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Gregory A. Ryan

Receptive Integrity and the Dynamics of Doctrine: A Study in the Hermeneutics of Catholic Ecclesial Learning

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a principle of ‘receptive integrity’ in contemporary Catholic theological and doctrinal hermeneutics. I provide an original construction of this principle by synthesising its expression in Receptive Ecumenism with the notion of integrity found in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s ‘broad reflective equilibrium’, and with the concept of ‘rejuvenating reception’ developed by Ormond Rush. While Receptive Ecumenism draws on pragmatist perspectives, I make use of the hermeneutics of doctrine, establishing and integrating three dialogical perspectives which are unexplored or underdeveloped in the existing literature: 1) a Catholic reading of Anthony C. Thiselton’s *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*; 2) a comparative study of Fiorenza’s non-foundationalist method with the coherentist underpinning of Receptive Ecumenism developed by Paul D. Murray; and, 3) a reading of Receptive Ecumenism in the light of Rush’s reception hermeneutics.

In the resultant model, integrity is sought in a dynamic equilibrium between three modes of coherence: intrinsic coherence, discerned through reconstructive hermeneutics; extensive coherence, derived from critically assessing and appropriating background theories; and pragmatic coherence developed in diverse communities of interpretation through retroductive warrants for a fresh examination of some aspect of tradition. Similarly, reception occurs at a number of dialogical sites and involves a plurality of mutually correcting factors.

The thesis contributes a new reading of Receptive Ecumenism viewed in terms of systematic methodological commitments, as one instance of receptive integrity among multiple possible sites of reception. Such a reading stands in contrast to much of the secondary literature on Receptive Ecumenism made from the perspective of existing ecumenical practices, but is nonetheless intended to complement such readings. A tentative identification between this model of receptive integrity and the ‘pastorality of doctrine’ evidenced in Pope’s Francis’s magisterium is made by exploring the synodal development and post-synodal reception of *Amoris Laetitia*.

**RECEPTIVE INTEGRITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF
DOCTRINE: A STUDY IN THE HERMENEUTICS OF CATHOLIC
ECCLESIAL LEARNING**

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.....	6
1 DISJOINTED DOCTRINES, INSISTENTLY IMPOSED?.....	8
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Aim and Objectives	9
1.3 Receptive Integrity	13
1.4 Outline of Chapters.....	14
2 THE HERMENEUTICS OF DOCTRINE.....	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Mapping the Terrain: Anthony C. Thiselton	17
2.3 Doctrine and Life.....	19
2.3.1 Dispositional Belief	19
2.3.2 Communal Forms of Life	20
2.3.3 Temporality, Narrative, and Drama	22
2.4 Ecclesial Learning	25
2.4.1 Formation and Training	26
2.4.2 Alterity and Narcissism	29
2.5 Doctrine and System.....	33
2.5.1 Dialectic and Polyphony.....	33
2.5.2 System and Coherence.....	36
2.5.3 Rescher’s Aporetics.....	39
2.6 A Catholic Reception of Thiselton	43

3 DOCTRINAL PENETRATION AND FORMATION OF CONSCIENCES: GAUDET MATER ECCLESIA AS A HERMENEUTICAL LENS	47
3.1 Introduction	47
3.2 Substance of Faith and Means of Expression	50
3.3 Paradigmatically Catholic or Hermeneutically Naïve?	54
3.3.1 Reconstruction	59
3.3.2 Retrospection	61
3.3.3 Reception	67
3.4 The Pastoralty of Doctrine	68
3.4.1 Hermeneutical Considerations	71
3.4.2 Pastoralty as Expansive, Ecumenical Learning	72
3.5 From Development of Doctrine to a Hermeneutics of Tradition	73
3.5.1 Hermeneutics of Continuity, Rupture, and Reform	74
3.5.2 A Revivified Hermeneutic	78
3.6 Conclusion	79
4 DYNAMIC INTEGRITY AND REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM	81
4.1 Introduction	81
4.2 Coherence and Dynamic Integrity: Paul D. Murray	83
4.3 Broad Reflective Equilibrium: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza	87
4.4 Reconstructive Hermeneutics and the Integrity of Tradition	90
4.4.1 Identity and Integrity	93
4.4.2 Reconstructive Hermeneutics and Internal Coherence	97
4.5 Background Theories and Extrinsic Coherence	103
4.6 Retroductive Warrants and Pragmatic Coherence	108
4.6.1 Hermeneutical Significance	110
4.6.2 Dysfunctions, Wounds and Incoherence	114
4.7 Diverse Communities of Discourse and Interpretation	117
4.8 Conclusion	121
5 A VESSEL RENEWED: RECEPTION HERMENEUTICS AND ECCLESIAL LEARNING	126
5.1 Introduction	126
5.2 Rejuvenating Reception: Ormond Rush	127
5.3 The Architecture of Reception: Diverse Objects, Sites, and Readings	131
5.3.1 Two Basic Hermeneutical Triads	131
5.3.2 Four Objects of Reception	132
5.3.3 Twelve Sites of Reception	133
5.3.4 Further Hermeneutical Triads	134

5.4 The Dynamics of Reception: <i>Poiesis</i> , <i>Aesthesis</i> and <i>Catharsis</i>	135
5.4.1 <i>Poiesis</i> and Productive Receptivity	136
5.4.2 <i>Aesthesis</i> , Recognition and Integrity	138
5.4.3 <i>Catharsis</i> and Receptive Transformation	139
5.5 Diachronic and Synchronic Plurality.....	141
5.5.1 An Alternative to Essentialism	141
5.5.2 A Pluralising Hermeneutics	144
5.5.3 Reception and Alterity	146
5.6 Putting Reception to Work	151
5.6.1 <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> and the 2014-15 Synods.....	154
5.6.2 The Reception of <i>Amoris Laetitia</i>	163
5.6.3 Hermeneutics, Reception and Ecumenism	164
6 ECUMENISM AS A SITE OF RECEPTIVE INTEGRITY	167
6.1 Introduction	167
6.2 What is Receptive Ecumenism?	170
6.2.1 Third Wave Ecumenism	172
6.2.2 Humble Realism and Realistic Humility	174
6.2.3 Receptive Renewal as Ecclesial Learning	176
6.2.4 Affective, Cognitive, and Practical.....	178
6.2.5 Synodal and Transversal Ecumenism.....	180
6.2.6 A Bold, New Strategy?	182
6.3 Dynamic Integrity as a Methodological Commitment	183
6.3.1 Committed Pluralism	184
6.3.2 Recursive Fallibilism	187
6.3.3 Expansive Catholicity	189
6.3.4 Coherence-Based Testing	192
6.3.5 Wounds and Dysfunctions	193
6.4 Receptive Ecumenism as a Hermeneutical Endeavour.....	196
6.4.1 Receptive Ecumenism and Ecumenical Hermeneutics	196
6.4.2 Receptive Ecumenism and Reception Hermeneutics.....	202
6.5 Conclusion	208
7 CONCLUSION: RECEIVING WITH DYNAMIC INTEGRITY	211
7.1 Retrospect	211
7.2 Prospect	217
7.3 Doctrinal Hermeneutics in a Franciscan Key	221
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225

ABBREVIATIONS

(Full details of texts are given in the bibliography)

<i>AL</i>	Pope Francis, <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> (2016)
ARCIC	Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
<i>EG</i>	Pope Francis, <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> (2013)
<i>GME</i>	Pope John XXIII, <i>Gaudet Mater Ecclesiae</i> (1962)
<i>GS</i>	Vatican II, <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (1965)
<i>HD</i>	Anthony C. Thiselton, <i>The Hermeneutics of Doctrine</i> (2007)
<i>HV</i>	Pope Paul VI, <i>Humane Vitae</i> (1968)
<i>ID</i>	International Theological Commission, <i>The Interpretation of Dogma</i> (1989)
ITC	International Theological Commission
JDDJ	<i>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (1999)
<i>ME</i>	Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, <i>Mysterium Ecclesiae</i> (1973)
<i>RD</i>	Ormond Rush, <i>The Reception of Doctrine</i> (1997)
RE	Receptive Ecumenism
<i>RECCL</i>	Paul D. Murray (ed.), <i>Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism</i> (2008)
PCPCU	Pontifical Commission for the Promotion of Christian Unity
PCPNE	Pontifical Commission for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation
<i>TEV</i>	Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, <i>A Treasure in Earthen Vessels</i> (1998)
<i>UR</i>	Vatican II, <i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (1964)
<i>UUS</i>	Pope John Paul II, <i>Ut Unum Sint</i> (1995)
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
WCC	World Council of Churches

DECLARATION

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or any other institution for a degree.

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1 DISJOINTED DOCTRINES, INSISTENTLY IMPOSED?

1.1 Introduction

Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,¹ was intended to have 'programmatic significance and important consequences.'² Indeed, it has been described as the manifesto for Francis' papacy, and has ecclesial implications well beyond the scope of the Synod on the New Evangelisation to which it responds.³ One of the numerous challenges presented to the Church in *EG* concerns the handing on and reception of Church teaching, a challenge which Francis expresses in striking tones:

There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a

¹ Pope Francis, 'Evangelii Gaudium : Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World', 24 November 2013 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html>, henceforth *EG*. (All URLs accessed 15th August 2018.)

² *EG* §25.

³ See Richard R. Gaillardetz, 'The "Francis Moment": A New Kairos for Catholic Ecclesiology', *CTSA Proceedings*, 69 (2014), 63–80; Catherine E. Clifford, 'Pope Francis's Call for the Conversion of the Church in Our Time', in *Conversion and Church*, Stephan van Erp and Karim Schelkens (eds.) (Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 147–77; Duncan Dormor and Alana Harris (eds.), *Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, and the Renewal of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 2017); Gerard Mannion (ed.), *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Clemens Sedmak, *A Church of the Poor: Pope Francis and the Transformation of Orthodoxy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017); see also, A.E. Orobator (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016).

false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger.⁴

How can the risk of such linguistically orthodox idolatry be mitigated? An earlier paragraph in *EG* gives a possible starting point by concisely describing the anti-pattern of Francis' vision:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed.⁵

This suggests therefore that if the transmission of doctrine is not to be disjointed, *integrity* must be a matter of primary concern. Similarly, if part of the problem lies with an insistent imposition of formulae, attention must be paid to the nature of doctrinal *reception*.

Therefore, the overarching research question is: *what does it mean for the church to receive with integrity?* Specifically, what components and criteria are involved in evaluating and demonstrating integrity? How do they interact? And how is such integrity maintained in the activity of reception?

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to delineate a model of receptive integrity—which can be variously described as ‘receiving with integrity’, ‘ecclesial learning’, ‘receptive learning’, or ‘dynamic integrity’—by bringing selected hermeneutical and methodological resources into a multi-dimensional conversation. In line with the key resources used in this exploration, the predominant method is one of coherence in multiple dimensions, rather than logical deduction from fixed foundations. To achieve this goal, there are a number of specific objectives. Firstly, the notion of receiving with integrity will be located in the wider question of how a hermeneutical approach is relevant not only to interpreting scripture but to appropriating doctrine and tradition. The work of the Anglican hermeneutical scholar, Anthony C. Thiselton, will be engaged to give this high-level view. Secondly, a specifically Catholic perspective will be employed to complement Thiselton's framework by examining selected responses to Pope John XXIII's opening address at the Second Vatican Council not only in respect of the substance and presentation of the deposit of faith but also the pastorality of doctrine.

The core of the thesis looks in depth at the two key concepts involved in ‘receiving with integrity’: integrity and reception. Thirdly, therefore, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's use of ‘broad reflective equilibrium’ will be assessed as a model of mutually-critical elements for

⁴ *EG* §41

⁵ *EG* §35

specifying and assessing the quality of integrity in ecclesial reception. And fourthly, a hermeneutical perspective on the category of reception will be explored through Ormond Rush's appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss. In each case, the objective is to connect the respective work of Fiorenza and Rush with the overall exploration of receptive integrity, not to offer a critique of the primary philosophical resources which they have each respectively adopted. A fifth objective is to apply the theory to a concrete context in contemporary church life. This is achieved through an analysis of the methodological principles underpinning a recent ecumenical approach known as Receptive Ecumenism. Throughout the study, contemporary issues in Catholicism, especially as highlighted by the current pontificate, will be referenced in order to illustrate the concepts under discussion.

The selection of specific resources was initially driven by the parameters of the research question and my own ecclesial situation as an ecumenically-committed Catholic. Although I have framed the contemporary relevance of this question with reference to *EG*, I look to a wider set of resources than Francis' magisterium in attempting an answer. Thiselton's overview of the hermeneutics of doctrine identified two key resources in reception theory: Hans Robert Jauss; and the theological appropriation of Jauss by the Australian Catholic theologian Ormond Rush. Although Rush is well-known for his work on the hermeneutics of Vatican II and on the theology of the *sensus fidelium*, his earlier work on reception hermeneutics has received far less attention and so offers a substantial, but under-utilised resource for a constructive appropriation. Rush traces his own interest in Jauss and reception theory to the pioneering insights of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, particularly Fiorenza's introduction of reception theory into theological hermeneutics in *Foundational Theology*. Researching Fiorenza's *corpus* demonstrated that there was potential material in Fiorenza's foundational and hermeneutical theology to deal with the question of integrity in a pluralist, non-foundationalist, and dynamic manner. Fiorenza thus became the second major interlocutor.

The opportunity to build on Rush's hermeneutics also suggested an ecumenical application. Rush not only includes ecumenical dialogue as a potential site of reception in his model, but argues for his overall approach meeting the needs of ecumenical hermeneutics and methodology, without however fully developing what a specifically ecumenical appropriation would entail.⁶ In this regard, an emerging body of material on 'Receptive Ecumenism' offered an ideal intersection of ecumenism, reception, and theological methodology.⁷ In researching the application of reception hermeneutics to RE, I

⁶ See Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1997), henceforth *RD*, pp. 350–54.

⁷ References to the literature on Receptive Ecumenism (henceforth RE) are included in Chapter 6.

identified significant resonance between the methodological roots of this ecumenical approach and the concern for integrity developed in Fiorenza's model of broad reflective equilibrium. What had originally been envisaged as a linear sequence of relationships (Fiorenza to Rush to RE) developed into a triangulation of mutually-supporting and mutually-correcting ideas between Fiorenza, Rush and Paul D. Murray, who instigated RE as a systematic strategy on the basis of a pragmatist approach to theological rationality.⁸

The original contribution of this thesis is thus three-fold. Firstly, it makes a constructive reply to the implied criticism of current ecclesial practice given in *EG* by utilising the resources outlined above to describe integrity and reception, and to bring these together to delineate receptive integrity in a more explicit and sustained fashion that is to be found elsewhere in contemporary Catholic theology. As *EG* indicates, such dynamic integrity is essential if ecclesial renewal and missionary discipleship is to be effective. Secondly, the thesis makes an original contribution to academic theology by identifying and systematically developing hitherto undeveloped relationships between the selected resources (i.e. Fiorenza, Rush, and Murray), thereby adding to the relatively sparse literature on these contemporary Catholic theologians. In identifying the resonances and relationships between Fiorenza, Rush and Murray in this way, this study extends their work into new dialogues and new questions and provides an expanded field for further research and application.⁹ Thirdly, the study constructively applies the combined insights of this analysis to a specific substantive site of ecclesial and doctrinal plurality, which is currently under development, namely receptive ecumenical learning. The significance of RE for the church can be seen not only in a growing body of academic and practical engagements, but in the ground-breaking adoption of this methodology for the third phase of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III).¹⁰ This third contribution of the thesis, then, is to situate RE in relation to its methodological commitments and, using reception hermeneutics, develop a fresh perspective on doctrinal dynamics and receptive integrity that coheres with these commitments.

It may also be helpful to note from the outset what this study is *not*. It is neither a historical account of modern theological hermeneutics, nor a critical analysis of the underlying philosophical sources. Rather it is concerned with critically and constructively examining selected resources available in the theological sphere which have been enriched

⁸ See Paul D. Murray, *Reason, Truth, and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

⁹ Some proposals for further research are addressed in Chapter 7.

¹⁰ See ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*. (Erfurt, 2017) <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20180521_walking-together-ontheway_en.pdf>.

by their engagement with particular philosophical assets in pursuit of better understanding how reception and/or integrity might be identified, assessed, and realised in the contemporary church. As Gerard Mannion has pointed out, an urgent task is to *build on* those who have appropriated the insights of modern hermeneutics.¹¹ Rush, Fiorenza, and Murray each argue in their own way for using such insights as auxiliary theories within the theological sphere, not allowing them to dictate the terms of the argument. Choosing Rush and Fiorenza as conversation partners does not, of course, imply that these are the only available resources. Other possible approaches might have been to examine integrity through the systematic methodology of Bernard Lonergan; to explore the awareness of plurality and alterity in David Tracy's Ricoeur-influenced hermeneutics; or to pursue a systemic analysis of more ad hoc essayists such as Rahner and Lash, both of whom have contributed useful reflections on how the church can receive with integrity.¹²

The examples I have included in the thesis tend toward ecclesial practice and associated ecclesiology, rather than the great doctrines of faith such as salvation or the Trinity. This represents a response both to the need to begin with 'questions that arise' in contemporary Catholicism and the importance of the 'pastorality of doctrine'— themes which will be addressed in Chapters 2 and 3. However, it by no means suggests that a concern for receiving with integrity only applies to these cases. Treatment of large systematic themes, along the lines of Part II of Thiselton's *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* is also possible, and indeed Fiorenza, Murray and Rush have all made such contributions.¹³

¹¹ Gerard Mannion, 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Hermeneutics of Catholic Learning: The Promise of Comparative Ecclesiology', in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Paul D. Murray (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 413–27 (p. 423).

¹² See, *inter alia*, Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972); David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Nicholas Lash, *Theology on Dover Beach* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979); Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986). A useful introduction to Rahner's writings on doctrinal hermeneutics is *Transformation of Dogma: Introduction to Karl Rahner on Doctrine*, Mary E. Hines (ed.) (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

¹³ See, *inter alia*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology', in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 212–48; Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2009); Murray, 'Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plentitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God', in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.) (Washington, D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), pp. 109–58.

1.3 Receptive Integrity

The core theories with which this thesis engages—Fiorenza’s reflective equilibrium, Rush’s rejuvenating reception, and Murray’s proposal for Receptive Ecumenism—are models of what I refer to as ‘receptive integrity’. Elements of this notion also inform my appropriation of Thiselton and the responses to Pope John XXIII in the opening chapters. I have used it as an organising concept both because of its significance for Receptive Ecumenism and to provide a convenient label for the kind of post-foundationalist, mutually corrective, coherentist approaches pursued by these various interlocutors. In doing so, I am following but significantly developing the notion of ‘dynamic integrity’ found in Murray’s work on theological rationality. Murray describes this quality as follows:

‘Dynamic integrity’ is intended to articulate both the continuous identity and the contextually specific freshness that are each always authentic to Christian tradition... It is intended also to resonate with Francis Sullivan’s evocative phrase ‘creative fidelity’ while suggesting a greater degree of expansive reconfiguration in the light of fresh data, experience, concerns, perspectives, methodologies concept and beliefs than Sullivan’s own analysis suggests.¹⁴

This thesis argues that for ecclesial integrity to possess a ‘dynamic’ quality there must be ongoing *reception* of tradition and consequent reconfiguration of a web of belief and practice. Ecclesial reception involves individuals and communities, thus although I will sometimes describe a system of belief as exhibiting dynamic integrity, such a description assumes that for integrity to be *realised*, it requires women and men to provide the dynamic element to what is otherwise best described simply as an ‘open’ system. Thinking in terms of *receptive* integrity, as this thesis proposes, is intended to keep this communal role of discernment and practice in view, as well as acknowledging a corresponding need for integrity (assessed in various ways) to be maintained or obtained in such reception.

Accordingly, the bulk of the thesis is dedicated to describing and evaluating in what ways these three different resources are able to contribute, on the one hand, to a richer understanding of what receiving with integrity entails *conceptually*, and on the other hand, to developing *practical* models of how such integrity might be identified, assessed and developed (in a system) or nurtured (in people and communities). Without anticipating the detailed analysis, these approaches all make use of web-like dynamic interactions of multiple criteria and sources rather than seeking irreformable foundations; all three

¹⁴ Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development: A Post-Foundationalist Perspective’, in *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP*, Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and Thomas O’Loughlin (eds.) (London: T & T Clark, 2012), pp. 193–220 (p. 215).

recognise a need for ongoing reception and reconfiguration of such webs; all three give some weight to a committed faith position, although not one that is immune to criticism, or that cannot benefit from the support of other internal and external elements; and all three lay some emphasis both on the concrete situations in which communities find themselves, and on the ethical dimensions of right interpretation.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

The present chapter (**Chapter One**) aims to provide a brief, high-level overview of the objectives and structure of the thesis.

In **Chapter Two** I take *Evangelii Gaudium* as a starting point for the investigation. As Francis' ecclesial manifesto, *EG* includes a selective but significant 'state of the nation' analysis of the ills of contemporary Catholicism. These ills act as barriers to the communication of the gospel and to the church becoming a community of missionary, spirit-filled disciples. I argue that some of these are sites of hermeneutical concern, particularly in relation to how the church interprets doctrine. The impact of inadequate interpretation of doctrine on ecclesial life is also a driving force behind Thiselton's *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, from which I draw out three themes in particular as resonant with current Catholic concerns: 1) the gap between doctrine and life; 2) the role of 'the other'; and 3) the tension between systematic coherence and hermeneutical contingency.

Chapter Three situates the issues raised by Thiselton in a more familiar Catholic context, using as a focal point an influential paragraph from Pope John XXIII's opening address to the Second Vatican Council:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.¹⁵

Both the distinction between the 'substance of faith' and the 'means of presentation', on the one hand, and the pastoral character of church teaching, on the other, are considered as interrelated aspects of receiving with integrity. Drawing on selected post-conciliar theologians, I argue for a more holistic and critical understanding of these principles than is afforded by a simple form-content dichotomy or any unidirectional application of doctrine to pastoral practice.

¹⁵ Pope John XXIII, 'Opening Speech to the Council', (11 October 1962), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, W. Abbott (ed.) (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 710–19.

In **Chapter Four**, the concept of theological and doctrinal *integrity* receives particular focus through an analysis of Fiorenza's post-foundationalist proposal for conceptualising, testing and enhancing such integrity based on the principle of broad reflective equilibrium. In this model, multiple mutually-critical criteria are employed to achieve a relative adequacy in the interpretation of tradition, without prioritizing any of the principal elements: reconstructive hermeneutics, warrants arising from experience; background theories; or local consensus. The resulting equilibrium has a dynamic nature, and does not rest on a single unchallengeable foundation. I compare this model to Murray's use of 'dynamic integrity', in turn situated with Murray's understanding of theological rationality and doctrinal dynamics, and identify previously un-reported resonances which facilitate a richer, synergistic, understanding of both theologians.

Chapter Five investigates the notion of *reception* through a close reading of Ormond Rush's work on the reception of doctrine. Rush builds on a number of Fiorenza's insights, and makes an acknowledgment of post-foundationalist concerns, but develops his own hermeneutics of doctrine using Jauss and theological notions of 'reception'. Like Fiorenza and Murray, Rush develops a multidimensional model, with diverse objects of revelation, sites of reception, reading strategies and hermeneutical-theological 'senses', which I systematically present. Insights from this model are then applied in a reading of the 2014-2015 synods and I argue that elements of Pope Francis' approach are characteristic of a theological application of reception hermeneutics in pastoral orientation.

Chapter Six represents something of a change of mode. In recent years, a new approach to constructive ecumenical engagement known as Receptive Ecumenism (RE) has been developed, initially at Durham University. RE takes a stance which recognises the wounds and dysfunctions within a particular church community and, from the inside, asks not what can others learn from us but what can we learn—with dynamic integrity—from them? This makes RE a suitable case-study in how a concern for receptive integrity might be put into practice. In ecumenical dialogue—and particularly in the practice of receptive ecclesial learning proposed in RE—plurality, interpretation, consensus, and integrity all have real currency. In this chapter, after outlining the characteristics of this new strategy, I identify the often-missed methodological commitments underpinning RE – notably, those which Murray develops from Nicholas Rescher's pragmatic idealism, together with the coherentist approach to testing for theological and doctrinal integrity which arises from this. With these commitments in view, I then make a case for RE as a method which substantially realises one of the twelve sites of reception in Rush's model.

Chapter Seven draws together these lines of inquiry and proposes areas for further research.

2 THE HERMENEUTICS OF DOCTRINE

2.1 Introduction

Evangelii Gaudium is by no means a treatise on theological hermeneutics. Indeed, despite (or perhaps because of) its programmatic significance, Pope Francis's exhortation is frequently allusive rather than systematic, for example in describing unity as a polyhedron, not a sphere (*EG* §25, §236).¹ Nonetheless it is a valuable reference point for looking at central issues in contemporary Catholicism and raises important questions about how the church can receive with integrity.² Furthermore, a careful reading of *EG* reveals a surprising number of hermeneutical issues. These are most clearly present in the concerns for how doctrine is presented (§41), how it is systematically ordered (§241), and how it must not be separated from reality (§231). The orientations towards a growth in understanding (not just individually but ecclesially) and the expansion of horizons, as well as critical assessment of barriers to understanding also resonate strongly with hermeneutical principles. Less obviously related, but which I hope will become clear through this and following chapters, are concerns for pragmatic fruitfulness, renewal, and otherness.

In order to start viewing these issues systematically, in this chapter I engage with *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, a major work by Anthony C. Thiselton which catalogues and synthesises a wide range of hermeneutical resources in order to develop suitable horizons of

¹ The caveat applies to the value Francis places on 'initiating processes, rather than possessing spaces' (*EG* §223) in which case a programmatic approach might be intentionally be left 'open'.

