: (a) a 'constructive reply' to the criticism of contemporary ecclesial practice by Pope Francis (in *Evangelium Gaudii*) by outlining what 'receptive integrity' might mean, while underlining that such reception is necessary 'if ecclesial renewal and missionary discipleship is to be effective' (p. 4); (b)

a contribution to academic theology by making and exploring connections between authors and sources that were not discussed in relation to each other yet; (c) to make a contribution to receptive ecumenical learning.

In a systematic fashion, interacting with usually well-chosen sources, Ryan embarks on the journey that was outlined in the paraphrase above. As he intentionally constructs his thesis as a conversation and, in order to achieve at this, deals with each of his interlocutors in-depth at the same time, this makes for very instructive and often surprising reading, as Ryan indeed crafts a new kind of conversation, which at the same time amounts to his building of a consistent argument that leads to understanding reception with integrity in terms of a form of 'rejuvenating reception' that both confirms key tenets of the (Durham) discourse of receptive ecumenism and at the same time challenges them. Ryan, thus opts for an intentionally constructive approach. The flipside of this is, however, that he does not study cases in which reception took place without or with insufficient integrity, although the two popes that he refers to the most frequently (John XXIII and Francis) present their views of how the reception of the faith should take place in marked contrast to ways in which this should not happen. Can Ryan's model also be employed to identify cases of unauthentic reception? And what might be the consequences of this?

This critical remark aside, when arriving at his conclusions, Ryan presents them as systematically and clearly as he has analyzed and written throughout his monograph. This is, then, what are for him the parameters for receiving with integrity: (1) the conviction that receptive integrity is connected with 'integrity with tradition,' all the while understanding tradition as a 'living reality' (p. 227); (2) highlighting the importance of what Ryan calls 'background theories', namely 'theories regarding what constitutes a reasonable and theologically appropriate mode of reasoning' (p. 227); (3) highlighting the role of 'lived experience' as a criterion for receptive integrity; (4) stressing the role of communities of discourse and interpretation, especially regarding the *sensus fidei* and the 'dynamics of learning from another ecclesial tradition' (pp. 227–228); (5) underlining the role of these first four criteria in a broader 'dynamic equilibrium' that constitutes a 'coherent web' in which different aspects of reception balance each other (p. 229); (6) accentuating the 'rejuvenating' dimension of reception, which is inherent to a deeply dynamic understanding of what tradition means, and arguing that this takes not just place on the level of (cognitive) understanding, but also of (transforming and) transformative praxis (pp. 229–230); (7) emphasizing the orientation of reception towards the future, going beyond a retrospective approach to reception (looking toward

and evaluating the past) and instead stating that renewed reception and with that the rejuvenation of ecclesial life is of the essence (p. 230). On this basis, Ryan also develops an agenda for future theological research, which could well focus on the role of background theories, the actual lived experience of the church, the role of virtues in receptive ecumenism, the transformation of ecclesial procedures in the light of receptive integrity, the work of Nicholas Rescher (a major influence on Ryan); the role of diverse communities of discourse; the interpretation of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel (231–235). A final reflection restates much of what was just summarized as the main findings in relation to the challenge of *Evangelium Gaudii* with which the book started out (pp. 235–239).

Ryan's approach, in particular the constant conversation with the Roman magisterium, which provides the alpha and the omega of the book, and the matter of course in which this takes place, make this study a very emphatically *Roman*-Catholic book (of which Ryan is aware, see p. 3: 'my own ecclesial situation as an ecumenically-committed Catholic'). Yet, Ryan also seeks to constructively develop his own tradition – often the examples (e.g., the ordination of women to the diaconate as a possible form of reception with integrity, pp. 105–106) that he discusses throughout his study (intentionally, arising out of a pastoral concern) and the suggestions that he makes in such contexts also betray that he is most certainly not looking for a kind of restoration Roman Catholicism. Quite the contrary. Given this fact and his engagement with the school of receptive ecumenism towards the end of his book, Ryan's work could also be read as an invitation to theologians from other traditions to explore whether this approach to reception might also work for them. Simultaneously, it would be very interesting to see whether Ryan himself might also build such ecumenical bridges. On that note, the book is warmly recommended and it is hoped that studying it will in itself contribute to two things that drive Ryan himself: the rejuvenation of the Roman Catholic tradition and learning from other traditions, which, in the case of this Old Catholic reviewer, has certainly happened.

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