² Murray argues that whilst the apostolic exhortation is not a systematic analysis, it nonetheless identifies 'sites of ecclesial significance' which should be given attention by systematic theologians. See Murray, 'Ecclesia et Pontifice: On Delivering on the Ecclesiological Implications of *Evangelii Gaudium*', *Ecclesiology*, 12.1 (2016), 13–33.

understanding in relation to doctrine.³ Being himself an Anglican, the application of these insights in a contemporary Catholic context is not addressed by Thiselton, nor has a Catholic reading of Thiselton's contribution received any substantial discussion in the literature.⁴ Indeed, since the publication of *HD*, the contemporary Catholic context has continued to change, not least with the style and teachings of a new pope. As an initial move in specifying 'receptive integrity', therefore, this chapter gives a new application to Thiselton's insights in a contemporary Catholic horizon, particularly through reading *HD* in conversation with some of the issues raised in *EG*.

2.2 Mapping the Terrain: Anthony C. Thiselton

Anthony Thiselton is an Anglican priest and theologian, best known for his substantial volumes appropriating philosophical hermeneutics for scriptural interpretation, of which the most influential have been *The Two Horizons* (1980) and *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (1992). In 2006 he published a major collection of essays entitled simply *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*.⁵ Whilst his work has been praised by the likes of N.T. Wright, James Dunn, and Rowan Williams, it is less well-known in Catholic discussions.⁶ Thiselton has constantly issued a challenge both to an older view of hermeneutics as simply discovering *rules* for correct interpretation, and to postmodern pessimism about the possibility of interpretation being anything other than a local perspective. At the 1977 National Evangelical Anglican Conference in Nottingham, his address 'Understanding God's Word Today' argued that a defence of biblical authority depended on the 'practical cash value' of scripture in use, and hence on hermeneutics rather than abstract theoretical assertions.⁷ This was reported as a watershed in evangelical hermeneutics, and as 'the cat being set among the

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), henceforth *HD*.

⁴ For a Catholic review, see Thomas G. Guarino, 'The Hermeneutics of Doctrine by Anthony C. Thiselton (Review)', *The Thomist*, 74.3 (2009), 344–48.

⁵ Thiselton, *The Two Horizons - New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁶ Gerald O Collins is a notable exception: 'We are not attempting to write a history of modern biblical interpretation, nor are we promising to take up all the major issues that enter contemporary debates about interpretative theory. Others, in particular, A.C. Thiselton, have already done this well.' Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, *The Bible for Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁷ Thiselton, 'Understanding God's Word Today: Evangelicals Face the Challenge of the New Hermeneutic. Address at the Second National Evangelical Anglican Congress, Nottingham 1977', in *Obedying Christ in a Changing World. Volume 1, The Lord Christ*, John Stott (ed.) (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), pp. 90–122.

pigeons’, even as ‘heresy’.⁸ Thirty years later he issued a similar challenge to move from abstract ideas to practical currency with regard to Christian doctrine in his 2007 work, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*.

In this book he explores whether a hermeneutical approach can ‘inject life into engagement with doctrine with as much effect as hermeneutics has resourced biblical reading’ (*HD*, xxii). There is an urgent need for a hermeneutics of doctrine, he claims, not just to ensure a ‘right interpretation’ but rather because doctrine is seen as marginalised in practice, as a dead letter in the church.⁹ Thiselton’s contention is that, far from being irrelevant, doctrine is intimately associated with the life of the church and the individual. Furthermore, characteristics such as embodiment, communal participation, and ongoing formation place doctrine firmly within the domain of hermeneutics. This requires a shift of mode for the interpretation of doctrine. As with his 1977 approach to biblical interpretation, the key move needed is from ‘from abstract theory to life-related hermeneutics’ (*HD*, xvi-xxii).

In his typically comprehensive style, Thiselton’s analysis encompasses a considerable number of topics and a wide range of scriptural, theological, and philosophical sources, from biblical and patristic through medieval, reformation and modern theologians (Catholic, Orthodox, and Reformed), to philosophers of language and science, and hermeneutical theorists, notably Gadamer, Ricoeur, Jauss, and Wittgenstein. In order to deal with this complexity, I propose to follow Thiselton’s overall sequence but to organise his various perspectives around three main themes: (2.3) *Doctrine and Life*, which includes questions arising from forms of life, dispositional faith, embodiment and the importance of place, community, and narrative and temporality;¹⁰ (2.4) *Ecclesial Learning*, which considers ongoing Christian formation in relationship and the role for ‘otherness’ in learning and growth; and, (2.5) *Doctrine and System and Coherence* which deals with dialectics and Thiselton’s proposal for viewing doctrine as a coherent but dynamic, ‘open’ system. The chapter concludes with some reflections on both the potential for, and the challenge of a Catholic appropriation of Thiselton’s work (2.6).

⁸ Robert Knowles, *Anthony C. Thiselton and the Grammar of Hermeneutics: The Search for a Unified Theory* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), p. 50.

⁹ Although Thiselton is writing from an Anglican evangelical situation, similar concerns are evident in Catholic contexts. According to the International Theological Commission (henceforth ITC), ‘the world-wide crisis of tradition has become one of the most profound spiritual challenges of this age.’ ITC, ‘The Interpretation of Dogma’, (henceforth *ID*), 1989 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1989_interpretazione-dogmi_en.html>, §A.I.2.

¹⁰ To borrow a phrase from Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, this might be characterised as a ‘hermeneutics of belonging’. See James C. Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Modern Christian Thought. Volume Two: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006 [1997]), pp. 352–54.

2.3 Doctrine and Life

2.3.1 Dispositional Belief

Pope Francis in *EG* and Thiselton in *HD* are each concerned with certain disjunctions—and associated dysfunctions—involving doctrine. Principal among these is the disjunction between doctrine and life. Thiselton wants to avoid doctrine being separated from the life of believers, of being seen as a dry topic for ordinands and theologians but of no concern to the life of the church (*HD* xvi–xvii). Is this also relevant in contemporary Catholic contexts? On the one hand, the Catholic context *ad intra* is somewhat different: through such instruments as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the various levels of papal and episcopal magisterium, and the role of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,¹¹ doctrine is a lively topic within many Catholic ecclesial conversations and hardly in danger of being sidelined or forgotten. On the other hand, somewhat more pressing is the likelihood of doctrine being seen as irrelevant by those outside the visible church, as disconnected from actual lived experience to many of the faithful, and/or as inconsistent with the behaviour of the church as institution, or of key individuals within it. Research on UK church-leavers notably indicates that the ‘irrelevance’ of church teachings is a more significant factor in leaving than disagreement with theological content.¹²

Thiselton’s first move, therefore, is to address the misconception that doctrine is an abstract, fixed body of knowledge giving rise to a particular mental state in believers. Rather than construing belief as a mental occurrence, Thiselton argues, it is better to ask (with Wittgenstein), about the *consequences* of a belief, or (with H.H. Price) to consider talk of someone believing to be a dispositional statement, describing how someone would *act or feel* if a particular circumstance arose.¹³ Furthermore, belief is a ‘multiform disposition’: ‘believing in’ and ‘believing that’ together involve actions, feelings, and inferences as a belief ‘spreads itself’ from propositional forms to various consequences (*HD*, pp. 31–34). Similarly, as Mike Higton notes, doctrine ‘is no one thing’: a variety of traditions and

¹¹ Hereafter CDF.

¹² Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), p. 119. 19% of respondents over 20 (34% under 20) who left the church disagreed with the theological teachings, whereas, 28% (49%) considered church teaching ‘irrelevant to everyday life’ and 35% (52%) said the same about sermons. The survey covered a range of denominations. 33% of respondents had attended a ‘Roman Catholic church’ more than six times a year.

¹³ *HD*, pp. 19–37; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, G. E. M. Anscombe (tran.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967 [1958]); H. H. Price, *Belief* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

practices are involved which are not only intellectual but embedded in the life, teaching and learning of the whole Church, in diverse concrete contexts.¹⁴

2.3.2 Communal Forms of Life

This relationship of doctrine and life, of belief and action, is not restricted to individual faith, far less to a private mental world. The significance of dispositional faith for the present study lies less in the individual and more in Thiselton's transposition of this dispositional belief into a corporate belief, which can thereby be judged also to have a dispositional character. Doctrine is the *communal* discernment, endorsement, and transmission of the actual dispositional faith found in the individuals making up a church community.¹⁵ It involves the church in a 'series of dispositional responses to new situations' (*HD*, p.38) and, like language and hermeneutics, is embodied in communal forms of life. What hermeneutical resources are available to address this communal dimension? Thiselton introduces the significance of lived experience, not abstract logic, as the starting point for hermeneutics, not only in relation to texts and language but 'social institutions and communal practices'.¹⁶

A key term in Thiselton's treatment of these forms of life is 'embodiment', which includes not only the physicality of doctrine in life, but its historicity and particularity. Here Thiselton draws on Ernst Käsemann's view that for Paul, the body is 'the piece of the world which we ourselves are'.¹⁷ In fact it is precisely the embodiment in a communal 'form of life' which puts doctrine into the visible public domain.¹⁸ Both the Old Testament and the New Testament bear witness to beliefs embodied in life-situations—liturgical, social or otherwise—and significant forms of life are tied to the narratives of historical events (paradigmatically the Exodus for Israel, and the relationship of the eucharist to the Passion in Christian traditions). Fundamentally, an individual is related to these narratives not through *description*, but through *participation*, and not just as an individual but as part of a community. Karl-Otto Apel's constructive appropriation of Wittgensteinian language games and 'forms of life' provides a systematic rendering of this relationship:

¹⁴ Mike Higton, 'Teaching and Witness in the Life of the Church', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 1.2 (2017), 6–20.

¹⁵ Ormond Rush has convincingly argued that the *sensus fidei* of particular communities has significance as one of many 'sites of reception' not only in the transmission but in the interpretation of doctrine. See Rush, *Eyes of Faith*; also Rush, *RD*, pp. 213–16, 300–303, 317–19, 336–38.

¹⁶ *HD*, p. 55.

¹⁷ *HD*, p.46-47; Ernst Käsemann, 'On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic', in *New Testament Questions of Today*, W. J. Montague (tran.), (London: SCM, 1969).

¹⁸ *HD*, p. 46. This can be contrasted with gnostic approaches which both are hidden from public view and deny the goodness of the material nature (pp.51-52); compare *EG* §94, §223.

Wittgenstein insists that questions about meaning and understanding lead to confusion when asked ‘*outside* a particular language game’ (his italics), and ‘language-game’ is his term for ‘the *whole*, consisting of language and *the actions into which it is woven* (my italics)...Only in the larger unit of language-and life-activity does a linguistics utterance acquire its meaning currency’...Apel insists that this is central to hermeneutics.¹⁹

How then can the ‘larger unit of language-and-life’ be taken into account in interpretation, application and ‘development’ of doctrine? I suggest that this requires a range of perspectives will be needed to receive with integrity, including not only the diachronic tradition in which doctrine is embedded, but the synchronic diversity of cultures and ways of viewing the world, concrete life situations, and diversity even within Christian communities of interpretation.²⁰ For Catholicism, the challenge here is to ask what might count as a warrant for the validity of an interpretation *in addition to* the oft-cited criterion of ‘continuity’.

What, then, is the relation of this analysis of dispositional belief and communal forms of life to the challenge of receiving with integrity? Firstly, there is clearly a historical context to doctrinal formulations, and therefore a historical conditioning to any doctrinal proposition. More than this, though, doctrine arises as a particular response in time to a particular question in a particular historical context, not as part of an abstract system. This latter point is sometimes missed when a historical perspective on doctrinal development remains highly generalised, for example in referring to the ‘thought of an era’.²¹ Secondly, there is a corresponding historical and cultural dimension to the reception and interpretation of doctrines in *subsequent* historical horizons including the present. Therefore, in looking at what a doctrine means now, an interpreter needs to pay attention to the concrete church, not an idealised abstraction. Thirdly, if doctrine is to be interpreted within the ‘larger unit of language-and-life’, then an indicator of integrity will be coherence between the doctrine (and its implications) and the lived experience and practice of the Church. Thiselton makes an

¹⁹ HD, p.58-59; Karl-Otto. Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 1–45.

²⁰ These perspectives are all found in Thiselton but here I have deliberately grouped them into these categories in order to highlight a broad agreement when aligned with the four criteria in F.S. Fiorenza’s ‘Broad Reflective Equilibrium’ which I examine in detail in Chapter 4. See also Nicholas Lash, ‘Method and Cultural Discontinuity’, in *Looking at Lonergan’s Method*, Patrick Cocoran (ed.) (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1975), pp. 127–43.

²¹ E.g. ‘the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of *a given epoch*’. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ‘*Mysterium Ecclesiae*: Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine of the Church against Certain Errors of the Present Day’, (24 June 1973), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html>, henceforth *ME*.

extremely important contribution here, in using hermeneutical resources to challenge a linear view of understanding and application whereby doctrine is first understood (more or less perfectly) and then put into practice (more or less imperfectly).²² Rather, formulation of doctrine involves reflection on practice, and application is a part of the *spiral* movement of the hermeneutical triad of understanding-explanation-application, not a distinct practical task performed *after* interpretation is complete.²³ All of which suggests that the ‘pastorality of doctrine’ is a more complex concept than might at first appear, and will accordingly be dealt with in the next chapter.

If a hermeneutical approach helps us attend to the horizons of both the past and the present as particular sets of surroundings for a doctrinal formulation, in which particularity and contingency are brought to the fore, what can be said about how the interpretation of doctrine is related to the temporality which allows us to situate both past and present not as independent moments separated by Lessing’s ‘ugly ditch’ but as somehow connected? A Catholic investigation might typically take this question as an opportunity to investigate changes in doctrinal understanding through history, using the categories of development and continuity, but Thiselton instead approaches the question through the lens of drama and narrative. The significance of Thiselton’s treatment of these topics lies in his starting to address the dynamic, receptive quality of traditioned integrity by examining not only an orientation to the past, but also present and future horizons.

2.3.3 Temporality, Narrative, and Drama

According to Paul Ricoeur’s treatment of emplotment in *Time and Narrative*, ‘Narration implies meaning and invites hermeneutical enquiry: expectation, attention and memory’.²⁴

²² This criticism has something in common with John Thiel’s critique of ‘prospective’ models of development which I examine in Chapter 3.

²³ On the unity of these three elements in the hermeneutical circle, see Hans Robert Jauss, ‘Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics’, *Diogenes*, 28.109 (1980), 92–119. Also Jauss, ‘The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding’, in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 7–28.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 20; cited in *HD*, p. 65. See also Thiselton, ‘Hermeneutics within the Horizon of Time: Temporality, Reception, Action’, in Roger Lundin, Clarence Walkout, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 183–209. As my focus in this chapter is on Thiselton’s contribution to understanding the temporal dimensions of receptive integrity, rather than a ‘dramatic hermeneutics’, I will pass over his discussion of dramatic narrative in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Kevin Vanhoozer, *HD* p.68-80, see Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-98); Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). On the narrative basis of scripture with respect to doctrine, see Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 4.

Narrative therefore communicates meaning through locating events and action in time, not as a simple linear series of happenings, but in a purposeful way, requiring interpretation. From a Catholic perspective, but drawing on a wide range of sources, Bradford E. Hinze has convincingly demonstrated the importance of narrative for a contemporary understanding of doctrinal reception:

The phenomena of plurality and discontinuity and the issues associated with them bear directly upon the narrative configuration of the history of Christian doctrine...[Narrative structures] lend credence to certain understandings of what has transpired. They do not simply warrant but also embody judgements about what has taken place and what needs to take place in this historical community. Thus narratives serve discursive and rhetorical arguments, defending what has taken place or what needs to occur. As such, they can accentuate continuity and stability, as well as lend credence and plausibility to reform, renewal, and innovations.²⁵

In the overall narrative of Christian doctrine, Thiselton characterises Ricoeur's 'expectation, attention and memory' as the faithful memory of God's saving acts, attention to God's present action, and Christian hope that God's promises will be fulfilled eschatologically.²⁶ The doctrine of the incarnation, for example, has significance not simply as a past event but for the present Christian life and future expectations.²⁷ Even a more controverted doctrine, such as the Assumption, can be given a richer interpretation by seeing it as concerned not primarily with a historical account of an event, but with both eschatological hope and attentiveness to the already transformative effect of Christ's salvific action.²⁸

Interpreting doctrine with past, present and future in focus in this way acts as a defence against reducing the horizon to just one temporal perspective in traditionalism, relativism, or futurism (of either an apocalyptic or utopian variety). Receiving with integrity cannot therefore simply be reconstruction of the past, but requires attentiveness to the present—as

²⁵ Bradford E. Hinze, 'Narrative Contexts, Doctrinal Reforms', *Theological Studies*, 51 (1990), 417–33 (pp. 418–19); see also Hinze, *Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); and Hinze, 'Reclaiming Rhetoric in the Christian Tradition', *Theological Studies*, 57 (1996), 481–99.

²⁶ *HD*, p. 65. In the final chapter, he takes up this theme in respect of 'Eschatology: the ultimate and definitive hermeneutical horizon of meaning'. The theme is further developed in Thiselton, *The Last Things: A New Approach* (London: SPCK, 2012).

²⁷ Recent contributions by Catholic scholars have also suggested that these could be useful categories in interpretation, for example with reference to the reception of Vatican II, see G. O'Collins and D. Braithwaite, 'Tradition as Collective Memory: A Theological Task to Be Tackled', *Theological Studies*, 76.1 (2015), 29–42.

²⁸ See Karl Rahner, 'The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption' (1954), in *Theological Investigations Volume I*, 2nd edition, Cornelius Ernst (tran.), (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965, pp. 215–27.

the earlier focus on forms of life and concrete experience also indicated—and an orientation to the future. Theologically, a narrative horizon for the interpretation of doctrine reminds us that:

Revelation is not the communication of a definite number of propositions, a numerical sum...but a historical dialogue between God and man in which *something happens*, and in which the communication is related to the continuous ‘happening’ and enterprise of God.²⁹

As Thiselton argues, for Christian theology, doctrines ‘assume a living, dynamic, ongoing form, because God is the living, dynamic, ongoing God. If doctrine reflects the nature of God and derives ultimately from God, doctrine will be no less “living” and related to temporality than God, who acts in human history’ (*HD*, p.63). The category of narrative therefore points towards a dynamic system in which events can be organised, ‘not a static closed system of propositions, but a system that is open to the future and temporally conditioned’ (*HD*, p.65). Such a system would be capable of allowing not only predictable developments but changes, even reversals.³⁰

The significance of such a future-oriented hermeneutics for current stresses and strains in Catholicism is illustrated by Tom O’Loughlin in relation to the question of who should and should not (or may and may not, from a more juridical perspective) be invited to participate fully in a Eucharistic service. Based on the principle that ‘constituted as a community of memory, the Church is unremittingly future-focused...the future determines the present’, O’Loughlin argues that if Catholics believe non-Catholic Christians will be included in the heavenly banquet, then the eschatological dynamic which impels present action in relation to received tradition from the past indicates that ‘it is that heavenly table which we should be aiming to imitate at the gathering next Sunday’.³¹

The dual focus on stability (systemic integrity) and change (receptive openness) found in Thiselton’s treatment of time and narrative is given further consideration in Part II of *HD*, and I will return to it shortly. Along somewhat similar lines, dramatic approaches to doctrine draw attention to the need for a stable tradition—such as ‘a stable backcloth’, a script, a (musical) score, or canons for harmony, metre or style—whilst also recognising the creative role of individual performances as unique realisations of a score, even of skilful

²⁹ Rahner, ‘The Development of Dogma’ (1954), in *TI I*, pp. 39–77 (p. 48), emphasis added.

³⁰ The possibility of reversals in doctrinal development is raised in Rahner, ‘Mysterium Ecclesiae’ (1973), in *Theological Investigations, Volume XVII*, Margaret Kohl (tran.) (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), pp. 139–55. For a sophisticated discussion on dramatic change within doctrinal systems, see John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity & Development in the Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 100–128.

³¹ Thomas O’Loughlin, ‘Don’t Deny the Promise of Future Glory’, *The Tablet*, 21 July 2018, 4–5.

improvisation.³² This opens a much wider topic in relation to doctrinal hermeneutics: the role of doctrine in formation and learning, to which I now turn.

2.4 Ecclesial Learning

To say that there is a formative aspect to doctrine is to say something more than asserting that doctrines allow the complex, dynamic narrative of faith to be packaged into a catechism for easy learning. It is to argue that part of the role of doctrine is along the lines of the ‘expansion of horizons’ which is significant to hermeneutical inquiry.³³ The language and examples which Thiselton uses apply principally to the growth in understanding of an individual reader, but in the light of his earlier argument locating doctrine in *communal* forms of life, it is equally cogent to view particular communities as capable of learning and developing new horizons of understanding and expectation. Following this line of argument, the doctrine and practice of the church could in principle be reconfigured in the light of new understandings, expanded perspectives, and recovered memories.³⁴ In this case we can reasonably talk of ‘ecclesial learning’ arising from the interpretation and reception of doctrine.³⁵

³² See *HD*, pp. 88–89; Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004); Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 179–270, esp. 215–21. Whereas Wells deals with dramatic improvisation, Begbie is concerned with the relationship between theology and music, and draws particularly on improvising in jazz. From a Catholic perspective, see Anthony J. Godzieba, “‘...And Followed Him on the Way’ (Mark 10:52): Unity, Diversity, Discipleship”, in *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence*, Bradford E. Hinze and Anthony J. Godzieba (eds.) (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2017), pp. 228–54; Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 155.

³³ “‘Horizon’ is not simply a code word used by those who practice hermeneutics... The key point about “horizon” is that it moves as we move, and can expand its scope... Whereas “presupposition” suggests a fixed, defensive standpoint, “horizon” permits negotiation... it allows self-correction... (and) expansion of vision’: ‘Horizon’ in Thiselton, *The SPCK Dictionary of Theology and Hermeneutics* (London: SPCK, 2015), pp. 470–71.

³⁴ Ongoing reconfiguration is suggested by Thiselton’s comments on fallibility (*HD* pp. 72, 122) and his rejection of a view of doctrine as a closed system (pp. 137–141). His actual practice in Part III of *HD*, however, is concerned more with correcting inadequate or one-sided interpretations than with reweaving the web – but such a task would almost certainly need to be collaborative and dialogical, and thus less well-suited to exploration in a monograph. It would however be consistent with his endorsement of Bakhtin on the irreducibility of polyphony and dialogue in Part II.

³⁵ On the notion of ‘ecclesial learning’, see Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, *Louvain Studies*, 33.1–2 (2008), 30–45; also Murray ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda’, in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Murray (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 5–25 (pp. 16–18).

2.4.1 Formation and Training

Thiselton assigns formation in hermeneutics to ‘the vocabulary of *character formation*, judgement, *training*, *habit*, and human agency’, using Gadamer’s sense of ‘formation’ (*Bildung*) and Wittgenstein’s emphasis on training (*Abrichtung*).³⁶ Read along these hermeneutical lines, doctrine is not simply about conveying facts, but about providing skills necessary for independent thought. It is concerned not just with information, but formation and transformation.³⁷ The use of formation as a key perspective on doctrine is particularly valuable in that it recognises the need for a system of tradition which is both relatively stable and responsively dynamic. Wittgenstein’s distinction between ‘drill’ (learning by rote) and ‘training’ (developing the skills and character necessary to apply the learning in new situations) is helpful here: a ‘stable backcloth’ of tradition against which novel applications can be actualized is required, but so is the skill to make judgements on concrete cases, or even to ‘improvise’ (*HD*, pp.83, 94). For Gadamer, as for Wittgenstein, understanding involves practice and application, which involves more than learning a method. It involves both the formation of habits *and* engaging with the specific case:

The knowledge that guides action is demanded by the concrete situation in which we have to choose the thing to be done and cannot be spared the task of deliberation and decision by any learned or mastered technique (*HD*, p.84).

A contemporary Catholic example of this scenario can be found in Pope Francis’ 2016 post-synodal exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*.³⁸ In discerning the appropriate pastoral and sacramental response of the church to those in ‘irregular’³⁹ familial and marital situations (*AL* §§296-312), Francis emphatically rejects both a dogmatic approach disconnected from concrete, particular situations,⁴⁰ and the transformation of individual circumstances into cases for a refined set of general rules (*AL* §300). Thus,

³⁶ *HD*, pp. 82–83. Although ‘*Bildung*’ is usually translated as ‘culture’, Thiselton cites Gadamer’s own argument for its relationship to ‘*formatio*’ (latin), ‘form’ and ‘formation’ (English) and ‘*Formierung*’ and ‘Formation’ (German), Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trans.), (London: Continuum, 2004 [1975]), pp. 13–14.

³⁷ The ambiguity in Thiselton’s description of hermeneutics as ‘*transforming* biblical reading’ is intentional, see Thiselton, *HD*, p. 81; See also his essay on ‘transforming texts’ in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, pp. 31–54. A shortened version with minor amendments can be found in Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, pp. 69–74.

³⁸ Pope Francis, ‘Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, *Amoris Laetitia*,’ (19 March 2016), <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html>, henceforth *AL*.

³⁹ The term is enclosed in quotation marks throughout the exhortation.

⁴⁰ ‘Hence it can no longer simply be said that all those in any “irregular” situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.’ (*AL* §301).

It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being (*AL* §304).

In this example, doctrine as interpreted *and applied* is orientated not towards quick fixes but towards growth in understanding, toward expansion of horizons in belief bound up in lived praxis: 'discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized' (*AL* §303). Although *AL* is concerned with a particular set of issues and is not specifying a hermeneutical methodology, the principles of attending to the specific case and being open to expansive growth have a wider applicability in receptive integrity. A more substantial reading of *AL* in the light of reception hermeneutics therefore forms part of Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Formation in practical wisdom rather than simply following a rule can also be viewed in terms of communicative virtues, as Thiselton argues with support from Emilio Betti:

listening, tolerance, patience, respect for the other, and ultimately mutual understanding...assist communities to live together in mutual respect, common understanding and harmony'. (*HD* p.87)

These virtues are characteristic of a 're-formed mindset' developed through the formative practice of understanding, and the communicative virtues Thiselton cites from Betti are directed towards communities living together in mutual respect and harmony. Similar goals can be found in *EG* where Pope Francis sets forth 'four specific principles which can guide the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit' (*EG* §221). Of particular interest to the notion of expanding horizons through learning is the first principle: 'time is greater than space':

Giving priority to space means...trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystalize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.⁴¹

Compare this with Georgia Warnke's reading of Gadamer on the topic of formation: 'From the point of view of edification what is important is *not* "the possession of truths" but our own *development*'.⁴² For Pope Francis, time 'has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us.' In the activity of interpreting doctrine, the concrete Church—which does not escape sinfulness and finitude on earth—is as prone to the temptation of possessing spaces in preference to initiating processes as are agents in more

⁴¹ *EG* §223. Note also the hermeneutical resonance of §222: 'Broadly speaking, "time" has to do with fullness as an expression of *the horizon which constantly opens before us*,' emphasis added.

⁴² Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 157, cited in *HD*, p. 82, emphasis added.

obviously socio-political activities. Surprisingly, therefore, the four principles in *EG*—particularly that time is greater than space—also suggest a contemporary Catholic perspective on how the relationship of doctrine and life might begin to be evaluated.⁴³

There is one further image used by Thiselton in respect of formation which might usefully be taken forward into a Catholic understanding of ‘receiving with integrity’. In a short discussion on the work of Peridito Aparece on learning in Wittgenstein, hermeneutics is identified as a kind of ‘therapy’ aimed at restoring competencies for various activities including understanding, with different therapies for different symptoms.⁴⁴ A resonance with this therapeutic role can be found in Pope Francis’ image of the church as a field hospital,⁴⁵ as well as in Pope John XXIII’s prescription of the medicine of mercy for a wounded world.⁴⁶ In both cases, analysis of the symptoms of current ills in the world gives rise to a decision regarding how doctrinal and pastoral priorities are to be configured in a particular application (and therefore interpretation) of tradition. With an eye on the systemic ill of incoherence, Paul Murray has recently suggested that the role of the systematic theologian is like a doctor focussed on keeping the whole system in good health.⁴⁷ All of these examples turn on the ability to identify dysfunctions or ‘wounds’ which require therapy or healing. In this regard, one area recognised as a major wound in the contemporary church is the disunity between Christian communities, thus ecclesial learning as therapy in ecumenical perspective will provide a focus area later in this study.⁴⁸

⁴³ This theme is dealt with further in Chapters 4-5 here.

⁴⁴ *HD*, pp. 92–93. Thiselton is drawing here on Pederito A. Aparece, *Teaching, Learning, and Community: An Examination of Wittgensteinian Themes Applied to the Philosophy of Education* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 2005).

⁴⁵ Antonio Spadaro, ‘Interview with Pope Francis’, (19 August 2013) <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html>.

⁴⁶ Pope John XXIII, ‘Opening Speech to the Council’, in Abbott, p.715.

⁴⁷ ‘The systematic theologian is here the General Practitioner or the Engineer of the Christian theological task, with the health of the body or the effectiveness of *the system as a whole* in view and in such fashion as enables each other specialism to be properly located in service of the healing and greater productivity of the whole.’ Murray, ‘Engaging with the Contemporary Church’, in *The Routledge Companion to the Practice of Christian Theology*, Mike Higon and Jim Fodor (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 278–92 (p. 280), emphasis added; compare *HD*, p.92 on the relationship between ‘sound doctrine’, coherence, and good health.

⁴⁸ For an initial appreciation of this topic, see, *inter alia*, Ladislav Orsy, ‘Authentic Learning and Receiving: A Search for Criteria’, in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, Murray (ed.) *op.cit.*, pp. 39–51.

2.4.2 Alterity and Narcissism

Up to this point, the focus has primarily been on the hermeneutics of belonging to a tradition in which meaning and identity can be discovered, ordered and appropriated. The themes selected from Thiselton have focussed on hermeneutical resources and perspectives intended to remove misconceptions about the nature of interpretation and doctrine but have nonetheless recognised that:

a stable tradition of doctrine, far from inhibiting improvisation, provides the very ground for it. Only within a tradition of firm communal identity-markers can constructive ‘going-on-independently’ be distinguished from maverick idiosyncrasy and self-indulgence (*HD*, p.97).

However, the intrinsic resources of the tradition are not the whole story. Formation, which has been shown to be integral to hermeneutics and to understanding doctrine, requires openness to expanded horizons, reformed consciousness and changed forms of life: ‘(t)he heart of the hermeneutical endeavour is learning how to be open to “the other”, to come to respect “the other” on its own terms’ (*HD*, p.82). In the work of Gadamer, Betti, and especially Ricoeur and Jauss, the encounter with the other, which is essential to both understanding and formation, enables initial horizons of understanding to be expanded (Gadamer), the idols of the narcissistic self to be overcome (Ricoeur), and rejuvenating reception to occur (Jauss).⁴⁹

Although Thiselton refers extensively on Gadamer and Ricoeur throughout his work, it is the contribution of Hans Robert Jauss upon which he draws in order to illustrate a ‘hermeneutics of alterity’ in more detail.⁵⁰ Otherness plays a major role in Jauss’ hermeneutics and involves de-familiarisation, provocation, reception-history, and lived praxis as major concepts. As Thiselton writes:

⁴⁹ For Gadamer, ‘understanding is a fusion of... two horizons supposedly existing in themselves’, which might suggest that otherness is vanquished. In fact he stresses that the tension between horizons must not be concealed or ignored. Rather the ‘hermeneutic task consists not in covering up this tension in a naïve assimilation but rather in developing it consciously’. See Gadamer, p. 305. On Ricoeur and narcissism, see *HD*, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁰ On Gadamer and Ricoeur, Thiselton writes that they ‘rank as the two most significant theorists of hermeneutics of the twentieth century. But although much of his theological work remains implicit rather than explicit, Ricoeur will have a lasting impact on the future of Christian theology perhaps even more than Gadamer’, Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 228. In addition to their respective chapters in this volume, see, regarding Gadamer, Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, pp. 293–326, and regarding Ricoeur, Thiselton, *New Horizons*, pp. 344–78. Gadamer and Ricoeur are also referenced in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document on hermeneutics: see J. L. Houlden, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (London: SCM, 1995). Note, however, that the use of Gadamer in the PBC document is considered insufficiently critical by Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, ‘(Mis) Reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of The Bible in the Church’, *Theological Studies*, 60.3 (1999), 513–28 (pp. 517–18).

Like Gadamer and Betti, Jauss conceives of the other as deserving sufficient respect to understand the other on the other's terms... Like Ricoeur, Jauss also understands the other as a catalyst for understanding the self. Jauss insists far more strongly than Gadamer that it is impossible actually to reach a 'fusion of horizons'... A differentiation of horizons, not assimilation between them, irreducibly remains... (It) is whatever confronts us as most strange, adversarial, challenging, or provocative that encounters us with the most creative, formative, transformative, and life-giving effects (*HD*, p.101).

How, though, does all of this relate to the interpretation of doctrine? Interestingly, it is two Catholic scholars—David Tracy and Ormond Rush—that Thiselton selects to illustrate such a hermeneutics of alterity in theological mode, both of whom recognise a number of places where the theological interpreter is confronted with otherness.⁵¹ There is of course a profound 'vertical alterity' between the interpreter and God, but there are also situations of 'horizontal alterity' such as negative or oppressive life experiences, or the otherness of a text, especially the enduring otherness of a 'classic'.⁵² These all provoke a reassessment of settled, domesticated interpretations within a tradition and are important factors to take into account in developing criteria for integrity in doctrinal interpretation.

All of this can however be stretched a little further as regards application in *ecclesial* learning. For example, in the light of the plurality of receptions which exists in the Christian community, can negative experience of an ecclesial dysfunction be an occasion for not only recovering resources in the tradition, but also discovering therapy or healing from encounter with the ecclesial other? Bringing together Thiselton's perspectives on the communal, formative and therapeutic aspects of hermeneutics and doctrine certainly indicates this possibility. More widely, might other Christian traditions be appreciated as 'classics'? This would mean recognising the continuity of apostolic tradition in the other, whilst also being provoked by difference. These lines of approach cohere with the understanding of Receptive Ecumenism, which I discuss in Chapter 6. To develop one further example from a number of potentially fruitful insights, consider the use Thiselton makes of Ricoeur in the context of a hermeneutics of alterity:

Genuine hermeneutical engagement with 'the other' may begin to erode this spell of idolatrous self-deception, and may begin to re-form and form an 'intersubjective' self... The aim of hermeneutical endeavour and hermeneutical training is to overcome

⁵¹ *HD*, pp. 102–15; Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*; Rush, *RD*.

⁵² On the significance of Gadamer's understanding of the 'classic' for theological hermeneutics, see Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*.

narcissistic self-projections composed and imposed by the disguised self. Ricoeur declares, ‘The idols must die – so that symbol [which points beyond] may live.’⁵³

The natural reading of this, particularly with its reference to self and its roots in Ricoeur’s critique of Freud would be to understand the ‘self which is not-other’ in a purely individual sense. However, this would be to read Thiselton against the thrust of his earlier emphasis on the interpretation of Christian doctrine in *community*. Indeed, if the church is seen as a subject, then it is the church as an interpreting ‘self’ which stands in need of disenchantment. There is thus a question of particular interest to contemporary Catholic concerns which Thiselton does not explicitly address: are the challenges which Ricoeur and Jauss raise regarding self-limitation and even narcissistic self-deception also applicable to entire communities and traditions – including the church?

The key terms appropriated from Ricoeur in this context are the inhibiting dysfunctions of *narcissism* and *idolatry*. These are precisely the terms which are used in *Evangelii Gaudium* to signify ecclesial dysfunctions, specifically with regard to doctrine and how it is used. One manifestation of ‘spiritual worldliness’ is a ‘self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism’ in which ‘a supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism’.⁵⁴ Furthermore, such narcissism is not ‘really concerned about Jesus Christ or others’ and therefore idolatrous.⁵⁵ Even where the intention is good, a failure to engage with the otherness of the contemporary world still risks idolatry:

There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because their language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them *a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian*.⁵⁶

As for Ricoeur, the remedy for Pope Francis lies in engagement with the other:

⁵³ *HD*, p. 85. See also, Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Don Ihde (ed.), (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 323–24.

⁵⁴ *EG* §94. See also the reference to the ‘limited horizon of their own immanence and interests’ (§97). This is not an abstract category: Francis explicitly names ‘an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige’ in this context. (*EG* §95).

⁵⁵ *EG* §94. On the role of theology in unmasking idolatry, see Murray, ‘Theology “Under the Lash”: Theology as Idolatry Critique in the Work of Nicholas Lash’, *New Blackfriars*, 88 (2007), 4–24., reprinted in *Idolatry: false worship in the Bible, early Judaism, and Christianity*. (London: T&T Clark, 2007) pp. 246-266.

⁵⁶ *EG* §41, emphasis added. See also: ‘It is not the gospel which is being preached’ (§39), and ‘There are ecclesial structures which can hamper evangelisation’ (§26). Ecclesial language has the potential to be such an inhibitor despite the special role claimed for it in evangelising culture and perfecting language. On this latter point, see ITC, ‘Interpretation of Dogma’, §§ B.III.1, C.III.3.

We need to avoid it [i.e. spiritual worldliness] by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor... This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God (EG §97).

Furthermore, the hermeneutical significance of this commitment to the poor is not simply a negative one in terms of being freed from spiritual worldliness but lies in the recognition of a privileged locus of interpretation.⁵⁷ In different ways, a concern for the communicative efficacy of evangelisation, and a deep commitment to the poor, represent a view of pastoral practice as not only an application of doctrine, but as intimately bound up in its interpretation.⁵⁸ Francis' principle of living *sine glossa*—'without commentary'—is not one of hermeneutical naivety, but of alterity, resisting any attempt to reduce the ability of the Gospel to *challenge* the church.⁵⁹ The otherness of the Gospel, and the otherness of negative experience each points towards a threefold hermeneutical significance for alterity in *EG*: 1) as a site where interpretive 'gifts' may be received; 2) as an object of love; and, 3) as a challenging provocation that demands a response in both action and in reconfiguring existing understanding.⁶⁰

This has a somewhat paradoxical implication for practice which is especially acute in Catholicism. It means that whilst a valid response to otherness might include setting aside holy places, people, ministries, artefacts, times, and doctrines, our understanding of these must remain open to provocation through vertical and horizontal alterity and therefore potential change if we are to fully respect this alterity. We cannot, in short, take possession of otherness. A dialectic results, between belonging and otherness, between stability and renewal. A key question, therefore, is how this dialectic can be negotiated. What resources are available to view the integrity of doctrine in a dynamic way so as to handle these various moving parts? Before concluding this chapter and moving onto post-conciliar Catholic engagement with the hermeneutics of doctrine, it will therefore be instructive to examine Thiselton's treatment of doctrine and life as a coherent but dynamic *system*.

⁵⁷ 'Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them', *EG* §198.

⁵⁸ See Francis' commentary on Gal 2:2-1, which notes that care for the poor is 'the key criterion of authenticity', *EG* §195. The hermeneutical and ecclesial significance of such pragmatic criteria will be developed in Chapter 3-4 in this thesis.

⁵⁹ *EG* §271; see also 'This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it' (§194). The 'greatest risk' or 'greatest danger' for the church is a tendency towards reductive interpretations which fail to respect the claim of the text (§39) and the context of the receivers (§41).

⁶⁰ Chapter 6 here explores how these characteristics might also be applied to the ecclesial 'other' in an ecumenical context.

2.5 Doctrine and System

Does an emphasis on the currency and ‘cash value’ of doctrinal formulations, on the importance of lived experience, dramatic narrative and formation, and a positive valuation of otherness in understanding doctrine mean that Thiselton leaves no place for the formal, systematic presentation of interconnected doctrines? If this were the case it would not only create difficulties for appropriating his work in a Catholic context but would be at odds with his own systematic and conservative exploration of doctrinal topics in Part III of *HD*, as well as with his role on the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England. Throughout *HD*, and elsewhere in his writings, Thiselton consistently argues against postmodern relativism in secular or Christian guise and resists any attempt to reduce interpretation to individual opinion or truth to localised consensus.⁶¹ He does however acknowledge a tension between the hermeneutical focus on the particular (this could be, for example, a single pericope, a specific term, or a concrete context) and the universality claimed for Christian doctrine.⁶² Other contraries also appear: between continuity and discontinuity; between the centre and the periphery; between coherence and contingency (*HD*, pp. 119-44). How then are these to be meaningfully held together? To address this, Thiselton introduces two concepts which are of considerable significance for a hermeneutics of doctrine and for a dynamic notion of receiving with integrity: *polyphony* and *coherence*. These concepts involve the challenge not of understanding single propositions, but of interpreting doctrines located in a complex system.

2.5.1 Dialectic and Polyphony

Above all, Thiselton is here concerned to show that whilst there may be a dialectic between continuity, tradition, and coherence, on the one hand, and discontinuities, plurality, and particularities of human life, on the other, *it is a complementarity and not an opposition*. In

⁶¹ See *HD*, pp. 126–34. Thiselton’s immediate criticism is aimed at readings of Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine* which minimise the role for doctrinal truth-claims. Thiselton reaches a similar, though independent, conclusion to Murray; namely that Rorty’s approach ends up making the local community the measure of the world, with potentially disastrous implications for wider ethics, see Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 23–90.

⁶² Thiel also draws attention to this dialectic, although the terminology is different. Whereas Thiselton includes a range of critical approaches within the scope of hermeneutics, under the broad category of ‘explanation’, Thiel considers the ‘hermeneutical style of theology’ as a correlational activity concerned primarily with universality and coherence. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza makes a similar case, distinguishing hermeneutics from critical theory. Setting aside the use of the term ‘hermeneutics’, all three proposals recognise the fundamental dialectic between the need to interpret from within a tradition and exercising a critical hermeneutic of suspicion, see John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 197–203; also Fiorenza, ‘The Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions and Christian Theology’, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 27.1 (2000), 3–31.

particular, taking a hermeneutical approach to theology does not require the abandonment of epistemology, or the desire for coherent systems of thought and praxis, although it does require a more dynamic approach to how such systems are conceived and how they are implemented in practice. He approaches this by initially setting up a contrast between a 'scientific' approach to theology, read through a more general philosophy of science, with a focus on truth and the whole in apparent contrast to a hermeneutical approach which attends to the particular, to contingency and fallibility.⁶³ Rather than simply highlight how both perspectives are needed, he shows that modern 'scientific' approaches in fact contain hermeneutical elements⁶⁴. In addition, he supports Ricoeur's claim that there is a place for 'explanation' (critical investigation) in hermeneutical understanding (*HD*, p.145). As Ricoeur emphasises, both explanation and creative understanding are required for an adequate interpretation. But how can the tension in such a dialectic be negotiated? Here, Thiselton turns to the notions of dialogue, dialectic, and polyphony in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (*HD*, pp.134-39).

The key insight Thiselton draws from Bakhtin is that 'dialectic' does not mean having two thoughts within one system in order to demonstrate a singularity. Indeed, true dialectic cannot be comprehended and fully contained by a single consciousness (*HD*, p 135). Rather dialogical discourse is produced and owned collectively and inter-subjectively. The aim, as Thiselton interprets it, is to steer between the confines of a system and the chaos of relativism. Applied to the subject at hand,

A hermeneutic of doctrine prevents doctrine from becoming only monologic discourse; a hermeneutic of doctrine prevents hermeneutics from becoming only relativistic. As Bakhtin observes, either relativism or dogmatism prevents and undermines dialogic discourse (HD, p. 136).

Thiselton names Hegel as exemplar of the closed, final, understanding of system which is seen as inadequate in *HD*, viewing Hegel's dialectics as insufficiently attentive to ongoing dialogue, and as ultimately monological rather than polyphonic. A different Hegelian perspective, however, is offered by Gillian Rose, who presents an understanding of dialectic which is both intimately concerned with the concrete particular, and committed to search for wholeness and comprehensive knowledge.⁶⁵ To appropriate the language Murray uses to

⁶³ Use of 'scientific' methods does not, of course, necessitate a positivist or reductive *world-view*.

⁶⁴ For an alternative approach to the compatibility of scientific and theological rationality, using the category of fallibilism, rather than contingency, as the counterpart to coherence, see Murray, 'Truth and Reason in Science and Theology: Points of Tension, Correlation and Compatibility', in *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, Christopher Southgate (ed.), 3rd Edition, 2011 [1999], pp. 89–124.

⁶⁵ Kate Schick, *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 33, 52.

describe ‘dynamic integrity’, this might be described as both recursively self-critical, and faithful to an expansive catholicity.⁶⁶ Rose emphasises the importance of the ‘broken middle’ which entails:

a different way of knowing: one that eschews both fixed truths and absolute contingency, forging a path which holds the pursuit of truth and an awareness of contingency together, negotiating a ways of being that avoids the danger of falling into one or other opposition. It is a way of being that involves work and struggle, acknowledging that there is no easy path forward in a broken world.⁶⁷

Whilst Rose’s work might be fruitfully appropriated in a number of ways for theology,⁶⁸ the more limited point I am making here is that it not only illustrates another pattern of taking serious coherence and contingency within a system, but that it highlights the *dynamic* and personally-involving nature of such a system.

Returning to Thiselton, a ‘polyphony’ can be seen in biblical narratives which, taken as a whole, allow multiple voices to be heard in the canon itself (e.g. the different gospels, genres, and theologies evident in the biblical canon), but also in the ‘small voices’ of individuals which prevent the grand narrative from becoming a totalising one:

Although the biblical writings and Christian doctrine do offer an overreaching narrative of God’s dealings with the world from creation to the end-time, alongside this drama the Bible offers ‘little narratives’ about particular people in particular places at particular times. A dialectical interplay of coherence and contingency characterises these texts.⁶⁹

‘The development of the biblical canon and its continuity as a coherent plurality that generates Christian tradition and doctrine reflects this plurality-in-coherence that characterises a hermeneutics of doctrine’ (*HD*, p.136).

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis emphasises dialogue and the need to hear multiple voices which are not reduced to uniformity, using the image of the ‘polyhedron, not the sphere’, and he introduced steps to put this into practice at the 2014 and 2015 Synods of Bishops,

⁶⁶ On Murray’s principles, see Chapter 4 and 6 here. The idea that Rose presents an evangelistic form of catholicism (with a small “c”) is found in Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose’s Reception and Gift of Faith* (London: SCM, 2008).

⁶⁷ Schick, p. 53.

⁶⁸ See Rowan D. Williams, ‘Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose’, *Modern Theology*, 11 (1995), 3–22; see also, Anna Rowlands, ‘Practical Theology and the “Third City”’ (PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2006) <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.560494>>.

⁶⁹ *HD*, p.127, following Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), p. 89.

with an emphasis on the meaning and practice of synodality.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, listening to diverse voices, and specific local voices, beyond the episcopal college, without which integrity in the handing on (*traditio*) of doctrine can hardly be considered adequate, remains a major challenge for contemporary Catholicism. Such a plurality of voices illustrates the more general dialectic of coherence and contingency in the system of doctrine-and-life. If doctrine as a closed system is rejected, as Thiselton does explicitly, and *Evangelii Gaudium* implicitly,⁷¹ what dimensions of a dynamic system are relevant for a hermeneutics of doctrine?

2.5.2 System and Coherence

A richer understanding of system than as a closed, self-contained unit, can be found in systems theory, applied in technology, sociology, and biological sciences. Thus, Habermas characterises a system as ‘a self-regulating organism which maintains stability, identity and boundaries’, often located in relationship to a ‘hypercomplex environment’ (*HD*, p.65).⁷² This is a useful start in expanding horizons of understanding for the concept of a system in that it highlights the dynamic nature of systems and the fact that systems exist within larger systems or environments (for example, an organism exists within an eco-system).⁷³

⁷⁰ Referring to the etymological roots of ‘synod’ as ‘walking together’ (Gk: *syn* (together) + *hodos* (journeying, a way)), Pope Francis’ closing address at the 2014 Synod speaks of ‘a spirit of collegiality and of synodality ... a path of solidarity, a “journey together” ... I have seen and I have heard—with joy and appreciation—speeches and interventions full of faith, of pastoral and doctrinal zeal, of wisdom, of frankness and of courage: and of *parrhesia*.’ Pope Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops’, (18 October 2014), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_conclusionone-sinodo-dei-vescovi.html>.

⁷¹ E.g., through the principle that time is greater than space, leaving room for the surprising action of the Holy Spirit. Subsequent statements have made this dynamic view of doctrine clearer: ‘Christian doctrine is not a closed system, incapable of raising questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living, is able to unsettle, is able to enliven. It has a face that is supple, a body that moves and develops, flesh that is tender: Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ.’ (Pope Francis, ‘Address of the Holy Father, Cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore, Florence’, 10 November 2015 <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html>. Also: ‘Doctrine cannot be preserved without allowing it to develop, nor can it be tied to an interpretation that is rigid and immutable without demeaning the working of the Holy Spirit.’, Pope Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization’, 11 October 2017 <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_convegno-nuova-evangelizzazione.html>.

⁷² *HD*, p. 139.

⁷³ Thiselton worked with John Bowker on a Report of the Church of England Doctrine Commission on the corporate nature of faith, which includes an application of systems theory to religions, see Bowker, ‘Religions as Systems’ in Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith* (London: SPCK, 1981), pp. 159–89.

However the key concept in Thiselton's view of a dynamic, open system which has the necessary integrity to describe doctrine is *coherence*, albeit in a dialectical relationship with contingency.⁷⁴ A major question therefore is: how can coherence be evaluated in such a dynamic model?

A useful insight is provided in Nancey Murphy's suggestion of viewing theology as a 'research project', based on the approach of Imre Lakatos.⁷⁵ The core of Lakatos' argument lies in the way he differentiates between so-called 'hard' facts and explanatory theories:

The problem is *not* what to do when 'theories' clash with 'facts'... Whether a proposition is a '*fact*' or a '*theory*'... depends on our methodological decision... the clash is not 'between theories and facts' but between two high-level theories: an *interpretive theory* to provide the facts and an *explanatory theory* to explain these.⁷⁶

The core question in any given 'research programme', therefore, is which theories will prove to be the interpretative providers of 'hard facts' and which will be the explanatory, tentative theories to be tested.⁷⁷ As Thiselton notes, decisions about which theories provide the 'hard core' and which act as explanatory materials is a matter of hermeneutics (*HD*, p.168). Testing is aided by counterexamples and refutations which might not falsify the core of the research programme but which may require amendments in the 'auxiliary hypotheses' which form part of the overall system and which can be adapted or even discarded without damaging the integrity of the core thesis. If such auxiliary theories do not merely defend the hard core, but are capable of generating 'novel facts', the research programme is deemed 'progressive' by Lakatos. In contrast, a 'degenerative' programme requires more and more

Thiselton's contribution to the report is a chapter entitled 'Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory', pp. 45-78, reprinted in Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, pp. 701-25.

⁷⁴ In addition to the main discussion of this topic in *HD* pp. 119-173, the theme of coherence, often alongside contingency and the expansion of horizons, appears throughout the methodological section of Thiselton's work: *ibid.*, pp. 21, 53, 55, 65, 81-83, 112; also his commentary on a point by Wittgenstein: 'Such a formative process would involve not information about a single isolated belief, but reconfiguring a whole network of shared beliefs and practices', *ibid.*, p. 96. Note that coherence is not simply a practical necessary characteristic of a stable system: 'I firmly endorse the need for system, but with significant qualification, and I strongly urge the importance of coherence as a criterion of *truth*.' (*ibid.*, xx, emphasis added)

⁷⁵ Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). Thiselton's discussion can be found in *HD*, pp. 162-73.

⁷⁶ Imre Lakatos, 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 129.

⁷⁷ For a constructive critique of Murphy's suggestion from a Catholic perspective, see Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', pp. 205-20. On Lindbeck and Rorty, see Murray *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 11-16, 23-90.

theories simply to shore up the core against attacks, and should—at some point—therefore be abandoned.⁷⁸

Transposed into the doctrinal sphere, there are a number of implications to be drawn from all this. Firstly, doctrines are not free-standing propositions but are part of large, complex, ‘research projects’. Furthermore, whilst all doctrines belong to this project, not all are at the core. The Catholic understanding of the hierarchy of truths on the one hand, and the different weighting of doctrinal statements on the other, suggests a similar understanding. Secondly, overall coherence (survival of the research project) can be maintained at the cost of refining or rejecting auxiliary hypotheses. The goal, however, is not so much defensive as progressive or expansive: ‘Conceptual tools exist to heighten contact with the realities they seek to explain, not to distance us from them’.⁷⁹ Thirdly, Thiselton emphasises the positive value of competing theories for the interpretation and development of Christian doctrine.⁸⁰ In particular, rather than competing interpretations being viewed as complete, self-enclosed systems set in simple opposition, he notes the value of ‘creative discovery’ and the growth of knowledge.⁸¹ This perspective might usefully be applied not

⁷⁸ Murray argues that ‘research programme adoption, adaption and potential rebuttal is a matter of holistic judgement rather than precise formulation’ and that Lakatos’ proposal is best viewed ‘not as one searching for a guaranteed algorithm with which to escape the ambiguity of judgement but rather as one seeking to expand the range of resources available for guiding this process in a rational manner’, Murray, ‘Truth and Reason’, p. 111. I will return to Murray’s constructive reply to Lakatos and Murphy in Chapter 4 in the context of Murray’s own coherentist approach.

⁷⁹ *EG* §194. ‘Conceptual tools’ comes close to Murphy’s identification of auxiliary theories with ‘instrumentation’ in science, as well to the notion of ‘background theories’ which will be discussed in Chapter 4, see Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Although Thiselton rarely talks of the ‘development of doctrine’ as such, he undoubtedly sets a premium on growth in knowledge among the interpreting community and on the expansion of horizons in respect of understanding and embodying doctrine.

⁸¹ *HD*, p. 169. He has in mind here particularly the ‘Yale/Chicago’ debates of the 1980s but the typology could be equally well applied to debates within contemporary Catholicism over a wide range of issues. See also: ‘Christian theology is ...a corporate enterprise requiring Christian collaboration’, *HD*, p.165. For a contemporary Catholic situation where opposing schools are pre-defined and set in opposition, consider the sense of ecclesial division associated with the ‘hermeneutics of rupture’ and the ‘hermeneutics of reform or continuity’ frequently (though inadequately) polarised as a *Concilium/Communio* opposition, see Tracey Rowland, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T& T Clark, 2010), p. 21 which explicitly identifies *Communio* with a ‘hermeneutics of continuity’ with regard to the interpretation of the documents of Vatican II; also Rowland, *Catholic Theology*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017) which presents an emphatic contrast between *Communio* and *Concilium* types; and Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2007), pp. 31–32, 52–55. Although Mannion has sympathy with Lash’s despair at the ‘stereotypical nature of the *communio/concilium* [*sic*] compartmentalisation’ (p.32), he nonetheless finds the distinction useful as a heuristic device; contrast Thiselton’s strongly-worded criticism against this kind of classificatory approach to theology, which he considers ‘profoundly unhermeneutical’, Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 105–8.

only to intra-denominational debates, such as the ‘correct’ hermeneutics for interpreting Vatican II but also to the possibility of ecclesial learning in ecumenical dialogue.⁸²

Before concluding this chapter with an outline of the relevance of Thiselton’s doctrinal hermeneutics for a Catholic understanding of ‘receiving with integrity’—both its positive potential and the challenges it poses—I want to extend Thiselton’s analysis by making some initial moves to include the work of Nicholas Rescher in this exploration of systemic coherence. On the one hand, Rescher’s work on coherence, systems, and decision-making is highly relevant to the topics Thiselton raises, but Rescher does not appear in *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* nor, indeed, in any of Thiselton’s major works.⁸³ On the other hand, Rescher—as appropriated by Murray—is a key influence on the emerging strategy of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’ with which I engage in Chapter 6. In particular, it is Rescher’s understanding of the identification of incoherence, and the methodological choices made in favour of a particular understanding of coherence that I introduce here as significant for beginning to understand the *dynamics* of systemic coherence.

2.5.3 Rescher’s Aporetics

Rescher, like Thiselton, considers doctrine as co-ordinated with life. Indeed ‘dispositional belief’ can be found in a more general scheme of philosophical concepts which co-ordinate theory and praxis in his work.⁸⁴ As already noted, at the heart of Thiselton’s approach to systems is the ‘hermeneutical dialectic of correspondence, analogy, or generality on one side, and uniqueness, particularity and contingency on the other’ taken from Dilthey.⁸⁵ Rescher too draws on Dilthey in his 1985 book, *The Strife of Systems*,⁸⁶ where he addresses the apparent inability of philosophy to come to agreement on fundamental issues since

⁸² On Vatican II, see the argument for ‘authenticity’ rather than ‘continuity’ as the principle criterion for assessing interpretations in Neil Ormerod, ‘Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity? Toward an Ontology of Meaning’, *Theological Studies*, 71 (2010), 609–636. The question of ecclesial learning through ecumenical encounter forms the substance of Chapter 6 of the present thesis.

⁸³ Clearly, this short section is a highly selective use of Rescher’s considerable output in order to indicate its relevance for the further development of Thiselton’s proposals on dialectic and system. The choice of texts is suggested by the elements Rescher himself includes in his work on hermeneutics. In the main, I have focussed on texts which are *not* utilised in Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, which is the most substantial theological engagement with Rescher’s work to-date.

⁸⁴ ‘Our concept of BELIEF coordinates mentalistic dispositions to think and overt physicalistic dispositions to action.’ Nicholas Rescher, *Interpreting Philosophy: The Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Frankfurt; New Brunswick: Onotos Verlag, 2007), p. 106.

⁸⁵ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 7* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1927) cited in Thiselton, *HD*, p. 57.

⁸⁶ Rescher, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), p. 4. The title of Rescher’s book is from Dilthey *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 5* (Stuttgart: Vandenhoeck, 1960 [1927]), p. 134.

antiquity.⁸⁷ This leads Rescher to develop a number of interesting responses, including a critique of consensus as a criterion for truth,⁸⁸ of which the most relevant to the current discussion is the role of *coherence* as the essential characteristic of a rational system. Philosophy is a matter of ‘systematisation and rationalisation... concern for rational order and systematic coherence of our commitments’.⁸⁹ Driving this task are questions arising from the identification of incoherence within system, formalised in Rescher as ‘apories’ or ‘aporetic clusters’.

An apory is ‘a group of individually plausible but collectively incompatible theses’.⁹⁰ To maintain coherence in the system requires the rejection of at least one thesis – the ‘weakest link’ from the cluster.⁹¹ In practice, this is more commonly achieved by *modifying* the weakest link through the use of distinctions in order to retain some value from the original thesis.⁹² There is clearly a similarity here with the modification of auxiliary hypotheses in order to protect a hard-core theory in Murphy’s appropriation of Lakatos, and Rescher likewise adopts a cost-benefit heuristic: what is the cost to the overall system of abandoning or modifying a given thesis?⁹³

⁸⁷ Rescher recognises a fundamental tension, akin to Thiselton’s coherence-contingency dialectic, between the desire for comprehensiveness of data and systemic coherence: ‘On the one hand we seek comprehensive need – answers to all our questions, doctrines capable of providing for the rational accommodation of all our beliefs. On the other we stand committed to coherence in all its guises (consistency, compatibility and proper rational order)...we inhabit a difficult and complex world, not of our making, that simply is not capable of total cognitive domestication’. Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, pp. 43–44.

⁸⁸ Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, p. 38. On the significance of coherence in this context, see Rescher, *Aporetics: Rational Deliberation in the Face of Inconsistency* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), pp. 9–28. The topic is dealt with in detail in Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

⁹⁰ Rescher uses the anglicised ‘apory’ rather than ‘aporia’ as the singular form, see Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 1. Examples of apories, ranging from everyday situations to fundamental philosophical problems, can be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 1–8.; also Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, pp. 95–115.; and Rescher, *Interpreting Philosophy*, pp. 123–43.

⁹¹ Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, p. 67.

⁹² ‘They make it possible to remove inconsistency not just by the brute force of thesis rejection, but by the more subtle and constructive device of thesis qualification’, Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 127. An example of this refinement through distinctions in Catholic theology can be found in the development of Catholic understanding of ‘outside of the Church there is no salvation’ (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), especially in the drafting of Vatican II documents, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 141–61.

⁹³ See Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 119; also, Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, p. 19. Such distinctions which refine a thesis are, according to Rescher, genuine creative innovations, which not only explain something better, but raise the discussion to a new level of sophistication and possibility. The parallels with the development of doctrine should be clear. Nonetheless, this innovation means that ‘a philosophical position, doctrine, or system, is never closed, finished, and complete....Philosophical

A weakness which Murray identifies in Murphy's use of Lakatos is how predictive fruitfulness, valuable in science, could meaningfully be used as a heuristic tool for theological questions.⁹⁴ For Rescher, however, predictive fruitfulness is only *one* indicator of coherence, applicable for a particular scientific method, but not all human activity is science, and other indicators are possible and reasonable.⁹⁵ Thus, in general terms, a coherentist approach will seek a balance between, on the one hand, *thesis plausibility* based on evidential security and, on the other hand, the explanatory power or *informativeness* that a thesis generates. However, choosing which thesis to reject or amend, and how it should be amended, depends on what values are prioritised in the system as a whole, and in particular how different *cognitive values* are weighted in assessing coherence with a range of criteria. In part, this arises from recognizing the particularity and contingency associated with the interpreter.⁹⁶ In his mature work, Rescher also assigns a functional and contextual variability to the logic of prioritisation.⁹⁷ For example, in the context of a speculative philosophy, explanatory fertility will be valued (as in a Lakatosian research project) and accordingly the weakest link thesis will be the least informative. However, in the context of an empiricist philosophy, it will be the overall *plausibility* of the system which is prioritised, and therefore it will be the thesis which is 'least consonant with the fundamental commitments of one's overall position' that will be judged to be the weakest link. Other forms of enquiry may value evidence, such as evidence-based security, comprehensibility, or systemic unity.⁹⁸

Thiselton has shown that the communal activity of interpreting doctrine requires *multiple* perspectives to be considered (such as life-experience, embodied praxis, narrative, and formation, as well as systematic coherence with tradition and reason, and pragmatic 'cash-value'). These perspectives potentially give rise to very different kinds of questions. Moving from 'problems to be solved' to 'questions that arise' represents, in Rescherian terms, a shift of priorities from systemic unity to overall plausibility, using pragmatic and evidential criteria, whilst retaining a modified understanding of integrity and coherence as a characteristic of the overall system.

To consider a current application, the Commission on the female diaconate, initiated by Pope Francis in 2016, has been asked specifically to look at the historical evidence for the

systematization is a process whose elements develop in stages of interactive feedback – its exfoliation is a matter of dialectic.' Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 127.

⁹⁴ Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', pp. 212–15.

⁹⁵ Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 138.

⁹⁶ Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, pp. 95–115.

⁹⁷ 'All in all, then, the rationale for a particular mode of prioritization lies in the specific goal and purpose of the domain of deliberations at issue...even in theoretical matters the pragmatic dimension is bound to come to the fore.' Rescher, *Aporetics*, p. 139.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–39.

female diaconate in the early church. Whatever its findings, this does not answer whether women should be ordained deacons in the contemporary Catholic Church today because it does not ask that question. Historical evidence will contribute to an evaluation of the systemic coherence of various options, but a non-historical question cannot be determined solely on this basis. What other criteria might be necessary for overall plausibility? On the basis of Thiselton's work, an appreciation of diverse communal voices, and an analysis of concrete realities would appear to be essential.⁹⁹ I will address this question in more detail in Chapter 3 using Fiorenza's model of 'broad reflective equilibrium'.

As is the case for a specifically *historical* investigation into female deacons, prioritisation is sometimes made explicit in particular activities of theological interpretation and application. For example, Paul VI's appeal to a 'basic orientation' of charity;¹⁰⁰ or the stress on mercy in Pope Francis' pastoral approach. In other cases the difference in methodological prioritisation may simply and inadequately be viewed as a clash of more-or-less fixed positions, as with some attempts to resolve the apories of the Vatican II documents within a larger horizon of change and identity. Rather than viewing events such as Vatican II, or the papacy of Pope Francis, simply in terms of either continuity or discontinuity, the trajectory of this chapter suggests that categories of 'coherence' and 'integrity' are more suitable to the hermeneutical and theological task. The significance of Rescher's work is to demonstrate that what qualifies as optimal coherence varies according to contextual and teleological commitments, and therefore comes down to a judgement of the community of interpretation.¹⁰¹

Evaluating and optimising the overall coherence of the system is an ongoing task. In this regard, it is worth noting Pope Benedict XVI's words on the dynamic of (social) doctrine in *Caritas in Veritate*:

⁹⁹ For example, looking at the deacon-like roles performed by women religious and lay ecclesial ministers in diverse times and places; learning from the experience of female deacons in other Christian communities; prioritising the radical challenge of Gal 3:28 over tentative reconstructions of what Jesus Christ may or may not have intended in first century Palestine.

¹⁰⁰ 'We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council. Now, no one can reprove as want of religion or infidelity to the Gospel such a basic orientation, when we recall that it is Christ Himself who taught us that love for our brothers is the distinctive mark of His disciples' Pope Paul VI, 'Closing Speech at the Fourth General Assembly of the Second Vatican Council', (7 December 1965), <https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio.html>.

¹⁰¹ The rejection of the theological concept of 'limbo' as the eschatological destination of unbaptized innocents in favour of hopeful trust in God's mercy can thus be read in Rescher's terms as rejecting a method of evidential security for a wider coherentist position; see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Edition (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference / Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2008) §1261; also, ITC, 'The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized', (19 January 2007), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html>.

It is one thing to draw attention to the particular characteristics of one Encyclical or another, of the teaching of one Pope or another, but quite another to lose sight of the coherence of the overall doctrinal *corpus*. *Coherence does not mean a closed system*: on the contrary, it means *dynamic faithfulness* to a light received. The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging.¹⁰²

With this 'dynamic faithfulness' in mind, the final section of this chapter asks what might be learned from Thiselton's hermeneutics of doctrine in terms of framing an understanding of receptive integrity in contemporary Catholic contexts.

2.6 A Catholic Reception of Thiselton

Input from Catholic theology is by no means absent from Thiselton's approach. In addition to extensive use of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, including Aquinas, Balthasar's theo-drama is approvingly examined; Lonergan, Tracy, and Rush all receive appreciative and constructive treatments on their contributions; Rahner, Lash, and Dulles, among others, are referenced. Two Vatican II documents—*Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus*—are mentioned,¹⁰³ and two further post-conciliar documents—*Inter Oecumeneci and Eucharisticum Mysterium*—are given more weight than is strictly accurate, being incorrectly assigned the authority of 'the documents of Vatican II', whereas they are in fact post-conciliar curial instructions.¹⁰⁴ Overall, however, the contribution of the Catholic

¹⁰² Pope Benedict XVI, 'Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, *Caritas in Veritate*', (29 June 2009), §12, emphasis added, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html>. The idea of 'dynamic faithfulness', 'dynamic fidelity' or 'creative fidelity' occurs most frequently in pontifical addresses to religious orders and priests see esp. Pope John Paul II, 'Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World, *Vita Consecrata*', (25 March 1996), §37, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html>. It is also applied in the context of the 'New Evangelisation' to the recovery of the Christian and Humanist traditions of Europe in Pope John Paul II, 'Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ Alive in His Church the Source of Hope for Europe, *Ecclesia in Europa*', (28 June 2003), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html>.

¹⁰³ *HD*, pp. 483, 506; Vatican II, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*', in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery (ed.) (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), pp. 1–95; 'Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*', in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, pp. 283–315.

¹⁰⁴ *HD*, pp.529-531, Contrary to Thiselton's criticism of Vatican II, the *conciliar* documents did not 'reaffirm transubstantiation', although neither did they suggest that Trent's definition was in any way deficient; Sacred Congregation of Rites, 'Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Inter Oecumenici*', (26 September 1964), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery (ed.), 1988 Revised Edition (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988); Sacred Congregation of Rites, 'Instruction on the Worship of the

magisterium is largely absent from a text which draws most consistently on Calvin, Luther, Pannenberg, and Moltmann for post-Biblical theological material. The index cites Benedict XVI, but in fact this is only a passing mention to his role (as Cardinal Ratzinger) on the Pontifical Biblical Commission.¹⁰⁵ Liberation theology and feminist approaches, which have made significant contributions to Catholic hermeneutics, are barely in evidence.¹⁰⁶ This breadth of sources is reflected in Thiselton's proposals. For example, he evidences an appreciation of 'sacramentality' beyond the dominical sacraments attested in mainline Protestant tradition.¹⁰⁷ His treatment of doctrine and practice as a dynamic system constantly dealing with the dialectic of coherence and contingency, universality and particularity is highly significant in the light of contemporary Catholic debate over continuity and reform, the local and universal nature of the church, and the pastorality of doctrine.

There are however a few issues to be addressed before employing Thiselton's framework in a contemporary Catholic context. At various points, Thiselton demonstrates a very broad view of 'doctrine', aligning if not equating it with 'belief', 'dogma', 'systematic theology', or simply 'theology'.¹⁰⁸ Whilst these can all be related to a central theological concept of revelation, they are not entirely interchangeable terms in modern usage. Additional techniques and concepts which have been used in Catholic theological practice, such as 'theological notes' on the authority of a doctrinal proposition,¹⁰⁹ or the 'hierarchy of truths' showing its relationship to the core of the good news of salvation, are not considered.

Eucharistic Mystery, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*', (25 May 1967), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*.

¹⁰⁵ The use which Thiselton makes of Catholic theologians here is more positive than his summary of post-reformation Catholic contributions to hermeneutics in his *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. In the latter work, pre-reformation contributions are considered a common inheritance, and the contribution of post-Vatican II Catholic theologians is limited to an approving comment on the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (p.354). This suggests that Thiselton's work on the hermeneutics of doctrine may be the most promising starting place for a Catholic appropriation of his work.

¹⁰⁶ For his critique of liberation and feminist hermeneutics in general, see Thiselton, *New Horizons*, pp. 410–70; also, Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, pp. 255–305.

¹⁰⁷ *HD*, pp. 498, 591. Paul Avis considers that Thiselton demonstrates *catholicity* by his reference to the church as a sacrament, see Avis, 'The Hermeneutics of Doctrine', *Ecclesiology*, 6.2 (2010), 213–15 (p. 215).

¹⁰⁸ Dogma is referred to only occasionally in *HD*. Apart from when quoting sources it is used in the context of 'a piece of technical critical dogma' (p. 554) and in describing the 'flight from dogma' with reference to James Dunn (p. 409). Systematic theology 'roughly correlates' with Thiselton's own use of *doctrine*, p.106, also pp. 3, 766, 109, 110, 124, 224.

¹⁰⁹ Since the Council, theological notes have fallen out of use, see Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996). Sullivan's contribution to a Catholic hermeneutics—with references to Rush and Fiorenza—is addressed in Michael M. Canaris, *Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. and Ecclesiological Hermeneutics: An Exercise in Faithful Creativity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). On the contrast between 'creative fidelity' and 'dynamic integrity', see Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', p. 215.

However, when Thiselton comes to apply his method to concrete cases, the subject matter is confined to classical doctrine – creation, Christology, salvation and so on. Whilst this is admirable from the point of view of a hierarchy of truths, it does not illustrate how changes or incoherence in other aspects of church teaching might be addressed through the deployment of hermeneutical resources. Whilst the breadth of topics covered by Church teaching might be greater in Catholicism, even the Church of England has a body of doctrine beyond these classical themes. How, for example, would a hermeneutical model along these lines address the various disputes in the Anglican Communion on women’s ministry? Specific moral, practical, and structural-ecclesial issues are undoubtedly ‘questions that arise’ in contemporary Catholic contexts and have a self-evident cash value. How are they to be set in the context of doctrine and addressed using hermeneutical tools?

Related to this concern, it is notable that the ‘development of doctrine’ is not addressed in any detail beyond the patristic period, but this remains a live issue in Catholicism. In *EG*, for example, Francis reiterates a distinction between the deposit of faith and the ‘means in which these truths are set forth’. What does such a distinction of form and content look like viewed from a hermeneutical perspective?¹¹⁰ Additionally, whilst Thiselton characterises a Roman Catholic ‘definition of doctrine’ as largely reserved to the bishops in a hierarchical and communal manner, recent Catholic scholarship and teaching within the Catholic tradition also emphasises the sense of faith of the faithful and the community of theologians.¹¹¹ Likewise, through the church ‘interpreting the signs of the times in the light of gospel’, the contemporary world becomes a *locus theologicus*. Both of these concepts, found in Vatican II, are important for a contemporary Catholic hermeneutics of doctrine but are far from integrated into formal Catholic understanding and process.

Bearing these challenges in mind, how can Thiselton’s hermeneutical perspective help to structure a contemporary Catholic account of receiving with integrity? I propose four main areas. All of these have a broader ecclesial or even ecclesiological significance, but the conclusion of this chapter is that they also provide significant perspectives in evaluating the adequacy of the church’s interpretation and handing of the Gospel. They can be seen as a set of initial horizons from which more detailed questions might be pursued.

Firstly, in addition to an established focus on historical (hermeneutical) reconstruction and subsequent reception, there is a horizon which involves lived experience and ‘questions that arise’. Furthermore, this is not only in terms of a source of reflection (input) but also in

¹¹⁰ *EG* §41. For an initial consideration of the issues, see John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 56–99.

¹¹¹ On the *sensus fidei*, see Rush, *Eyes of Faith*; also, ITC, ‘*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of The Church’, 2014; Daniel J. Finucane, *Sensus Fidelium: The Use of a Concept in the Post-Vatican II Era* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016); Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (eds.), *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

terms of assessing the effective ‘cash value’ of doctrine in concrete applications (output).¹¹² To set these concerns into a contemporary Catholic horizon, it might be useful to consider Thiselton’s concern for doctrine and life as a hermeneutical perspective of the *pastorality of doctrine*.¹¹³

Secondly, the communal dimension of this doctrine and life perspective raises questions about who participates in interpretation, and how? In Catholic terms, the hermeneutical role of the *sensus fidei* is at issue here, as well as questions about how a plurality of voices can be heard. A key resource here is the hermeneutical role of reception. More generally, to set it in a current context, this concern for purposeful communal participation, could be characterised under the term *synodality*.

Thirdly, Thiselton highlights the role of the provocative other, experienced in the vertical alterity of God and the horizontal alterity of texts, world and intersubjective others. This raises a question of whether there is a space in Catholic interpretation for *ecclesial learning* through otherness. I argued that Thiselton’s use of Ricoeur to illustrate the risks of narcissism and idolatry has an ecclesial significance. Is there a role for the world, other Christian traditions, or other religions, precisely as sources of learning or as aids to understanding, not just as problems to be solved? In this study I will focus on the possibility of learning from the ecumenical other to pursue this question.

Finally, there is concern for the coherence of the system overall. Does the open, dynamic system (or web) described by Thiselton and Rescher offer anything to Catholic debates on the development of doctrine, continuity, and change and whether integrity has to do with more than re-clothing a core content in contingent forms?

Chapters 4-6, will address these areas through in-depth engagement with two contemporary Catholic theologians and a new ecumenical approach, but the immediate task is to examine more specifically the Catholic context and potential hospitality to a hermeneutics of doctrine. With these insights and challenges in view, the next chapter reviews some post-conciliar developments in order to examine how relevant hermeneutical questions might be situated in a Catholic understanding of doctrine, and how a dynamic faithfulness can be given contemporary Catholic currency.

¹¹² This notion of an effective ‘cash-value’ was controversial in Evangelical circles when Thiselton introduced it with regard to scripture. Although it seems equally challenging with regard to doctrine, it coheres with Murray’s pragmatist approach, and with the use of ‘retroductive warrants’ by Fiorenza. These approaches are dealt with in detail in Chapter 3 of the present work.

¹¹³ See especially, Gaillardetz, ‘The Francis Moment’, pp. 75–80.

3 DOCTRINAL PENETRATION AND FORMATION OF CONSCIENCES: *GAUDET MATER ECCLESIA* AS A HERMENEUTICAL LENS

3.1 Introduction

Although Thiselton's doctrinal hermeneutics engages a diverse spectrum of theorists and theologians, it is nonetheless developed from his particular ecclesial and cultural horizon of evangelical Anglicanism. Unsurprisingly therefore, whilst he engages individual Catholic theologians such as Tracy and Rush in some depth, magisterial texts pertaining to the interpretation of doctrine are barely touched upon, and specific hermeneutical considerations regarding questions arising in the contemporary Catholic context receive less attention than classical doctrines. An example of such a specifically Catholic concern is the hermeneutics of reading formal doctrinal pronouncements, taking into account the varying weights of authority in Catholic tradition, which Francis Sullivan has dealt with at length.¹ Similarly, the relationship between magisterium, theologians and the *sensus fidelium*, and the role of dialogue in the church have been addressed in documents from Rome as well as in the work of Richard Gaillardetz, Ormond Rush and Bradford Hinze, among others. These are

¹ See, *inter alia*, Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity*; also Sullivan, 'Developments in Teaching Authority since Vatican II', *Theological Studies*, 73.3 (2012), 570–89; also Sullivan, 'The Definitive Exercise of Teaching Authority', *Theological Studies*, 75.3 (2014), 502–14.

significant sites of hermeneutical analysis in contemporary Catholicism.² Alongside and interwoven with these are critical hermeneutics from liberationist, feminist, and contextual perspectives, which constitute a significant part of contemporary Catholic engagement with the question of interpretation.³ Given this diversity of approaches, where might be a suitable starting point for viewing the field Thiselton has described through appropriately Catholic lenses?

Werner Jeanrond argues that theological hermeneutics, far from being a new fashion, has been a major concern for Christian theology since the earliest times.⁴ Similarly, Schillebeeckx makes a case for hermeneutics being an intrinsically Catholic concern, arguing that the development of dogma is ‘the Catholic counterpart of what is known in Protestant theology as the “hermeneutical problem”’.⁵ Since John Henry Newman,⁶ and

² Representative volumes are: Gaillardetz, *When the Magisterium Intervenes: The Magisterium and Theologians in Today's Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012); Rush, *Eyes of Faith*; Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York: Continuum, 2006). See also Gerard Mannion et al. (eds.), *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism*, (Aldershot: Routledge, 2003).

³ In these fields, much of the hermeneutical work has focussed on new ways of reading *scriptural* texts and narratives. A critical hermeneutics orientated towards *doctrine* and tradition can be found in, *inter alia*, Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, Robert R. Barr (tran.), (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987); Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993); Catherine M. Lacugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *The Power of Naming: 'Concilium' Reader in Feminist Theology*, (London, England: SCM, 1996); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Crossroad, 2002); Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma: Faith, Revelation, and Dogmatic Teaching Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (London: SCM, 2012); Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley (eds.), *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

⁴ Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM, 1994).

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics’, in *God the Future of Man*, N. D. Smith (tran.) (London: Sheed & Ward, 1969), pp. 1–49 (pp. 6–7, 16–17). In this regard, he refers to Gadamer and Ricoeur as ‘protestant philosophers’ (p.7). Similarly, Lash, penning an entry on doctrinal development for a theological dictionary, concludes that ‘Increasingly, hermeneutics provides the framework for negotiating the gap between Christian origins and their subsequent development on the one hand, and on the other whatever it is that we might seek to say and think and do today’. Lash, ‘Development, Doctrinal’, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 155–56 (p. 156). This idea is elaborated with regard to Schillebeeckx and Rahner among others in Lash, *Change in Focus: A Study of Doctrinal Change and Continuity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973). That the relationship of doctrinal development and hermeneutics is still very much a live topic is indicated by a 2016 symposium in Rome entitled ‘Conceiving Change in the Church: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Catholic Tradition’, which included Paul Lakeland, Paul D. Murray, Neil Ormerod, Ormond Rush, and John Thiel among its contributors. See Murray ‘From the Development of Doctrine to the Hermeneutics of Catholic Tradition: Taking Stock after John H. Newman and after John E. Thiel’ (Unpublished, 2016).

⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1878 Version)* (Assumption Press, 2013).

despite a 1978 article in *New Blackfriars* claiming that the development of doctrine was now a ‘dead duck’ as a topic of theological interest,⁷ the notion of ‘development’ continues to be utilised and critiqued in contemporary Catholicism, as can be seen in recent debates within Catholicism on the interpretation of Vatican II,⁸ and in re-evaluating the church’s stance on use of the death penalty.⁹

Although Newman’s *Essay*—or perhaps Vincent of Lérins’ *Commonitorium*¹⁰—might be considered the *locus classicus* of the notion of development of doctrine, a more recent focal point is the address of Pope John XXIII at the start of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.¹¹ This speech establishes a number of significant trajectories for the council and for contemporary Catholicism but I will focus on two principles put forward by Pope John and further developed in the Council which have particular significance for the hermeneutics of doctrine and for ‘receiving with integrity’.

Thus the present chapter has three main movements: firstly, Pope John’s speech and its reception are introduced (3.2, 3.3); secondly, the hermeneutical implications of the pastoralty of doctrine are addressed (3.4); and finally, I consider the application of these trajectories, using two recent examples where questions surrounding the hermeneutics of doctrine have engaged not only theologians but the wider Catholic community, and continue to be live issues in the church (3.5). I conclude that three interrelated elements found in the key passage of *GME*—traditional ‘substance’, contemporary presentation, and the pastoralty of doctrine—not only resonate with elements of Thiselton’s analysis, but indicate a dynamic, multi-faceted approach to a Catholic hermeneutics of doctrine. This forms the basis of a close engagement with selected theological resources in the next three chapters of the thesis.

⁷ H. F. Woodhouse, ‘Is Debate over Development of Doctrine a Dead Duck?’, *New Blackfriars*, 59.702 (1978), 512–16.

⁸ See 3.5.1 here.

⁹ E.g. Pope Francis’ address on the anniversary of John XXIII’s opening speech at the Second Vatican Council: ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization’, (11 October 2017), <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_convegno-nuova-evangelizzazione.html>. In the note accompanying the subsequent revision to the Catechism, the CDF explicitly refers to ‘the development of doctrine’, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ‘Letter to the Bishops Regarding the New Revision of Number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Death Penalty’, 2 August 2018 <<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/08/02/180802b.html>>.

¹⁰ Reginald Stewart Moxon (ed.), *The Commonitorium of Vincentius of Lérins*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915). A recent analysis of the significance of Vincent’s work, which seeks to avoid an isolated reading of *quod ubique, semper, et ab omnibus* is Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

¹¹ Pope John XXIII, ‘Opening Speech to the Council’, (11 October 1962), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, W. Abbott (ed.) (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 710–19, henceforth *GME*.

3.2 Substance of Faith and Means of Expression

Pope John's opening speech at Vatican II sets an agenda and style for the whole Council. While the whole document is significant in this regard, I will focus in particular on one passage:

From the renewed, serene, and tranquil adherence to all the teaching of the Acts of the Council of Trent and the first Vatican Council, the Christian, Catholic and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward towards a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expanded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.¹²

The first thing to note in this agenda-setting speech is of course the distinction made between the meaning of doctrine and its traditional formulation. This is one—perhaps characteristically Catholic—way of negotiating the dialectic of coherence and contingency, of or the universal and the particular, which Thiselton identifies as central to a hermeneutics of doctrine.¹³ However, the second half of the above citation is equally important, and is related to—not detached from—the first, giving a place to the relationship between doctrine and pastoral perspectives. Again, this coheres with what might be expected from general and theological hermeneutics, as seen in Thiselton's work connecting doctrine and life, and the role of application in developing understanding.¹⁴

Although a clear distinction between variable form and immutable content might appear to be the plain sense reading of *GME*, I suggest that the situation is more complex, and that despite frequent citations of *GME* as a warrant for a static deposit of faith which is simply re-clothed in new cultural or historical settings, there are resources within Catholicism that allow for alternative readings.

GME not only acted as a lodestone to which the Council fathers referred for direction, but has become the reference point for Catholic distinction between the form and content of doctrine. Nonetheless, in a foreshadowing of arguments in the decades following Vatican II

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 715.

¹³ A useful summary of the emergence and subsequent development of form-content models in Catholic thought can be found in Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 141–53.

¹⁴ See Chapter 2 here.

on the correct interpretation of the Council, the correct sense and meaning of John XIII's text is itself disputed.¹⁵ In the redacted official Latin version of the text, used in the opening speech, this passage undergoes notable changes:

For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing.¹⁶

The 'same sense and meaning', a phrase drawn from Vatican I and ultimately from Vincent of Lerins, reappears in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.¹⁷ As with *GME*, the distinction between the substance of the deposit and the means of presentation is set in a pastoral, communicative context in *GS*. The decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, similarly acknowledges that the deposit of faith or revealed truths can be formulated in different ways, and that these may be deficient.

let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, ... even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. (UR §4)

if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated - to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself - these can and should be set right at the opportune moment (UR §6).¹⁸

Christoph Theobald rightly highlights that the later council texts show an important development over the initial principle, and start to uncover the problems of an essentialist form/content approach which is nonetheless only indicated and not fully matured even in *Gaudium et Spes* §44.¹⁹ *UR* not only reiterates the need for new formulations of doctrine, but adds complexity to the question of interpretation by introducing the notion of a hierarchy of truths.²⁰ Given the limited reception of this notion in magisterial documents until *EG*,

¹⁵ Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century*, Abridged edition, revised by Margaret Hebblethwaite (London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 221–23.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Komonchak provides a useful translation annotating the differences between the two versions of the speech, available at <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>.

¹⁷ '[The] deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another.' *GS* §62.

¹⁸ Vatican II, 'Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*', in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery (ed.) (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1964), pp. 499–523, henceforth *UR*.

¹⁹ Christoph Theobald, 'The Theological Options of Vatican II: Seeking an "Internal" Principle of Interpretation', *Concilium*, 4 (2005), 87–107 (pp. 98–100); Vatican II, 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*', in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery (ed.) (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1965), pp. 163–282.

²⁰ The hierarchy of truths is introduced in *UR* §11. Endorsement of a plurality of conceptual or expressive models can be seen in *UR* §4, §6 and §17.

caution must be exercised in assuming that the treatment of form and content in the conciliar documents represents a fully developed position.²¹ All of which lends support to Theobald's argument that on the matter of form and content, the council represents a snapshot of a learning church.²² Given the question at hand, the form of words in *GME* and in the conciliar documents remains capable of more perfect expression as a wider web of theological and pastoral realities and relationships are taken into account.

The significance of *GME*, and its reception, can be seen in a number of post-conciliar documents in Rome, and a diversity of views among Catholic theologians as to the correct reading of the different versions of Pope John's speech, the degree to which a form-content distinction can be sustained intellectually, and the limits of its practical application, for example in ecumenical dialogue and theological pluralism.²³ Magisterial examples of the ongoing currency of John XXIII's speech can be found in John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* and Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, both of which also refer to the conciliar concept of the hierarchy of truths and the practical implications for a transformation of ecclesial structures in this regard.²⁴ However, the most significant post-conciliar magisterial document, in terms of dealing *directly* with the hermeneutics of doctrine, is the 1973 declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae*.

In the fifth section of *ME*, the historical conditioning of dogmatic statements is acknowledged, with four major points being affirmed:

- (1) the incompleteness of every doctrinal affirmation;
- (2) the contextuality of doctrinal affirmations insofar as they are responses to particular questions;
- (3) the linguisticity of all doctrines; and
- (4) the distinction between the truth affirmed in a particular doctrinal formulation and the philosophical categories and worldviews used to express that truth.²⁵

²¹ '[Francis] is the first Bishop of Rome since the Second Vatican Council to call for an intentional application of the "hierarchy of truths"...to the preaching, catechesis and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church.' Clifford, 'Pope Francis's Call for the Conversion of the Church in Our Time'. For the analysis of magisterial documents substantiating this claim, see Clifford, 'L'herméneutique d'un Principe Herméneutique: La Hiérarchie Des Vérités', in *L'autorité Des Autorités: L'herméneutique Théologique de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), pp. 69–91. On the scholarly reception of the hierarchy of truths, see William Henn, 'The Hierarchy of Truths Twenty Years Later', *Theological Studies*, 48.3 (1987), 439–71.

²² '[The] conciliar texts are...the expression of a gigantic process of individual and collective learning'. Theobald, 'Theological Options of Vatican II', p. 103.

²³ These claims are discussed, with examples, in section 3.2.

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, 'Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*', (25 May 1995), §19, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html>, henceforth *UUS.*; *EG* §41.

²⁵ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods', in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (eds.), 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), pp. 1–78 (p. 39).

Here, the historical consciousness already applied to biblical criticism²⁶ is extended to doctrinal formulations. Fiorenza's summary, cited above, uncovers the rich implications of the text but rather hides the cautious and defensive language in which this emergent understanding is expressed.²⁷ Thus, *ME* introduces the fact of historical conditioning as a 'difficulty' for passing on revealed truth. Doctrinal formulas, whilst 'incomplete', remain 'sufficient'. Expressions and formulas are dependent on language but only 'bear traces' of conceptual systems. In different contexts supplementary or new expressions may allow a 'fuller', 'more complete', or 'more perfect' reconstruction and presentation of the original, determinate, and recoverable meaning.²⁸ Looking more closely at how *ME* uses the notion of 'form', Fiorenza's summary brings into the light an important point. Although *ME* accepts the development of doctrine as a 'fuller and more perfect expression', this arises not simply as a linguistic problem of textual translation, but 'in a broader context of faith or human knowledge'.²⁹ Examples might include the effect of evolutionary theory on the doctrine of monogenesis, and the struggle from the fourteenth century onwards to understand the salvation of non-Christians in the light of the discovery of new lands, to give just two examples.³⁰

Writing at the time of *ME*'s publication, Rahner welcomed its historical awareness, but criticised it for, among other things, not resisting the temptation 'to make things easy for itself by making a simple distinction between modes of expression and content'.³¹ This

²⁶ Vatican II, 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*', in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Austin Flannery (ed.) (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), pp. 97–115, §12.

²⁷ For example, 'Finally, even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions.'

²⁸ In fact only different *eras* are referred to in *ME*, which perhaps suggests a Euro-centrism concerned with cultural change only across time, in contrast to the diversity of interpretations and interpretative practices in World Christianity today. For two examples of significant synchronic diversity, one apparently using orthodox forms but expressing a non-traditional faith, and the other using Hindu practices and language to express recognisably Christian commitments, see Joshua D. Broggi, *Diversity in the Structure of Christian Reasoning* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

²⁹ *ME* §5, emphasis added. These form a class of criteria which Francis Schüssler Fiorenza names 'background theories'. As will be shown in the subsequent chapter, Fiorenza also includes reflection on concrete human experience as a part of human knowledge, and thus a further criterion for re-evaluating theological statements, under the heading of 'retroductive warrants'. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of the present work. See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), pp. 301–11.

³⁰ See Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*. On the impact of discovering the New World, pp.63-85; also, on the shift in doctrinal interpretations with regard to polygenism, see Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity*, pp. 104–5.

³¹ Rahner, 'Mysterium Ecclesiae', p. 151.

temptation is at least acknowledged in the 1989 ITC document, *The Interpretation of Dogma*, although the tension remains unresolved at a theoretical or practical level:

Without doubt a distinction must be made between the permanently valid content of dogmas and the form in which this is expressed...At the same time, it is not possible to make a neat distinction between content and form of expression.³²

ID makes use of the form-content distinction but simultaneously lays claim to a permanent value for traditional formulations, suggesting that form and content are not so easily disentangled in non-trivial practice.³³ Recently, the language of John XXIII has been echoed in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Here, Pope Francis quotes the relevant passage from *GME*, but then continues to give his own pastorally-informed interpretation.

There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger.³⁴

If Francis is not simply at odds with *ID* here, then at least there is an entire spectrum of form-content relationship described between the two documents, from the ‘permanent value’ of traditional propositions in *ID*, to the ‘alien language’ and ‘false god’ represented in ‘completely orthodox language’ which *EG* describes. Furthermore, the overall sense of *EG*, with its focus on reality as concretely experienced, suggests that overcoming this alien, idolatrous incomprehensibility is not simply a matter of language but of life. Such considerations will start to be addressed in the next section, and more so in the subsequent discussion on the pastorality of doctrine.

3.3 Paradigmatically Catholic or Hermeneutically Naïve?

At first glance a clear distinction between form and content appears both straightforward and adequate to the task in hand. By deploying suitable tools (including historical-critical

³² *ID* §C.III.3 Although not a magisterial document, this paper was issued *in forma specifica*, and authorised by then Cardinal Ratzinger, so it can be reasonably assumed to represent a view that was acceptable in Rome.

³³ *ID* §C.III.3. The rationale for this argument is that in making use of language, the Church in fact changes the fullness of meaning of that language, in part fitting it to the Church’s own ends. To adapt Hans Robert Jauss’ remarks on art and history, to which I refer in Chapter 5, the Church not only *has* a language, and is *affected by* language, but *affects* language.

³⁴ *EG* §41. Note that although the citation in *EG* is from the official AAS text of *GME*, Francis’s use of the term ‘substance’ and ‘formulation’ in his own comments echoes the original Italian version of Pope John’s address.

techniques) to reconstruct the meaning of an earlier church teaching, tradition or practice, a separation of contingent form and essential content can be made so that communication in a new idiom, language or culture is possible. This process is thus an act of *translation* which allows for an almost limitless plurality of forms each expressing the same content and meaning. A contemporary exponent of the superiority, even necessity, of the form–content approach is Thomas Guarino, who claims that it can be endorsed and adopted widely in the magisterium of the Catholic Church and by leading theologians. Furthermore, he claims it has shown its worth in allowing a plurality of conceptualisations, for example Thomist and Augustinian, to be maintained in continuity with tradition through an underpinning continuity of content, even when the different systems are incommensurable with each other. Additionally, the model is credited with being a key conceptual tool in post-conciliar ecumenical progress.³⁵ However, the situation is rather more complex.

This complexity can be found both in the detail of a form-content approach and in consideration of the wider scope of ‘receiving with integrity’. To consider first Guarino’s claims for the pervasiveness and usefulness of the approach, he provides evidence for the claim that *GME* had a major impact on the direction of the Council, and that the form-content distinction proved fruitful as a hermeneutical tool to dethrone the hegemony of neo-scholastic ‘conceptual monism’. But this does not, of itself, establish the adequacy of the distinction. Christoph Theobald argues that the conciliar evidence points rather to a developing understanding of the concept—and its limitations—through its application during the council, but which remains incomplete by the final documents.³⁶ I will return to Theobald’s argument later, in the context of the pastoral dimension of *GME* and Vatican II. Certainly, as early as 1967 Schillebeeckx was able to refer to the model, envisaged as a ‘kernel and husk’, as ‘the older solution’,³⁷ and Rahner criticised *ME* for its ‘too easy’ deployment of this model in 1973. In the same year, Thomas Ommen’s doctoral dissertation named the form-content distinction as a pervasive twentieth century example of ‘an earlier un-historical approach to tradition in general and to those specific elements of tradition which are the dogmas of the church.’³⁸ The fundamental issue is that no ‘essence’ or ‘kernel’ can be identified and expressed non-linguistically by tools that are themselves enmeshed in

³⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology; Revelation and Truth: Unity and Plurality in Contemporary Theology* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993); ‘Revelation and Foundationalism: Towards Hermeneutical and Ontological Appropriateness’, *Modern Theology*, 6.3 (1990), 221–35.

³⁶ Theobald, ‘Theological Options of Vatican II’.

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, ‘Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics’, pp. 10–13.

³⁸ Thomas B. Ommen, *The Hermeneutic of Dogma* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 96–104.

history.³⁹ The situation is further complicated by acknowledging the historicity not only of the language of the text and the culture of the authors, but also the setting of the various readers through history, culminating in the contingent location of the contemporary interpreter.

Indeed, interpretation is not simply a matter of bridging a historical ditch through being immersed in a tradition but of being alert to the possibility of distortions embedded in the act of the cultural-linguistic matrix associated with that tradition. In theological and biblical hermeneutics, this emphasis is given its sharpest and most developed form in various liberationist critiques, including feminist approaches. A theological variant of this concern can be seen early in Rahner's investigations into the church as not only historically conditioned but capable of wrong turns, and even sin.⁴⁰ In response to some of these challenges, Guarino acknowledges there is no access to a pure essence without linguistic and cultural forms, and that in practice form and content can, at best, be distinguished, not truly separated. He also accepts the force of critiques regarding possible distortions as necessary correctives to a form-content model for transmission of doctrine, whilst maintaining the centrality of that model.

As a more pragmatic warrant for the worth of a form-content distinction, Guarino cites the impact it has had on ecumenical dialogue. At one level, this is uncontroversial—an ecumenical conversation in which parties insisted that their respective traditional formulations were the *only* linguistic structures capable of conveying a revealed truth, would be no dialogue at all. Such a model would hardly suggest the capacity for mutual learning which has been significant in the modern ecumenical movement.⁴¹ However, in terms of substantive contribution, the significance of distinguishing form and content for particular propositions is less clear-cut. The noted ecumenist Anton Houtepen takes a rather different perspective:

³⁹ Here 'linguisticity' need not be restricted to texts, and certainly not to doctrinal texts (thus also, poetry, narrative etc.) but extends to interpretable practices involved in passing on tradition. In the case of Catholicism, the liturgy and structure of the church illustrate this wider sense of linguisticity.

⁴⁰ Rahner, 'The Church of Sinners', in *Theological Investigations, Volume VI*, Karl-Heinz Kruger and Boniface Kruger (trans.) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969 [1947]), pp. 253–69; 'The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II', [1965] in *TI VI*, pp. 270–94. See also Jeanmarie Gribaud, *Holy Yet Sinful Church: Three Twentieth-Century Moments in a Developing Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

⁴¹ For example, Clifford's account of the hermeneutical principles employed by the ecumenical *Groupe des Dombes* recognises 'le principe des equivalences' between the doctrinal expressions of different traditions, but sees them as complementary, not interchangeable, and orientated towards a task of recovery, reconstruction and re-appropriation of Christian faith, and continuing renewal and development of doctrine. Clifford, *The Groupe Des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 74–78.

As we cannot separate form and content in a piece of art, so we cannot isolate faith from our expression of faith. Nor can we find expressions of faith without expression of life itself. As we cannot separate fact and interpretations, so we cannot isolate a 'deposit' or a sum of tenets of faith from the living communities where they are honoured and lived.⁴²

The Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue which resulted in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) offers a useful illustration of the issues.⁴³ Pieter de Witte endorses the position that 'the fundamental difference between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism cannot be reduced to a different "packaging" of the same "kernel" of truth. It is more than just a matter of language.'⁴⁴ Thus the hermeneutical method employed in this dialogue goes beyond the 'qualitative' approach of a 'foundation-expression' model oriented towards a 'quantitative' approach constituted by both 'an extensive elaboration of all the issues that pertain to the theme of justification and a common expression of shared convictions about them'.⁴⁵ This relativizes the significance of a form-content distinction on two grounds. Firstly, by recognising that doctrinal statements are not free-floating propositions, but embedded within the life of ecclesial communities - in wider theological frames of reference, as identity markers, as guiding practice, and even as hermeneutical criteria (this is particularly true for Lutheran understanding of justification).⁴⁶ Secondly, however, it also acknowledges the importance of common forms of expression which can be

⁴² Anton Houtepen, 'Hermeneutics and Ecumenism: The Art of Understanding a Communicative God', in *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller (eds.) (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2001), pp. 1–18 (p. 3).

⁴³ For Guarino's reading of this dialogue, see his *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, p. 189.

⁴⁴ Pieter de Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), p. 14; see also, Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Quincentennial Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation', *Centro Pro Unione Bulletin*, 92 (2017), 8–17. As Murray notes, a significant factor in the methodology of JDDJ is Lindbeck's grammatical understanding of doctrine as 'cultural-linguistic', which Lindbeck locates as an *alternative* to a propositional form-content approach to continuity and change, see George A. Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Anniversary edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009 [1984]), pp. 91–92; Mike Higon, 'Reconstructing *The Nature of Doctrine*', *Modern Theology*, 30.1 (2014), 1–31.

⁴⁵ de Witte, p. 119.

⁴⁶ So too, Minna Hietamäki, in her analysis of the 2000 Lutheran-Roman Catholic document *Communio sanctorum*, states that 'the purpose of the content-form distinction is, on the one hand, to preserve the integrity of faith, and on the other hand, to facilitate critical discussion about the forms this faith has taken.' But the object here is not individual statements but the fundamental content of faith as 'God's saving act in Jesus Christ and Christ's presence among the communion of the faithful' and the witness of the early church as a paradigmatic 'form' of that faith mediated in the world. Minna Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement: An Examination of the Quest for Consensus in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), p. 69.

taken into the future life and doctrine of the respective churches.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the diversity of expression is not only related to a diversity of conceptual forms of thought, but an underlying diversity in the scriptures regarding justification.⁴⁸ The diversity of expression is therefore not simply a matter of translation, but of fundamental plurality in the sources of doctrine, which are themselves already interpretations, receptions, and normative criteria.

The issue is not limited to ecumenical contexts but can also be seen in intra-ecclesial hermeneutical decisions, such as the different approaches to a revised translation of the Roman Missal. Is the ‘content’ preserved through staying close to the Latin or by functional equivalence? Does the readability and poetry of the language form part of its effective meaning? How are the symbolic allusions (e.g. ‘mother bees’) received in the intended cultural-linguistic horizon? Examples could doubtless be multiplied, but these debates illustrate that separating content and form is by no means straightforward in practice, even within a relatively constrained sphere such as a liturgical text.⁴⁹ How, then, can Pope John’s first principle in the passage from *GME* at the start of this chapter be responsibly received today?

I will consider three concrete responses to the challenges of accounting for the apparent usefulness of distinguishing form and content, whilst respecting the difficulties outlined above. These reflect not just different evaluations of the adequacy of the form-content approach but different perspectives on the wider task of receiving with integrity, on how that integrity is conceived of and how it is critiqued, developed and maintained. Two questions run through these difference approaches. How can we critically interpret the tradition we ourselves stand in? And how can proposed changes be responsibly said to belong in that tradition?

It should be noted that none of these responses—including Guarino’s—represents naïve essentialism. They range from a nuanced endorsement of a form-content, to a limited appreciation of its value, to a sophisticated rejection and replacement of it by a different model of understanding. In the following sections, I will examine three approaches to the problem of how to interpret and apply the semantics and pragmatics of doctrine indicated by the distinction of substance and formulation in *GME*, which have relevance for contemporary Catholic hermeneutics: 1) Thomas Guarino’s appeal to *reconstructive* hermeneutics; 2) a limited and critical *retrospective* evaluation, proposed by Schillebeeckx;

⁴⁷ De Witte thus concludes that the foundation-expression scheme ‘cannot be an exhaustive description of the consensus expressed in the JDDJ...The form and the content of the JDDJ—and the criticism of form and of content – turn out to be closely related.’ de Witte, p. 231.

⁴⁸ Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ On the issues surrounding the missal translation, see Gerald O’Collins and John Wilkins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017).

and 3), a brief introduction to Ormond Rush's use of *reception* theory, dealt with more fully in Chapter 5.

3.3.1 Reconstruction

Although Guarino consistently defends and promotes the adequacy of a form-content distinction, he nonetheless accepts much of the philosophical and theological criticism to which the model has been subjected. For instance: the impossibility of access to an isolatable 'essence'; the absence of un-interpreted bare facts; the possibility of distortion in communication; the productive role of the interpreter; and the importance of concealment as well as revealed truth.⁵⁰ His principle concern is with being able to claim that—for a subset of doctrinal statements which constitute the fundamental dogmas of the church—identity of meaning can be assured, not only in concrete cultural-linguistic examples, but as a universal principle for all possible human cultures and languages. Only in this way can universality of the Christian revelation and acknowledgement of the indefeasibility of historicity be maintained. Guarino's concern, in fact, is not so much with the form-content distinction as such, but with justifying a metaphysical foundation for claims of continuity of meaning in Christian doctrine in the face of what he sees as reason-denying postmodern philosophies derived from Heidegger, without recourse to the 'conceptual monism' of neo-scholastic Catholicism.⁵¹ Where Guarino stakes the value of the 'context/content' approach is rather in the recoverability of textual meaning or 'reconstructive hermeneutics'.⁵²

Guarino's adoption of reconstructive hermeneutics is part of a sophisticated project for a foundationalist, metaphysical, pluralist understanding of the relationship of theology and philosophy, which cannot be addressed here. The more modest question I want to ask is what this approach looks like in practice. The limitations which Guarino admits of the form-content distinction have already been noted, and to this may be added limitations of reconstructive hermeneutics. It is one thing to claim that in principle, the intended meaning is not entirely unobtainable, but it is quite another to justify this in particular cases. Analysis of source texts, historical and cultural-linguistic setting, conditions of authorship and so on yield more and less probable reconstructions, but not absolute certainty regarding meaning and truth. Examining not only the precursors, but the later receptions may provide further warrants from a wider web of relationships and interpretations. Further questions at a meta-

⁵⁰ Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, pp. 109, 206, 327.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–105, 339–45. Also Thomas G. Guarino, *Revelation and Truth*, pp. 57–80.

⁵² Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, p. 206. To anticipate a possible confusion in the next chapter, it should be noted that Guarino's use of 'reconstructive hermeneutics', derived from Betti, is not the same as Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's non-foundationalist use of the same term.

critical rather than a critical level might be asked about the criteria for discerning continuity and how they are used.⁵³ Thus, contrary to Guarino's claim that liberation and feminist hermeneutics simply form other schools of thought which need to demonstrate that they maintain the same meaning as the classic doctrinal and scriptural texts, at least some of these hermeneutical approaches operate with a different account of what acts as a warrant for a sound interpretation. For instance, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's perspective in *In Memory of Her*, is that women have been systematically removed from the tradition, so appealing to the tradition to support that claim (notwithstanding 'traces' that might be found) is hardly appropriate.⁵⁴

An alternative way of looking at Guarino's approach is as follows. Given the phenomena of a plurality of theologies within Catholicism, and of diverse forms of life in different denominations, Guarino has shown that this plurality can be held coherently with a particular ecclesiology, one which sets a premium on traditional continuity. In this regard, a parallel may be drawn with Lievan Boeve's contention that the continuity and discontinuity in Benedict XVI's 'hermeneutics of reform' is an asymmetrical relationship in which the discontinuity must always be subordinate to the asserted continuity. A theology which employs a different standard of traditional integrity—such as one rooted in liberating praxis, or on the present surprising action of the Holy Spirit, or in post-foundationalist thought—might come up with a different mode.⁵⁵ For example, Murray makes use of Donald Davidson's critique of content-scheme dualism to construct a coherentist account of theological rationality. Rather than understanding legitimate plurality in terms of different expressions which are (potentially) incommensurable but essentially identical (as Guarino does), Murray recognises reality as complex and patient of multiple overlapping perspectives.⁵⁶ Dialogical understanding between users of different concepts and languages

⁵³ Thiselton illustrates these levels by reference to a film critic. The critic reviews a film at the critical level, but an observer analysing the criteria the critic is using operates at the meta-critical level. Thiselton's later work emphasises Gadamer's as concerned with a *meta-critical* approach to hermeneutics. See Thiselton, *New Horizons*, pp. 313–43.

⁵⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd edition (London: SCM, 1994).

⁵⁵ E.g., Thiel's notion of 'dramatic development', John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 100–128. Also see the post-foundationalist accounts of Fiorenza and Murray which are analysed in Chapter 4 of the present thesis.

⁵⁶ On Davidson, see Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 40–49; on Rescher's critique of Davidson, see, *ibid.*, pp. 104–8. Murray concludes that both philosophers view 'the complex, multi-faceted character of reality as coming to legitimate expression in the diverse conceptual resources that varying needs and situations have fashioned' (*ibid.*, p. 108). Compare Gadamer's 'radical contextualism', which calls for a dynamic, dialogical process in which '[c]onceptual and linguistic differences...are not simply obstacles to be overcome on the way to communicative understanding; they constitute opportunities for the interlocutors to expand their horizons and come to understand the subject matter better than they did before', Greg Lynch, 'Does Conversation Need Shared Language? Davidson and Gadamer on Communicative Understanding', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 52.3

is thus neither characterised by total incommensurability nor decided in advance. This need not lead to the relativism Guarino fears, but has the potential for a constructive, yet differentiated, plurality. Such an understanding not only has implication for intra-ecclesial plurality, but offers a different trajectory for ecumenical dialogue, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6. As these examples illustrate, and as Jack Bonsor argues—in direct response to Guarino—it is premature to dismiss the possibility of postmodern theological understanding, as both Guarino and the ITC appear to do.⁵⁷

John Thiel also offers a critique of Guarino and of the form-content approach in the process of developing his own proposal for the dynamics of tradition, arguing that the form-content model no longer explains well the dynamics of tradition as actually observed.⁵⁸ What is interesting is that Guarino's reply acknowledges the force of much of Thiel's argument. In particular, Guarino agrees that there is no 'hypostasized content' outside of its historical expression, and explains that a judgement on what is 'form' and what is 'content' can only be made over the course of time. In this pragmatic approach he comes close to a position advanced by Schillebeeckx, who recognises form and content only in a very limited, retrospective way. Thiel also lays out a model of retrospection as an alternative to the foundationalism favoured by Guarino, and it is to these accounts that I now turn.

3.3.2 Retrospection

The Flemish Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx acknowledges that his early work makes use of the 'older way' of distinguishing an essential dogmatic kernel from a contingent husk of expression, but argues that he does so purely in a *retrospective* manner.⁵⁹ Despite the inescapable historical situation of the interpreter, a judgment regarding 'form' and 'content' can still be made, but these terms have only an existential, not ontological, significance. In other words, the judgment which distinguishes the contingent and essential elements is a retrospective *interpretation* made from the contemporary horizon and not a matter of isolating some timeless essence. In such a retrospective approach, 'content' names the present interpretation and 'form' names the conditioning of language and world view

(2014), 359–81; see also, Lynch, 'Meaning for Radical Contextualists: Travis and Gadamer on Why Words Matter', *Philosophical Investigations*, 41.1 (2018), 22–41.

⁵⁷ Jack A. Bonsor, 'History, Dogma, and Nature: Further Reflections on Postmodernism and Theology', *Theological Studies*, 55.2 (1994), 295–313.

⁵⁸ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 88–91, 227 n.72.

⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, 'Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics'.

identifiable in the earlier formula.⁶⁰ But such a distinction is only available through a certain temporal distancing; at an earlier point in time, no such distinction could have been made.⁶¹

The conclusion Schillebeeckx draws from his investigation into theological hermeneutics is that only by constantly reinterpreting the tradition (not discarding it) can fidelity to both the tradition ('orthodoxy') and human historicity be maintained:⁶² 'it is precisely fidelity to the promise of the gospel, living in the Church, that demands that we...should interpret'.⁶³ Therefore, to fail to do so, to simply repeat earlier formulae, is to endanger genuine orthodoxy.⁶⁴ The clear echo of this danger heard in *EG* suggests that Schillebeeckx's analysis remains relevant,

The act of interpretation thus has a *retrospective* character with regard to identifying contingent elements of the doctrine, together with a concern for *present* reinterpretation as a criterion of faithfulness. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx insists on an orientation to the *future* on the basis that the most fundamental 'content' of the deposit of faith is the promise, already inaugurated in Christ but to be fulfilled at the eschaton.⁶⁵ This indicates the need for epistemic humility in attempting to isolate content within traditional forms. Such a modest approach to form and content is helpful, but leaves open the question of how such interpretations are to be judged; one of the practical weaknesses of the form-content model is delineating, even retrospectively, where the boundary of the contingent element lies. Does relativizing of the 'content' mean that all interpretations have a claim to equal validity? Schillebeeckx proposes three criteria which allow for a responsible, but not absolute, discernment between some components of a particular expression of doctrine as replaceable 'historical form' and some as 'essential content' from our present interpretation.⁶⁶ In terms of the present work, these criteria offer some initial indications of what 'receiving with integrity' looks like in practice.

Firstly, Schillebeeckx argues that continuity of Christian identity is constituted by a *relational proportionality* between the gospel message and cultural-historical situations, a

⁶⁰ 'If we then discard that mode in which the reality was worded, we are left with a content; it is however, no more the "pure content of faith" than the earlier one was, but is simply a faithful interpretation in the light of our present situation. This interpretation, not a "timeless essence", contains for us the "pure content of faith".' *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12. A concise summary of Schillebeeckx's position can be found in Rush, *RD*, p. 259.

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, 'Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics', p. 27.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, N. D. Smith (tran.), (London: Sheed & Ward, 1974), pp. 1–13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–77.

ratio which requires calibration and rebalancing in the case of a significant change in cultural *milieu*.⁶⁷ It is this proportion which needs to be maintained in subsequent reformulations, not an identity of the terms involved.⁶⁸ Daniel Thompson expresses this well:

The constant factor, therefore, is neither the act or intentionality of faith itself nor the ‘structuralising’ elements that are used to express it, but rather it is the proportional relationship between the two, as they both shape the understanding of the one saving mystery of Christ.⁶⁹

Rather than attempting to identify a ‘substance of faith’ which is timeless and transcultural, the emphasis here is on the universality of the gospel, which only appears in a plurality of particular cultures. In this principle can be seen Schillebeeckx’s approach to the dialectic of universal and particular which is at the heart of Thiselton’s treatment of a coherent system of theological hermeneutics.⁷⁰ The key point as regards receptive integrity is this: as well as the past tradition of faith remaining essential, *the contemporary situation is theologically significant*.⁷¹ As I will show later, this has also been identified as an important principle for Pope Francis’ magisterium.

⁶⁷ This notion is anticipated in Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, N. D. Smith (tran.), (London: Sheed & Ward, 1969), pp. 27–32. It is explicitly set out as a criterion in Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, pp. 58–63. Jean-Paul Gabus similarly suggests that the task of contemporary appropriation is not to propose a relationship between an (invariant) *object reel* and (variant) *object connu*, but to understand the relationship between a *symbolic* core and its socio-cultural expression. See Jean-Paul Gabus, *Critique du Discours Théologique* (Neuchâtel; Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1977), p. 323.

⁶⁸ In *The Understanding of Faith*, the relationships are expressed in terms of (a) the *intentionality* of faith as inwardly determined by the mystery of Christ and (b) subsequent *expressions* in different contexts. In his later work the terms *message* (or *interpretation*) and *context* are used, such that the relation of Jesus’ message with his socio-cultural context is equivalent to the NT message in relation to its context, and so on, culminating in an identical relation between contemporary theological interpretation and contemporary socio-cultural context. See Schillebeeckx, ‘Theological Interpretation of Faith in 1983’, in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Volume XI: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, M. Manley (tran.) (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 51–68 (pp. 61–64). The same terms are used in his mature work *Church*, although references to ‘the substance of faith’ are replaced by ‘the offer of revelation’: Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: SCM, 1989), pp. 40–45. Clodovis Boff, whilst not referencing Schillebeeckx directly, also argues that a hermeneutical ‘homosemy’ is to be sought in ‘correspondence of relationships’, not a ‘correspondence of terms’. See Boff, pp. 143–50. Martin Poulson draws attention to the way in which Schillebeeckx seeks to avoid the polar approach of simple correlation by emphasising the interpretation which mediates between the situation and message, from which the message cannot be detached. In this regard, Poulson suggests that ‘relation’ rather than ‘relationship’ best translates Schillebeeckx’s use of the Dutch *verhouding*. Martin G. Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 107–11.

⁶⁹ Daniel Speed Thompson, *The Language of Dissent: Edward Schillebeeckx on the Crisis of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 118.

⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, pp. 33–45.

⁷¹ ‘What is important here is the insight that ‘the situation’ is no longer purely the channel in which the transmitted faith flows to meet us. The situation, the context of faith, is itself also

Despite the significance of maintaining the ratio of relational proportionality,⁷² Schillebeeckx states that ‘the basic hermeneutical problem of theology...is not so much the question of the relationship between the past (scripture and tradition) and the present, but between theory and practice’.⁷³ His second criterion therefore concerns *Christian orthopraxis*. Clearly orthopraxis as right action is distinguished here from orthodoxy, or ‘right belief’, but Schillebeeckx is more nuanced than might at first appear. Precisely as *praxis*—rather than practice—a reflective, theoretical element is already implied⁷⁴ but Schillebeeckx consistently argues further that Christian theology involves a dialectical relationship between past, present and to be accomplished future.⁷⁵ Whilst the transformational aspect of hermeneutics is for Thiselton primarily about the effect of texts on the lives of readers, for Schillebeeckx, interpretation is involved with human and religious potential to transform the world. The religious tradition that forms the ‘theory’ investigated by theological hermeneutics not only discloses meaning as an authentically human existential possibility, but this meaning possesses ‘transformative, innovative, liberating, ultimately redemptive power’.⁷⁶ As Daniel Thompson notes, here Schillebeeckx is maintaining a challenging dialectic of meaning and praxis, which represents a transformational model of truth in which not only is praxis effective with regard to oppressive ‘negative contrast experiences’ but also meaning is revealed in that praxis.⁷⁷

Orthopraxis is thus not a matter of first understanding theory and then applying it; it is ‘not a consequence of a previously given, communal unity of faith, but the manner in which such a communal unity and conviction is realised’.⁷⁸ As ‘theology is an enterprise which is partly hermeneutic and partly, in its very theory, involves a certain praxis of redemption and

theologically relevant. For...the whole of history stands under God’s liberating and redemptive will.’ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷² Thompson argues that this first criterion is the fundamental one, and that the other criteria—orthopraxy and acceptance by the community of faith—are subsidiary to it. Certainly it is the principle which Schillebeeckx explicitly returns to in later works, as noted above. See Thompson, p. 117.

⁷³ Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 66.

⁷⁴ ‘The unfamiliar term praxis is used deliberately, to avoid the connotations of practice. The latter implies a prior pure theory that we then apply practically; praxis, by contrast, is understood as co-constitutive of theory likewise conceived.’ William L. Portier, ‘Interpretation and Method’, in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter (eds.), 2nd edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 19–36 (p. 30).

⁷⁵ Schillebeeckx, ‘Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics’, pp. 36–38; Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 66; Schillebeeckx, ‘Theological Interpretation’, p. 55.

⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, ‘Theological Interpretation’, pp. 54–55.

⁷⁷ Thompson, pp. 36–46.

⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 68.

liberation',⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx is able to claim that 'orthodoxy is at stake in orthopraxis'.⁸⁰ He illustrates this using the teaching of Vatican II on religious freedom, arguing that 'only a new praxis in the church can make the new interpretation credible, namely as a theoretical element in effective practice here and now by the churches themselves'.⁸¹ As with the risk to orthodoxy presented by simple repetition of formulas, Schillebeeckx's insight and language again resonates with *EG*, contrasting a retrieval of tradition guided by the criterion of orthopraxis with purely theoretical approaches which he characterises as 'gnosticism'.⁸²

The final criterion recognises that there is a role for discerning the acceptance of doctrines by the people of God.⁸³ The underlying principle is that the subject sustaining the hermeneutics of doctrine is not the isolated theologian but the community of faith,⁸⁴ and so it is in concrete communities of interpretation that new understandings appropriate to the cultural setting emerge and are tested, in relationship to other church communities, the episcopal magisterium, including the bishop of Rome, and theologians. The dialogical interaction which Schillebeeckx proposes for these different roles distinguishes his criterion of 'acceptance by the community' from notions of 'reception' which indicate a largely passive role for the laity with regard to the magisterium and for the local churches in regard to the universal.⁸⁵ However, 'reception' can be, and has been, given a richer, more active sense which Schillebeeckx anticipates in his argument that the act of interpretation involves a 'productive creativity' in which interpretation and praxis make new traditions and meaning by creatively and practically receiving the tradition anew:

the Christian perception of the meaning of the offer of revelation comes about in a creative giving of meaning: in a new production of meaning or a re-reading of the Bible and the tradition of faith within constantly new traditions, in creative trust.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx, 'Theological Interpretation', p. 55.

⁸⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, pp. 177–78.

⁸¹ Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, pp. 66–67.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69, compare *EG* §§93–97; also, Pope Francis, 'Gaudete et Exultate: Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today's World', 2018, §§36–46 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html>.

⁸³ Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, pp. 70–77. On the relationship of this criterion to the *sensus fidelium*, see Poulson, 'Schillebeeckx and the *Sensus Fidelium*', *New Blackfriars*, 98 (2017), 203–17.

⁸⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 70; Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 35.

⁸⁵ See Thompson, p. 122; Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, pp. 72–77; Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 215.

⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, p. 44. Also Schillebeeckx, 'Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics', p. 32. This creativity forms part of the 'hermeneutic character of theology': Schillebeeckx, 'Theological Interpretation', p. 64.

It is precisely this aspect of productive creativity that resonates with a *hermeneutical* understanding of reception. Before looking at how reception hermeneutics can give this insight a fuller treatment than Schillebeeckx provides, it will be useful to introduce an alternative account of retrospective understanding of tradition, in opposition to a simple form-content dichotomy, offered by John Thiel.

Thiel's *Senses of Tradition* provides a sophisticated account of tradition as an ongoing discernment involving four 'senses' in Christian communities. Thiel summarises these senses of tradition as follows:

The literal sense of tradition is the Church's judgment on the stability of belief, doctrine, and practice in its uncontroverted plain meaning. The sense of development-in-continuity is the Church's appreciation of how tradition's constancy is ever renewed in the present historical moment. The sense of dramatic development claims to discern a loss of authority in what had heretofore been regarded as tradition's literal sense. And the sense of incipient development claims to discern in unauthoritative beliefs and practices the authoritative and yet only recently recognized constancy of tradition.⁸⁷

Central to Thiel's argument is that these senses rely on a retrospective orientation as the church discerns continuity with its traditioned past from the perspective of the present horizon. Thus,

a retrospective conception of tradition measures continuity not by taking a divine stance in the original event of Christian revelation and imaging traditional time from a privileged, timeless point of view; rather, it does so by envisaging tradition from the actual limitation of the present moment and 'looking back' to the Christian past to configure traditional continuity... Development is always ... understood within the conditions of the present moment.⁸⁸

This offers a sharp contrast to both pre-modern notions of development which envisage a fixed deposit, and modern models of development as organic growth. It emphasises the determination of the community, and theologically looks not only to an incarnational Christology, but to the activity of the Holy Spirit in recalling, forgetting and bringing to birth elements of tradition. Thiel's consciously post-foundationalist approach is emphatic on the inseparability of form and content and offers instead a multi-dimensional account of the dynamics of tradition, viewed as individual and communal discernment.

Thiel and Schillebeeckx offer two distinct perspectives on how a retrospective point of view allows the idea of form and content to be represented in a more theologically and pragmatically satisfying manner. Both recognise the historical situatedness of the subject

⁸⁷ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 26–27.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

and the nature of the proximate object of revelation (scripture and doctrine) as already interpretations, indeed interpretations of interpretations. The continuous, dynamic of re-reading is brought to the fore in a third response to the limitations of a form-content model: a hermeneutics of *reception*.

3.3.3 Reception

In the second century, Irenaeus offered a dynamic vision regarding the deposit of faith in which ‘the faith received... acts continually, by the Spirit of God, like a valuable deposit in a precious vessel, to rejuvenate both itself and the very vessel that contains it.’⁸⁹ Such a ‘rejuvenating reception’ is at the core of an appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss’ reception hermeneutics by the Australian theologian, Ormond Rush.⁹⁰ Rush draws on Jauss’ work to identify three hermeneutical dangers: (1) an immanentist concern with the text as sole bearer of meaning; (2) an essentialist approach which has meaning floating outside of history where different expressions are simply a ‘change of clothes’; (3) a historicist reification of a ‘classic’ text or interpretation (a ‘tiger leap into the past’ which ignores what went before and came after a particular traditional formula).⁹¹ Jauss attempts to overcome these dangers by an active, actualising and rejuvenating reception which includes a productive making of meaning as well as attention to reconstructing the original horizon of a work and a critical attention to alterity.

As shown above, Schillebeeckx recognises the productive activity of the interpreting community in attributing meaning to tradition, and in finding the appropriate relational proportionality for a new context, and indeed Guarino accepts that even a reconstructive hermeneutic has a ‘somewhat creative’ aspect as well as a chiaroscuro effect, highlighting some aspects of past expressions and obscuring others.⁹² Transposing Jauss’ insights to the reception of doctrine, Rush argues

⁸⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.10.2, cited in Jared Wicks, ‘Deposit of Faith’, *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), pp. 229–39 (p. 231).

⁹⁰ Rush’s reception model and Jauss’ hermeneutics are engaged in greater depth in Chapter 5 of the present work. The intention here is simply to note that reception theory offers an alternative to form-content essentialism.

⁹¹ Rush, *RD*, pp. 255–61. Also Hans Robert Jauss, ‘Die Partialität Des Rezeptionsästhetischen Zugangs (Racines Und Goethes "Iphigenie“)', in *Aesthetische Erfahrung Und Literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt, 1982), pp. 704–52 (p. 745), cited in Rush, *RD*, pp. 91–92.

⁹² Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, pp. 185, 208.

as it seeks understanding...receptive faith demonstrates dynamism towards discovery and rejuvenated formulation within the newness of history. The stability and continuity of doctrine is maintained through the mediation of rejuvenating reception.⁹³

The implication for doctrinal understanding is a rejection of immanentist, essentialist and historicist approaches to doctrine. Instead a reception-centred approach focusses on the meaning in the dynamic process of understanding:

Contrary to a substantialist notion of doctrine of the content/form schema, a rejuvenating reception of a doctrine is here understood as the understanding, interpretation and application of the doctrine. In rejuvenating reception, no doctrinal 'content' takes on new 'form'. Rather the rejuvenating reception is its meaning, conveying truth within a new horizon of understanding.... The 'essence' is not first extracted in order to then clothe it in contemporary clothes. The reconstruction of the answer as the content is the new form.⁹⁴

There are echoes here of Schillebeeckx's 'production of meaning' but Rush makes more explicit use of hermeneutical ideas such as the triad of understanding, explanation, and application, and the method of question and answer, as well as the root metaphor of reception. This is a promising approach in terms of a deeper understanding of what 'receiving with integrity' entails, as well as being responding to the limitations of a form-content approach, and will be considered in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Returning to *GME*, it is important to note that the form-content distinction functions primarily not as a fully adequate positive model but as a counter-position to the inadequate model of conceptual monism. The reference to substance and formulation is in the context of forward propulsion for the church, not a philosophical analysis of meaning. It most clearly says that simply repeating the formula is not enough, and indicates how a more adequate contemporary approach might be pursued, particularly through the 'pastoral' orientation of the council.

3.4 The Pastoralty of Doctrine

I have argued that whatever the 're-clothing' or 'presentation' of doctrine means, it cannot be founded on a naïve expectation that the essence of a doctrine can be extracted on demand into historically-neutral content and then repackaged in more accessible language and form. In considering a selection of different responses to this challenge, a recurring theme has been that the desirable quality of authenticity—whether specified as continuity, identity, integrity,

⁹³ Rush, *RD*, p. 249.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

or orthodoxy—is not determined as a given but is discovered and understood in the activity of reception and the praxis of Christian faith in diverse cultural-linguistic settings (with particular elements of tradition as essential reference points in this reception and praxis). In an important article on the hermeneutics of Vatican II, Christoph Theobald describes this character with reference to Pope John’s opening address, as the ‘pastorality of doctrine’.⁹⁵ This contribution is significant because Theobald recognises it is not a matter of opposing the pastoral and doctrinal as distinct poles, nor even of synthesising two perspectives. Rather the doctrinal emerges precisely *in* the pastoral; the ‘essence’ is discovered only in the concrete historical forms in which the Tradition is re-received. The basic principle is that of abandoning a juxtaposition of the doctrinal and pastoral and so making reception possible.⁹⁶

Similarly, John O’Brien views the Second Vatican Council, under the influence of *GME*, as regaining a correct understanding of what ‘pastoral’ entails.⁹⁷ Such an understanding shifts away from a model of pastoral theology concerned with simply applying what has been given in doctrine, and instead recognises that the ‘pastoral is foundational’.⁹⁸ In this approach which recognises the ‘theological density’ of the pastoral principle,⁹⁹ the reality to which doctrine points is not packaged as it ‘is in itself’ in a doctrinal system but discovered in praxis.¹⁰⁰ As a general hermeneutical principle, this fits well with Thiselton’s argument for the relationship of doctrine and life, and the role of application as a constitutive part of the act of understanding, not something carried out after understanding is achieved. More specifically, it accords with the form-content alternative proposed by Schillebeeckx’s orthopraxis and Rush’s rejuvenating reception:

⁹⁵ Theobald, ‘Theological Options of Vatican II’.

⁹⁶ Theobald, ‘The Principle of Pastorality at Vatican II: Challenges of a Prospective Interpretation of the Council’, in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, Massimo Faggiolo and Andrea Vicini (eds.) (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), pp. 26–37 (p. 27). Also Theobald, ‘Theological Options of Vatican II’, pp. 89–90, 93–94, 101.

⁹⁷ John O’Brien, ‘Ecclesiology as Narrative’, *Ecclesiology*, 4.2 (2008), 148–65 (p. 150). See also Raphael Gallagher, ‘The Background to a Footnote: Understanding Pastoral Moral Theology’, in *Faithful Witness: Glimpses of the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Anthony Geoghegan and Vincent MacNamara*, Anthony Geoghegan et al. (eds.) (Dublin: Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, 2005), pp. 226–36. Also Giuseppe Alberigo, ‘The Christian Situation after Vatican II’, in *The Reception of Vatican II*, Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds.), Matthew J. O’Connell (tran.) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), pp. 1–24 (pp. 16–17 n.53). A contrasting position is that of Serafino M. Lanzetta, who argues for a much harder distinction between dogmatic and pastoral, with clearly-defined dogma controlling praxis. Indeed Lanzetta sees definitive dogmatic statements—for example an infallible declaration of Mary as ‘Mediatrice’—as pastoral because they address the (pastoral) problem of acute confusion in contemporary Catholicism. Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Vatican II: A Pastoral Council: Hermeneutics of Council Teaching*, Liam Kelly (tran.), (Leominster: Gracewing, 2016).

⁹⁸ O’Brien, ‘Ecclesiology as Narrative’, p. 152.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

The acid test of doctrine is its capacity to facilitate life-enhancing experience grounded in the mystery of Christ, and these very experiences—communicated as narrative—become the seedbed of the amplification, and precision in implementation through systematics, of retrieved doctrine.¹⁰¹

Theobald argues that the principle of pastorality is not exhausted or completed in the Council itself, but constitutes an open principle of reception, creatively involving the whole people of God.¹⁰² Similarly for O'Brien the pastoral and doctrinal have been restored to a correct relationship, one which necessitates 'an inductive methodology' in preference to a 'repetition of immutable principles'.¹⁰³ This comes close to Thiselton's fundamental principle that the hermeneutics of doctrine should be concerned with questions that arise, not free-floating abstract problems to be solved.¹⁰⁴

The continuing relevance of this principle is seen in a cluster of recent essays by Richard Gaillardetz, who situates the concrete application of Pope Francis' magisterium with this principle of the pastorality of doctrine. In the light of this principle, Gaillardetz can claim that far from undermining or marginalising church teaching, Francis is the 'defender of doctrine'.¹⁰⁵ The key to understanding the pastorality of doctrine exercised in this way is that doctrine and pastoral concerns are not opposed, nor is doctrine taken as a given which simply has to be applied. Rather it is a process of *recontextualisation*, of setting the doctrine in a correct relationship to both the kerygma and to pastoral realities, with mercy used as a hermeneutical lens to guide this activity.¹⁰⁶ It can be seen in the response given by Pope Francis to an interview question on *Humanae Vitae*:

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–53.

¹⁰² The Council thus acts as a 'generative grammar' for contemporary Catholicism. Theobald, 'Principle of Pastoralty', pp. 29–34.

¹⁰³ O'Brien, 'Ecclesiology as Narrative', p. 151.

¹⁰⁴ Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 3–18.

¹⁰⁵ Gaillardetz, 'The Pastoral Orientation of Doctrine', in *Go Into the Streets : The Welcoming Church of Pope Francis*, Thomas P. Rausch and Richard R. Gaillardetz (eds.) (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), pp. 125–40 (p. 125). There is an echo here of Schillebeeckx's claim that orthodoxy is at stake in orthopraxis.

¹⁰⁶ Gaillardetz shows that mercy is also at the heart of *GME*. Certainly this emphasis is a 'refashioning' of the papal magisterium, as Gaillardetz points out, but my concern here is less with the change in how authority is exercised, and more with principles of doctrinal interpretation – which apply not only to the magisterium, but to theologians and indeed the whole faithful in the light of the *sensus fidei*. See Gaillardetz, 'The Francis Moment', pp. 76–78.

It all depends on how the text of *Humane Vitae* is interpreted... The object is not to change the doctrine, but it is a matter of *going into the issue in depth* and to ensure that the *pastoral ministry* takes into account the situation of each person.¹⁰⁷

Gaillardetz detects in this wording an echo of John XXIII's call in *GME* for deeper doctrinal penetration and a more pastoral realization of the substance of doctrine.¹⁰⁸ Indeed the recontextualisation of doctrine in pastoral realities envisaged by Francis draws on a number of important principles from the Council which have a bearing on the interpretation of doctrine but which have been somewhat underdeveloped in magisterial practice. Particularly significant are the hierarchy of truths, interpreting the signs of the times in the light of the gospel, and the importance of the sense of faith in the whole church, not just the magisterium.¹⁰⁹ In examining Francis' realization of the council's principles, Gaillardetz suggests, 'we get a sense, as if for the first time, of the full pastoral force of the council.'¹¹⁰ Specifically, it is seeing Francis' practice as a model of *interpretation*, 'doing as Pope Francis does' that allows members of the church, be they popes, bishops, theologians or other members of the faithful, to contribute to the development of doctrine by seeing how doctrine actually works – 'that is, how it contributes to bringing people into a saving encounter with God's abundant love and mercy'.¹¹¹ As John O'Brien makes clear, only in the pastoral situation does salvation occur, not in doctrinal formulas:

'Pastoral' in the deeper sense is more fundamental than 'doctrinal', for it is in the pastoral rather than the doctrinal, that salvation occurs. 'Pastoral' is not simply derived from a doctrinal system presumed to be antecedent and entirely self-contained. On the contrary, the doctrinal is an attempt to state the meaning of the pastoral.¹¹²

3.4.1 Hermeneutical Considerations

In taking a stand against a strict separation of pastoral and doctrinal perspectives—indeed privileging the pastoral as the locus of meaningful interpretation and Christian salvation—and in critiquing a conception of the deposit of faith as a simple given to be adapted into different cultural and linguistic and historical contexts, the scholars discussed above engage

¹⁰⁷ Pope Francis' interview with *Corriere della Sera* (5th March 2014), translated by Estefania Aguirre and Alan Holdren, available at '<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/transcript-pope-francis-march-5-interview-with-corriere-della-sera/>', cited in *ibid.*, pp. 78–79, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁹ *EG* §51, §36, §119.

¹¹⁰ Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2015), p. 136.

¹¹¹ Gaillardetz, 'The Francis Moment', pp. 79–80.

¹¹² O'Brien, 'Ecclesiology as Narrative', p. 152.

with a fundamental hermeneutical problem: neither the source or tradition nor its interpreters are value-neutral, free from historical, cultural and linguistic limitations, nor—
theologically—free from human finitude and sinfulness. In Theobald’s assessment, the Council did not succeed in fully dealing with the hermeneutical problem. He identifies three main phases in the development of a hermeneutical awareness at Vatican II: firstly a desire to express the gospel in such a way as to make possible the reception in the whole world, therefore abandoning a strict distinction between the doctrinal and pastoral; secondly, a growing realisation that this would involve reform of the church itself; and finally, the beginning of understanding the historical nature of revelation, and the importance of the cultural and historical context of the *receivers* of the gospel.¹¹³

In the light of his reading of Vatican II, Theobald proposes a polycentric model of doctrinal-pastoral understanding which acknowledges the diversity in and of the texts and pastoral situation evident in the council, but which sees this not as a chaos in need of an organising principle (such as the privileging of a *communio* ecclesiology at the 1985 synod) but as ‘implying moving into a *multiform practice* of renewal and reform’.¹¹⁴ So too for John O’Brien, neither scripture nor doctrine can yield their ecclesiological meaning by themselves, but only in the ‘lives and struggles of local and larger ecclesial communities’¹¹⁵ Like Schillebeeckx, O’Brien locates continuity and identity neither in identity of context nor repetition of formulae but in a ‘correspondence of relationships’ between these two factors.¹¹⁶

3.4.2 Pastoralty as Expansive, Ecumenical Learning

Two further points on the pastoralty of doctrine should briefly be noted as having relevance for the in-depth examination of specific theological-hermeneutical resources pursued in subsequent chapters.

Firstly, the attention to the recipients of the gospel, in their various contingent situations, is not a matter of the church developing a reductive correlation in which the gospel is simply conformed to cultural expectations. Rather it is the embodiment of an *expansive* and *ecumenical* vision. Theobald credits Karl Rahner with being the first to criticise the lack of pastoral and ecumenical spirit in the early drafts of two conciliar texts, a theme taken up by

¹¹³ Theobald, ‘Principle of Pastoralty’, pp. 27–28.

¹¹⁴ Theobald, ‘Theological Options of Vatican II’, p. 92. More recently, Theobald has described this relationship in terms of a ‘genetic vision’ and a ‘generative grammar’ which gives rise to coherent, but plural diachronic and synchronic interpretations. See Theobald, ‘Principle of Pastoralty’.

¹¹⁵ O’Brien, ‘Ecclesiology as Narrative’, p. 153.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

some of the council fathers, including Bishop Volk's appeal for a greater 'flavour of the gospel' not only for Catholic readers, but for separated Christians, and for the whole world.¹¹⁷ The clear implication is that pastorality has an expansive orientation, 'catholic' in this sense of being concerned with fullness and 'the whole'. O'Brien makes a similar claim for 'ever-greater inclusiveness' as a guiding principle.¹¹⁸ More recently, writing on the reception of *Amoris Laetitia*, James Keenan argues that 'we are being asked not to compromise our teachings but to see that they are actually greater than we imagined.'¹¹⁹

Secondly, therefore, if the expansive potential of this vision is to be concretely realised, the church requires a corresponding capacity for change. Such change is neither arbitrary nor defined by secular fashion but is directed towards a deeper understanding of God's self-communication. Rather than thinking of change as an abstract quality, or development of doctrine as an object alone, the pastorality of doctrine represents a concern for an ongoing transformation or conversion of the church which can usefully be termed 'ecclesial learning'.¹²⁰ In his essay on the pastorality of doctrine, Theobald argues that 'the conciliar texts are therefore the expression of a gigantic process of individual and collective learning....capacity for learning or reform is something of the front rank and something that awaits our reception of it'.¹²¹ The proximate object of Theobald's analysis is the event of Vatican II itself but the observation can be applied more widely to the diverse collection of texts and practices which form the whole deposit of tradition and which the church is called up to receive anew and with integrity in a plurality of contexts in time and space.

3.5 From Development of Doctrine to a Hermeneutics of Tradition

Having analysed both the notion of the substance of doctrine and its means of expression on the one hand, and the pastoral character of interpretation on the other, an initial answer can be given to the question of what 'receiving with integrity' entails for contemporary Catholicism. Looking wider than the form and content of individual propositions, the principles put forward in *GME* bring together three perspectives, or horizons, which suggest how reception and integrity are related. Firstly, there is integrity with the tradition, both in

¹¹⁷ Theobald, 'Theological Options of Vatican II', pp. 94–95.

¹¹⁸ O'Brien, 'Ecclesiology as Narrative', p. 162.

¹¹⁹ James F. Keenan, 'Receiving *Amoris Laetitia*', *Theological Studies*, 78.1 (2017), 193–212 (p. 202).

¹²⁰ This phrase is drawn from the Receptive Ecumenism project initiated at Durham University, England. 'Ecclesial Learning' expands the notion of 'Catholic Learning' found in Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*..

¹²¹ Theobald, 'Theological Options of Vatican II', p. 102.

terms of scripture and later interpretation and reception – the deposit of faith through the ages. Secondly, the ‘means of expression’ can be conceived not just as a form of words but as engagement with the intellectual, linguistic, and cultural patterns of understanding in contemporary contexts. If the first principle is oriented inwards towards the tradition, this second principle takes account of the external apparatus of the world in which the gospel is proclaimed and lived. Thirdly, the pastorality of doctrine points towards a principle of integrity with that actual lived experience, taking account of limitations and difficulties.

These three broad orientations, which I have sketched here in the briefest terms, have been developed into more sophisticated theological models by at least two contemporary theologians, although neither uses Pope John’s speech explicitly as a ground for their schemas. The next chapter addresses these approaches through a close reading of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s method of ‘broad reflective equilibrium’ and Paul Murray’s coherence based approach, which I address under the title of ‘dynamic integrity’. Before turning to these resources, two recent examples may illustrate how the hermeneutical issues arising from *GME* continue to have an impact not just for academic theology, but in the church’s more public space.

3.5.1 Hermeneutics of Continuity, Rupture, and Reform

One example of recent Catholic perspectives on the fundamental questions of hermeneutics, critical approaches, and relation to earlier dogmatic understandings can be seen in the ‘battle for meaning’ over the interpretation of Vatican II, reignited by Benedict XVI’s remarks in 2005 on the hermeneutics of the council:¹²²

Well, it all depends on the correct interpretation of the Council, or as we say today – on its proper hermeneutics, the correct key to its interpretation and application... On the one hand, there is... ‘a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture’... On the other, there is

¹²² There is an immense literature on the interpretation of Vatican II. Useful starting points are Giuseppe. Alberigo, Jean-Pierre. Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, Matthew J. O’Connell (tran.) (Catholic University of America Press, 1987); Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004); John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Kristin Colberg, ‘The Hermeneutics of Vatican II: Reception, Authority, and the Debate Over the Council’s Interpretation’, *Horizons*, 38.02 (2011), 230–252; Clifford, *Decoding Vatican II: Interpretation and Ongoing Reception* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014). For a reading which intentionally employs a ‘hermeneutic of continuity’, see Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, (New York: OUP, 2017).

the ‘hermeneutics of reform’, of renewal in the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us.¹²³

For many in the Catholic Church, the reporting of Pope Benedict XVI’s address to the Roman Curia would have been their first encounter with the notion of ‘hermeneutics’. From Christmas 2005, ‘hermeneutics’ not only exercised scholars debating Vatican II, but became part of the vocabulary of popular Catholic discourse.¹²⁴ In the process some of the sophistication of Benedict’s argument was lost: the address did not use the term ‘hermeneutic of continuity’ but ‘hermeneutic of reform’, which includes both continuity and discontinuity.¹²⁵ Although the terms caught the public imagination, Ratzinger was substantially reiterating remarks made in 1985.¹²⁶ In the same year the Synod of Bishops marking ‘The Twentieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council’ published six hermeneutical principles for the ‘correct’ interpretation of Vatican II.¹²⁷

Benedict’s 2005 remarks have been variously interpreted: as opposing Karl Rahner’s notion of a ‘decisive’ break analogous to that ushered in by the Council of Jerusalem,¹²⁸ as a

¹²³ Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Address to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings’ (22 December 2005), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html>.

¹²⁴ See for example, <<http://the-hermeneutic-of-continuity.blogspot.co.uk/>>, which began in April 2006 with a direct reference to Benedict’s address. Although the 1985 Synod and Ratzinger’s book-length interview in the same year express substantially similar positions to those which would be associated with Benedict XVI, neither refers directly to a hermeneutic of continuity, reform, rupture or discontinuity. The term does however appear in the ‘counterpoint’ Vatican II interpretation presented to Benedict XVI in June 2005. See Agostini Marchetto, *The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: A Counterpoint for the History of the Council* (Scranton Pa. : Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010) [Italian edition 2005]. The notion of a ‘hermeneutics of continuity’, with a corresponding discontinuity, was also already current in biblical exegesis with regard to the role of the OT prophets. See James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon*, 2nd edition (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2005), p. 93. [1st edition 1976, p88]. See also, for a NT appropriation of Sanders’ insight, Craig A. Evans, ‘Paul and the Hermeneutics of “True Prophecy”: A Study of Romans 9-11’, *Biblica*, 1984, 560–570.

¹²⁵ Benedict does use the phrase ‘hermeneutic of continuity’, apparently equated to the ‘hermeneutic of reform’ in footnote 6 of *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission, *Sacramentum Caritatis*’, (22 February 2007), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html>.

¹²⁶ ‘Not rupture but continuity’ Joseph Ratzinger and V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 35.

¹²⁷ Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops (1985), ‘The Final Report’ Part I, §5. Richard McBrien, following Avery Dulles, lists the principles as follows: i) the documents must be read as a whole; ii) the four Constitutions act as a key to the Decrees and Declarations; iii) unity of pastoral and doctrinal concerns; iv) unity of spirit and letter; v) Vatican II to be read in continuity with tradition; vi) the Council illuminates the problems of our own time. See Richard McBrien, *The Church* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2009), p. 207.

¹²⁸ Tracey Rowland, ‘Joseph Ratzinger and the Hermeneutic of Continuity’, in *The Hermeneutics of Tradition*, Craig Hovey and Cyrus P. Olsen (eds.) (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), pp. 193–225 (p. 194). Rowland defines the hermeneutics of continuity associated with Benedict’s interpretation ‘in contrast to... Rahner... whose theological interpretations are thus associated with

counterblast to the historiography of Alberigo and the Bologna School following Cardinal Ruini's presentation of Archbishop Marchetto's alternative interpretation of the Council to the newly inaugurated pope in June 2005;¹²⁹ and as a criticism of traditionalist claims that Vatican II constitutes a rupture or reversal with respect to earlier tradition.¹³⁰ Whatever the proximate target, Benedict's approach is methodologically consistent with his biblical hermeneutics wherein he similarly opposes a one-sided application of historical-critical method, and draws attention to the need to apply theological norms for interpreting scripture as indicated in *Dei Verbum*. His biblical hermeneutics stress that scripture must be read as a whole; interpreted in dialogue with living tradition; and can be authentically interpreted only in the ecclesial community:¹³¹

The intrinsic link between the word and faith makes clear that authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church... without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text.¹³²

As is seen most clearly in his view on liturgy, Benedict views the relationship between scripture, tradition, church and change as an *organic* one where developments emerge non-violently from their embryonic forms without change or rupture.¹³³ It is also a dynamic one where 'the combination of two quite different types of hermeneutic [the historical-critical

"hermeneutic of rupture." ' Elsewhere, Rowland explicitly identifies *Communio* with a 'hermeneutics of continuity' with regard to the interpretation of the documents of Vatican II in *Benedict XVI*, p. 21.

¹²⁹ John W. O'Malley et al., David G. Schultenover (ed.), *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2008), pp. 52–55.

¹³⁰ Gilles Routhier, 'The Hermeneutic of Reform as a Task for Theology', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 77.3 (2012), 219–43. This position is considered 'implausible' by Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 43. A constructive approach is pursued by Murray in relation to *UR*, by reading that document in line with Benedict's concern for continuity and the norms of the 1985 Synod and showing that even on these terms, there is significant development within (not against) the tradition. Murray, 'Ecumenism, Evangelization and Conflicting Narratives of Vatican II: Reading *Unitatis Redintegratio* with His Holiness Benedict XVI Roman Pontiff Emeritus', in *The New Evangelization*, Kirsteen Kim and Paul Grogan (eds.) (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), pp. 99–120. See also Murray, 'Vatican II: On Celebrating Vatican II as Catholic and Ecumenical', in *The Second Vatican Council: Celebrating Its Achievements and the Future*, Gavin D'Costa and Emma Jane Harris (eds.) (London: T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 85–104.

¹³¹ See for example *Verbum Domini* 29–30. Also Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2008), pp. xv–xxiii. Joseph Ratzinger, 'Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today', in *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, Jose Granados, Carlos Granados, and L. Sanchez-Navarro (eds.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 1–29 (pp. 20–27).

¹³² *Verbum Domini*, §29

¹³³ See Rowland, 'Hermeneutic of Continuity' esp. pp. 195–197; Joseph Ratzinger, 'Preface', in *The Organic Development Of The Liturgy*, by Dom Alcuin Reid (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), pp. 9–13.

and theological-ecclesial] is an art that needs to be constantly remastered'.¹³⁴ As I have begun to articulate, and will develop in the next chapter, a number of contemporary Catholic theologians argue for also including lived experience as a further hermeneutical perspective.

What is the significance of Benedict's intervention for the wider question of 'receiving with integrity'? As Lieven Boeve has pointed out, 'it is probably more important for the contemporary theological situation to conduct a debate on the term "hermeneutics" in the expression "hermeneutics of reform", rather than focussing on continuity versus discontinuity.'¹³⁵ In this regard, Boeve argues that a modern hermeneutical awareness means that 'the distinction between truth as enduring content and language as mere form or design is not sustainable (or realizable)' but rather that the ongoing re-reception into language and culture necessary for tradition to be realized *requires* certain discontinuities.¹³⁶ On the surface, Benedict acknowledges the need for discontinuity, but as a number of scholars have noted, it is seen as necessarily subordinate to continuity.¹³⁷ In practice, this means that Benedict's own notion of what constitutes continuity—for example, a normative role for the early Church Fathers—remains dominant. In particular, for Benedict, the pastoral dimension of Vatican II remains subordinate to the dogmatic. Does this undermine the thrust of this chapter in the opposite direction, that the pastoral dimension of doctrine has a significance beyond the 'pastoral Council' itself? Recent teaching by Pope Francis suggests rather that the pastoral has a specifically hermeneutical role to play in understanding doctrine, and it this to this second contemporary illustration that I now turn.

¹³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), xv.

¹³⁵ *Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion (eds.) (London ; New York: T& T Clark, 2008), p. 277. Neil Ormerod makes a convincing case for continuity simply being an inadequate metaphor, in part due to the difficulty of measuring such a quality. He argues that testing for authenticity is a more important marker of traditional integrity. See Ormerod.

¹³⁶ Lieven Boeve, 'Interpreting the Second Vatican Council', in *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, Boeve and Mannion (eds.) (London: T& T Clark, 2008), pp. 257–79 (p. 277).. Also Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003). See also Schillebeeckx, 'Discontinuities in Christian Dogmas', in *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx Volume XI: Essays, Ongoing Theological Quests*, M. Manley (tran.) (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 85–109. Rush argues for 'micro-ruptures' within overall continuity: Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, p. 7, and throughout.

¹³⁷ In addition to Boeve, see the highly critical comments by Lash in his *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), p. 255. Also Edward Mushi, 'Benedict XVI's Hermeneutics of Reform and Its Implication for the Renewal of the Church', *Pacifica*, 26.3 (2013), 279–94.

3.5.2 A Revivified Hermeneutic

In this chapter, some hermeneutical implications of Pope John XXIII's opening address have been brought to light through a reading which goes beyond a simple separation of doctrinal form and content. Key themes relevant to the research question include the possibility of understanding 'substance' and 'means of expression' not as a deductive separation of the timeless essence from the contingent clothing (although some judgments about culture-specific amalgams can be made retrospectively), but as an inductive and productive reception of the gospel in new contexts. Accordingly a holistic approach has been suggested, with attention paid to multiple criteria, and a shift of emphasis from 'continuity' as the controlling metaphor to 'authenticity' or 'integrity'. Such integrity would include local experience as well as universal tradition and cultural-linguistic forms as potential sources of distortions as well as essential matrices for human reception of revelation and tradition. In particular, the relationship between the doctrinal and pastoral would not be limited to a linear application of doctrine after understanding, but understanding is to be found partly through Christian praxis in concrete, local pastoral contexts. Such praxis, to be receptive and productive, demands an attitude of humility and self-criticism on behalf of the interpreter. It also presupposes that individuals and communities playing a whole range of roles are involved in both teaching and learning in respect of the meaning of God's self-revelation. In Catholic theological perspective, such a hermeneutic is thus in a mutualistic relationship with concepts promoted by Vatican II regarding the *sensus fidelium* and reading the signs of the times, as well as the more obviously doctrinal-hermeneutical notion of the hierarchy of truths.

Notwithstanding the claims to experience and praxis, does the direction emerging here make contact with issues in contemporary Catholicism? Even more explicitly that the common concerns I traced between Thiselton and *Evangelii Gaudium*, this holistic pastoral-doctrinal hermeneutic, which involves learning from lived experience, can be seen in the recent analysis of Pope Francis's exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.¹³⁸ In a 2018 lecture in Cambridge, Cardinal Blaise Cupich describes *AL* as 'a new paradigm of catholicity'. In language resonant with the terms in Schillebeeckx's model of relational proportionality, Cupich divided his talk into two parts: i) 'The Present Reality', and ii) 'A New Hermeneutic'. As the title to the second part suggests, he sees hermeneutical significance in Francis' pastoral approach, which he lays out as six interpretative principles which together

¹³⁸ Cardinal Blaise Cupich, 'Amoris Laetitia as a New Paradigm of Catholicity', 2018 Von Hugel lecture, delivered 9 Feb. 2018 at St Edmund College, University of Cambridge. Available at <https://www.vhi.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/resources-folder/papers-presentations/cupich-annual-lecture-2018>.

present a ‘revivified hermeneutic’.¹³⁹ Of particular significance to the current chapter, the approach Cupich describes is very different to any attempt to extract a timeless doctrine from an earlier formulation. Rather it is holistic not only in terms of the breadth of elements produced as warrants for an interpretation, including everyday life and positive and negative experiences, but also in looking at particular doctrinal judgments in the light of a richer picture of faith, in particular the prioritisation of mercy as a hermeneutical key. It is a hermeneutical approach which recognises that interpreting communities—perhaps as small as an individual family—have a contribution to make to interpretation, and that the church cannot be divided into *ecclesia discens* and *ecclesia docens*. This in turn calls for a humble, self-critical orientation to the interpretation and application of doctrine. Above all, it recognises that (at least some) experience does not simply provide the cultural clothing for the gospel message, but is the site of understanding that message afresh. In doing so, a correct relation between the doctrinal and pastoral, and the necessary proportionality between the current situation and today’s interpretation, is maintained.¹⁴⁰ That all this has real significance can be seen in how Cupich describes Francis’s approach: ‘an enormous change of approach; a paradigm shift’; ‘nothing short of revolutionary’; in sum, it is ‘hard to overstate the significance of this hermeneutical shift’.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has added a Catholic perspective to the hermeneutical overview drawn from Thiselton in Chapter 2. I have argued that not only are there alternatives to form-content views of doctrinal development, but that attempts to follow the trajectory of Pope John XXIII’s opening speech at the Second Vatican Council must also attend to the need for praxis and effective communication indicated by the ‘pastorality of doctrine’. In a similar

¹³⁹ ‘1) The Family is a Privileged Site of God’s Self-Revelation... 2) The Synodal Church Accompanies Families by Balancing Teaching and Learning... 3) The Consciences of the Faithful are Essential in the Task of Discernment... 4) The Church’s Understanding of God’s Plan for Marriage Must Incorporate the Insights of the Faithful... 5) Accompaniment that Attends to the Pastoral and Local while Upholding the Doctrinal and Universal Concerns... 6). The Doctrinal Can Develop through the Pastoral as the Gospel of Mercy Informs the Ministry of the Church.’, *ibid.* Some of the hermeneutical principles I have put forward in the last two chapters are clearly evident here: concrete sites not just of application but revelation (#1); the church in learning mode as well as teaching mode(#2); the interpretative role of the church community(#3, #4); the dialectic of universality and contingency (#5); and the pastorality of doctrine (#6).

¹⁴⁰ For two recent examples of Schillebeeckx’s theology being brought into conversation with Francis’ approach see: Megan Loumagne, ‘A Theologian Standing with God in the World: Development in Schillebeeckx’s Epistemology and Implication for Feminist Theology’, in *Salvation in the World: The Crossroads of Public Theology*, Stephan van Erp, Christopher Cimorelli, and Christiane Alpers (eds.) (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 43–56; and Kate Mroz, ‘Dangerous Theology: Edward Schillebeeckx, Pope Francis, and Hope for Catholic Women’, in *Salvation in the World, op.cit.*, pp. 57–71.

way, the concern for continuity demonstrated by Benedict XVI need not be the sole or even principal criterion by which tradition might be interpreted and received. In addition to alternative conceptual models, such as Rush's micro-ruptures and Boeve's concept of 'interruption', recent teachings of Pope Francis's reveal a pastoral approach which has hermeneutical significance. In the following chapters, I look in greater depth at three theological responses which attempt integrate doctrinal and pastoral perspectives and which thereby offer potential resources for receiving with integrity in the contemporary church.

4 DYNAMIC INTEGRITY AND REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters introduced hermeneutical perspectives on church teaching which look to the present and future as well as to the past, which attempt to bring different perspective into a holistic and dynamic system, which recognise a creative reconfiguration—rather than repetition or simple reformulation—in the act of doctrinal reception, and which attend to the bi-directional interpretation exercised between doctrinal understanding and lived experience and practice. These are characteristics that I want to bring together in the notion of ‘receptive integrity’. I now turn to examining and integrating three resources for realising these characteristics in theological and ecclesial practice. In Chapter 5 I engage Ormond Rush’s work on reception hermeneutics, identified by Thiselton as a convincing and decisive contribution to the hermeneutics of doctrine (*HD* p. 102). Rush identifies twelve key sites of reception (*loci receptionis*) and learning for the church. One of these is ecumenical engagement, and so in Chapter 6 I use the recent approach of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’, developed by Paul D. Murray, as a key resource to illustrate and develop the notion of receptive integrity in this particular context as a concrete example of the ideas advanced in this thesis. Before engaging Rush and Receptive Ecumenism in detail, however, the present chapter will engage with Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s contribution to Catholic hermeneutics. There are three principal reasons for bringing Fiorenza into this conversation.

Firstly, as Rush acknowledges, the first theological use of Jauss’ work on reception is found in Fiorenza’s 1984 monograph, *Foundational Theology*. Although Rush makes a

number of references to aspects of Fiorenza's work—both in his doctoral research on the reception of doctrine, and in his recent work on the *sensus fidelium*—he only makes passing reference to Fiorenza's core proposal of a broad reflective equilibrium.

Secondly, I argue that Murray's work on fundamental ecclesiology, which provides the theological matrix for Receptive Ecumenism, has significant resonance with Fiorenza's proposal for hermeneutical reconstruction using a 'broad reflective equilibrium'.¹ The convergent trajectories of Murray and Fiorenza have not been explored by either theologian, nor have they been brought into conversation in the literature on Catholic theological hermeneutics.² I hope to show in this chapter that these two approaches are compatible, mutually enriching, and valuable for a hermeneutics of doctrine which is critical, expansive and responsibly Catholic. If this is the case, then Fiorenza's work provides an important bridge between the theological appropriation of reception hermeneutics (Rush) and the fundamental ecclesiology behind Receptive Ecumenism (Murray).

Finally, Fiorenza's proposal has its own merit, and in certain important aspects is relevant to the challenges posed by Pope Francis in *EG* and elsewhere. Accordingly, I offer a reading of the elements of broad reflective equilibrium, integrating not only Fiorenza's systematic presentation of this concept, but his development and application of certain aspects of the approach in a range of publications.

The chapter therefore begins by introducing Murray's presentation of 'dynamic integrity' as a quality to be evaluated through different levels of coherence-based testing (4.2),³ and a corresponding outline of Fiorenza's overall approach based on 'broad reflective equilibrium' (4.3). This is followed by four sections (4.4-4.7) dealing with the major components of Fiorenza's proposal, examined in conversation with what I suggest are parallel concerns in Murray, and in the context of Catholic theological hermeneutics and the mission-oriented ecclesial renewal envisaged by the reception of Vatican II in *EG*.

¹ Although Thiel locates reception hermeneutics as a mode of development-in-continuity, the creative element of reception identified in Jauss and Rush as a form of *poiesis*, is closer to Thiel's dramatic and incipient developments, which respectively address the radical forgetting or reconfiguring of an element of tradition, and the emergence from acutely local to possible universal acceptance of previously unrecognised interpretations and applications within the tradition. See Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, chapters 3 & 4.

² Fiorenza has similarly been brought into conversation with another contemporary theologian concerned with tradition and change, see Terence Bateman, 'Reinterpreting the Truth and Identity of the Christian Tradition: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and Lieven Boeve in Dialogue', in *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity*, C. Dickinson (ed.) (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 43–58.

³ In this chapter, I focus on Murray's coherentist model for doctrinal development. The complementary principles of 'recursive fallibilism' and 'expansive catholicity' developed from his reading of Rescher, which also shape his understanding of 'dynamic integrity', are subsequently addressed in Chapter 6.

4.2 Coherence and Dynamic Integrity: Paul D. Murray

Informing the notion of ‘receptive integrity’ in this thesis is Murray’s reference to ‘dynamic integrity’ in his writings on theological rationality and fundamental-systematic ecclesiology.⁴ Murray intends the term both to echo Francis Sullivan’s ‘creative fidelity’ and go beyond it so as to incorporate the dynamics associated with what Thiel calls *dramatic* and *incipient* developments, referring respectively to elements to be displaced from the dominant tradition, and elements which are emerging from one part of that tradition and starting to be received or recognised more widely.

‘Dynamic integrity’ is intended to articulate both the continuous identity and the contextually specific freshness that are each always authentic to Christian tradition... It is intended also to resonate with Francis Sullivan’s evocative phrase ‘creative fidelity’ while suggesting a greater degree of expansive reconfiguration in the light of fresh data, experience, concerns, perspectives, methodologies concept and beliefs than Sullivan’s own analysis suggests.⁵

In addition to the intended resonance with, and contrast to, Sullivan, there is a further echo here of language used in some papal writings, notably Benedict XVI:

Coherence does not mean a closed system: on the contrary, it means *dynamic faithfulness* to a light received.⁶

Indeed, *coherence* is the central concept in Murray’s elaboration of dynamic integrity. This is a fallibilist, critical-constructive horizon, which acknowledges that reality is mediated through language and pre-understanding as part of a community. Rather than seeking truth as correspondence to a secure foundation, through logic, method or experience, Murray’s approach begins from a perspective of epistemic humility, and looks to multiple modes of potential coherence to validate theological hypotheses in an abductive manner.⁷ The relevant

⁴ In this sense, it is somewhat different from recent use of the term in anthropology by H. James Birx, although Birx also has a concern with integration of multiple sources and disciplines, and a prospective orientation: ‘A person has dynamic integrity when his or her actions are not only based on empirical evidence and logical reflection but also when these action contribute to the adaptation, survival, enrichment, and fulfilment of human beings.’, H. James Birx, ‘Integrity, Dynamic’, *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2006), 1303–4.

⁵ Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, p. 215.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Caritas in Veritate’, 2009, n. 12, emphasis added..

⁷ On foundationalism and theology, the following are helpful introductions from rather different positions: Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); Guarino, *Revelation and Truth*; Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*. Both Fiorenza and Murray explicitly state their post-foundationalist commitments, and a post-foundationalist worldview is at least implicit in Rush. In contrast, Thiselton is extremely wary on the language of foundationalism/ non-foundationalism, see *HD*, pp. 126-34. In the light of Fiorenza’s commitment to a broad reflective equilibrium, it is worth

modes or levels of coherence are: 1) internal (intrinsic) coherence with the tradition through a history of receptions and decisions; 2) external (extrinsic) coherence with norms of rationality expressed in other disciplines, particularly science and philosophy; 3) pragmatic coherence whereby the meaning of a proposition is evaluated in relationship to warrants drawn from concrete experience.⁸ Equilibrium between these factors not only needs to continually respond to new situations and questions arising in practice, but the very points of reference for internal and external coherence exhibit change across time and between different communities and cultures. Seeking dynamic integrity thus follows the logic of question-and-answer which Thiselton identifies as fundamental to doctrinal hermeneutics,⁹ and results in an open system in which integrity with tradition and openness to extrinsic factors—what might be called centrifugal and centripetal forces—¹⁰ are held in dynamic equilibrium:

In short, it is intrinsic to its own particular commitments that Christian faith, theology and ecclesial self-identity should be constantly exposed in an expansive, recursive, coherence based fashion to the scrutiny and refreshment of new question, new problems and new situations.¹¹

noting Thiselton's contention that 'reasonable belief' includes a *multitude of criteria* including responsible evaluation of evidence and the quality of being reasonable', (p. 130).

⁸ Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', pp. 210–11. The requirement for dynamic integrity to maintain internal, extrinsic and pragmatic coherence has a certain similarity to David Tracy's three publics (church, academy and world). Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, pp. 3–31. Also Rowan Williams' description of the 'celebratory', 'communicative' and 'critical' responsibilities of theology in Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. xii–xvi., cited in Paul D. Murray and Matthew Guest, 'On Discerning the Living Truth of the Church: Theological and Sociological Reflections on "Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church"', in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Christian B. Scharen (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 138–64 (p. 142). Nonetheless, as Fiorenza points, these are not distinct publics which are isolated and cannot affect each other, but dimensions of a web of understanding which must be negotiated dynamically: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *FT*, p. 283. John Thiel makes a similar point regarding his own typology of theological styles: Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 207–10.

⁹ Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 3–8. The logic of question and answer is also a central element in the reception aesthetics of H.R. Jauss and Ormond Rush's appropriation of Jauss into theological hermeneutics. I will examine this in detail in Chapter 6.

¹⁰ Murray uses this image to describe 'Pauline' and 'Petrine' instincts which give the church a dual orientation *ad intra* and *ad extra*. See Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', pp. 17–18.

¹¹ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 154. See also Murray, 'On Valuing Truth in Practice: Rome's Postmodern Challenge', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8.2 (2006), 163–83 (p. 182). Murray argues that the potential *aggiornamento* arising from engaging postmodern thought aims at 'the enrichment of the *authentic identity* of the church' (emphasis mine). The expansive nature of this question-and-answer can best be viewed in terms of a concern running throughout Murray's work for a comprehensive understanding of 'catholicity'.

The image of a web, or a network of individual nodes, suggested by such an approach, may be helpful here.¹² The integrity of such a structure is in the whole, although some nodes (representing particular beliefs, practices, formulations, sources and so on) may be more critical for particular activities or necessary for the functioning of other nodes. However, can this be more than a suggestive image? One of the reasons I have engaged with Murray on this point is the continuation of this line of thinking into Receptive Ecumenism. A further reason is that by classifying three types of coherence he provides some initial specificity as to what a web of understanding and interpretation and practice might look like; I argue that Fiorenza does much the same thing with his ‘broad reflective equilibrium’. What value does such an approach of ‘dynamic integrity’ bring to the question of a responsible interpretation of Catholic doctrine? I will make some brief comments on Murray’s approach in order to show why I think this is a potentially fruitful approach to doctrinal hermeneutics, before concentrating on Fiorenza’s strategy for the remainder of the chapter.

The first thing to note is that this approach combines a retrospective and prospective view of doctrine. It is retrospective both in the evaluative sense of Schillebeeckx, where a present interpretation is able to look back and make judgements about historical conditioning in earlier judgements (often couched, misleadingly, in terms of form and content) and Thiel’s more developed sense which binds together continuity and development as a single reality within the traditioning process and accommodates both discontinuity and plurality of interpretations.¹³ Nonetheless, an approach seeking dynamic integrity is not content with evaluating the past, but puts new question to the tradition with prospective purpose. The prospective orientation of dynamic integrity is described by Murray with intentional ambiguity as ‘conceiving change in contemporary Catholicism.’¹⁴ As ‘expansive’ in its approach to doctrine it is orientated to the effect on future reception and future ecclesial experience of today’s interpretation of tradition, argument and experience from the

¹² Murray’s pragmatist approach builds on Quine’s dictum that ‘our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body’, W. V. O. Quine, ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, in *The Pragmatism Reader: From Peirce through the Present*, Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin (eds.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 202–20 (p. 215); see also Thiselton, who note the web-like nature of understanding in relation to the formative purpose of doctrine: ‘Such a formative process would involve not information about a single isolated belief, but reconfiguring a whole network of shared beliefs and practices.’ (HD, p.96),; also, on re-contextualisation as a root metaphor for understanding change in doctrine, see Lieven Boeve’s work on interruption, particularly Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*.

¹³ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 76–95.

¹⁴ The phrase emphasises the deliberate ambiguity of the term ‘conceiving’ as both receptive intellect, and active agency (Seminar, Durham, 8th October 2014). In 2016, Murray convened a theological symposium in Rome, under the title, ‘Conceiving Change in the Church: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Catholic Tradition’; he also teaches an MA module on ‘Conceiving Change in Contemporary Catholicism’ at Durham University. See also, Murray, ‘*Ecclesia et Pontifice*’, p. 26.

past.¹⁵ As both recursive and fallibilist, it exercises a critical but respectful view towards the tradition as it stands. This epistemic humility coheres not only with post-foundationalist thinking and significant insights from hermeneutical theory but also with important elements of Christian faith and theology. Examples of this can be found, *inter alia*, in Murray's use of Trinitarian dynamics and the theological virtues,¹⁶ as well as his concern for a rich understanding of Catholicity; one which is aware of the risk of idolatry arising from closed, static and reductionist theological interpretation.¹⁷

The second area of strength in this concern for dynamic integrity is that multiple types of criteria to be taken into account are explicitly identified: *internal*, *extrinsic* and *pragmatic* coherence. Internal coherence encourages a *ressourcement* approach to the rich, and sometimes obscured, diversity of Christian tradition. Seeking extrinsic coherence widens the hermeneutical scope to include a range of background theories including modes of reasoning about how one arrives at an understanding of integrity with a tradition, and the diverse forms of reasoning realised in concrete communities. Insofar as this activity takes seriously the possibility of dialogue with contemporary cultural contexts, it may be seen as embodying a spirit of *aggiornamento*. To some degree, both of these poles are also found in a range of correlation theologies; however the focus on pragmatic coherence constitutes a particular contribution of Murray's approach. This not only respects Schillebeeckx's criterion of attending to praxis and lived experience and Thiselton's *sine qua non* that doctrine and life must be connected, but brings the practical currency of doctrine into view through openness to empirical methods and a desire to consider the systemic cost of change to the system as a whole.¹⁸

Finally, it is important to note that Murray understands systemic coherence as a whole to involve these three modes as mutually critical, not isolated criteria for testing. Indeed, his understanding of 'system' as such, is that of a dynamic web, in which the integrity of the whole is held in relationships between the parts, not built on a foundation like the storeys of

¹⁵ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 152–60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–38.

¹⁷ See, for example: Murray, 'Ecclesia et Pontifice'; Murray, 'Redeeming Catholicity for a Globalising Age: The Sacramentality of the Church', in *Exchanges of Grace: Essays in Honour of Ann Loades*, Natalie Watson and Stephen Burns (eds.) (London: SCM Press, 2008), pp. 78–91; Murray, 'Theology "Under the Lash": Theology as Idolatry Critique in the Work of Nicholas Lash', *New Blackfriars*, 88.1013 (2007), 4–24.

¹⁸ For example, in Murray and Guest; also, Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology', *Modern Theology*, 30.2 (2014), 251–81. The hermeneutical currency of doctrinal interpretation is a theme throughout Thiselton's hermeneutics of doctrine, see *HD*, pp. 309, 320–31, 344, 382, 475.

a building.¹⁹ In exhibiting *dynamic* integrity, such a model allows for new formulations, practice and meaning to be discerned in theology and in lived practice. As evidencing *dynamic integrity*, any such developments are not free-floating novelties but need to be receiving and incorporated into the dynamic tapestry of existing tradition. Neither interpretations which abandon the tradition as a necessary element to be considered in reconfiguration nor those which rule out significant change in advance (either through a static worldview or a model of development which only allows for logical, organic or progressive development) are adequate on this view.²⁰ This dynamic is mirrored in *EG*, which recognises not only the development of new forms through a recursive exploration of the source, but even new meaning:

Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. (§11)

4.3 Broad Reflective Equilibrium: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza

Fiorenza's approach is rich in details and complex in application, a fact recognised by Fiorenza himself: the task of theology is to 'reconstruct the integrity of the church's tradition in light of relevant background theories and warrants from contemporary experience. *Such a task is extremely complex*'.²¹ His *Foundational Theology* approaches a set of methodological questions through three concrete approaches, relating to key aspects of fundamental theology, and a final section taking a more theoretical and abstract look at the same method.²² The effect is that of a listening to a series of themes and variations, in different timbres and keys, which work up into a single concerto. The substance of his proposal, however, can be summarised quite briefly. Indeed, in his monograph he states the

¹⁹ The dynamic of a fallibilist *modus operandi*, in which nothing is exempt from re-examination, but in which 'pivotal convictions...can serve an internally defining role' plays an important part in Murray's appropriation of Nicholas Rescher. See Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 113–17.

²⁰ See Fiorenza, 'Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods', in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (eds.), 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), pp. 1–78 (pp. 55–56), hereafter *ST*; *FT*, pp. 155–70. Compare Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 56–83; Lash, *Change in Focus*, pp. 143–82.

²¹ '*ST*' p.75, emphasis added.

²² Namely: the Resurrection of Jesus; the foundation of the church; the mission of the church.

essential elements of his method in 10 pages.²³ A summary of his mature approach is dealt with at similar length 25 years later.²⁴

In seeking an appropriate mode of rationality for theological discourse, Fiorenza takes seriously the challenge to foundationalism, and like Murray and Thiselton, he denies that a radically relativist anti-foundationalism need be the only possible response.²⁵ Essentially, Fiorenza negotiates this challenge not by denying the possibility of any foundations, but to look for *a plurality of diverse and dynamic foundations and criteria*, bringing these into a mutually correcting equilibrium. These multiple foundations are revisable, known only in the hermeneutical particularity of history.

In *Foundational Theology* Fiorenza specifies three elements which need to work together in an adequate foundational theology: reconstructive hermeneutics; retroductive warrants; and background theories. In his later work, he adds the fourth criterion of diverse communities of interpretation.²⁶ Together these constitute the elements of a ‘broad reflective equilibrium’ which is the heart of his approach.²⁷ There is an initial similarity between these first three criteria and three types of coherence in Murray: reconstructive hermeneutics with internal coherence; background theories and external coherence; retroductive warrants and pragmatic coherence. Each of these will be discussed in more detail below.²⁸

Reflective equilibrium is a concept taken from discussions on ethics and justice, particularly the work of John Rawls.²⁹ A *narrow* reflective equilibrium, like correlation

²³ *FT*, pp. 301-311

²⁴ ‘*ST*’, pp. 54-64.

²⁵ *FT*, p.289; compare Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 126–34; Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 23–90.

²⁶ *FT* lists only the first three criteria, whereas ‘*ST*’ includes ‘Communities of Discourse and Interpretation’ as a fourth criterion. Fiorenza’s articles in the intervening period sometimes refer to communities as the *locus* of the other three interpretive criteria, and sometimes as a *criterion* as such. Shortly after the publication of *FT*, Fiorenza stated that he wished he had read and included Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) because of its treatment of the relation between communities and criteria of truth. Fiorenza, ‘Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church. Author’s Response’, *Horizons*, 11.02 (1984), 415–23 (p. 413).

²⁷ In *FT*, Fiorenza uses ‘*wide* reflective equilibrium’, which is the term used in philosophical and ethical debates. Later works instead refer to ‘*broad* reflective equilibrium’ and it is this term that I have adopted, given Fiorenza’s ongoing use of the term. See, *inter alia*, ‘*ST*’, p.57; ‘From Interpretation to Rhetoric: The Feminist Challenge to Systematic Theology’, in *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. by Shelly Matthews, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and Melanie Johnson-Debaufre (Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury, 2003), pp. 17–45 (p. 37).

²⁸ In a useful summary, which reveals the essential orientation of each criterion, Fiorenza lists the areas to which theology must attend as *tradition* [reconstructive hermeneutics], *experience* [retroductive warrants], *background theory*, and the *community of the church* [diverse communities of discourse], see ‘*ST*’, p.5.

²⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). Since Fiorenza’s adoption of the theory, reflective equilibrium has been widely adopted in moral and political philosophy, and in a range of concrete applications, including healthcare such that

methods in theology, looks at mutually corrective correlation between two poles but risks collapsing into one or the other.³⁰ In contrast, a wide or broad reflective equilibrium seeks to bring a number of diverse criteria into view and use this diversity to develop and correct understanding and practice.³¹ As an ongoing task, equilibrium between the criteria is constantly in need of reassessing and adjustment:

The equilibrium is reflective because it is not static but is a constantly revising movement. Through a back and forth movement the method of reflective equilibrium seeks to bring into equilibrium the principles reconstructed from practice with practice itself.³²

Accordingly, Fiorenza's use of the technique in theology has been aptly described as 'perichoresis'.³³

To rephrase this in Murray's terminology, Fiorenza's reflective equilibrium describes a dynamic integrity between multiple criteria, with practical consequences, which is fallibilist, recursive and expansive. For Fiorenza's purposes, this serves to avoid the risk of correlational theology in collapsing a dynamic dialectic into a single pole and giving priority to either text or world.³⁴ He contrasts this position with the either/or choice of the world interpreting the bible or the bible interpreting the world in Lindbeck and Frei.³⁵ Similarly it

'[r]eflective equilibrium is the most widely used methodology in contemporary moral and political philosophy', Carl Knight, 'Reflective Equilibrium', in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*, Adrian Balu (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 46–64 (p. 46). For recent analysis of the background, impact, objections, and future potential of reflective equilibrium, see, in addition to Knight: Yuri Cath, 'Reflective Equilibrium', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, Herman Cappelen, Tamar Szabó Gendler, and John Hawthorne (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 213–30; Jonathan Floyd, 'Rawls' Methodological Blueprint', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16.3 (2017), 367–81; Folke Tersman, 'Recent Work on Reflective Equilibrium and Method in Ethics', *Philosophy Compass*, 13.6 (2018), e12493 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12493>>.

³⁰ Fiorenza has been criticised for pursuing a sophisticated theology of correlation, but he has consistently refuted this by drawing attention to the multiple criteria which cover a wide range of evidential processes and data and are brought into constant, mutually correcting, dynamic equilibrium in his approach. I deal with some of these criticisms later.

³¹ Rawls' distinction is clarified in Norman Daniels, 'Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics', in *Justice and Justification: Reflective Equilibrium in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1979]).

³² *FT*, p.302.

³³ Paul Lakeland and Margaret Campbell, 'Nature and Methods of Theology', *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 46 (1991), 191–93 (p. 193).

³⁴ *FT*, pp. 276–84; Fiorenza, 'The Crisis of Hermeneutics and Christian Theology', in *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, Gordon D. Kaufman and Sheila Greeve Davaney (eds.) (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 117–40 (pp. 128–33).

³⁵ Fiorenza, 'From Interpretation to Rhetoric', p. 38.

avoids the metaphysical or experiential foundations in traditional and transcendental approaches to theological interpretation.³⁶

But is the transposition of this tool from ethics to theology a valid one? Certainly, the indication from the ITC in *The Interpretation of Dogma* is that a holistic approach is essential to Catholic hermeneutics.³⁷ Although the ITC document caricatures hermeneutical positions so as to make them somewhat removed from real life proponents, the underlying principle can be discerned and is significant: *a Catholic hermeneutics of doctrine cannot be reductive*; thus *ID* criticises imaginary opponents who pursue a reading of doctrine purely from the perspective of, for example, liberation theology or feminist criticism.³⁸ Contrary to the foundationalist instinct of *ID*, Fiorenza offers an alternative that does not begin and end in a flight to metaphysics but which is equally critical of any attempt to privilege one criterion. More positively, Fiorenza's approach can be seen as an attempt to substantiate a holistic Catholic view of doctrine and reality, albeit in a critical manner far removed from any neo-scholastic proof. The rest of this chapter will examine each of the four elements of Fiorenza's proposal in more detail and ask how these criteria, read in conversation with Murray's proposals and located in the dynamic integrity of a broad reflective equilibrium, offer a Catholic hermeneutics of doctrine which engages the hermeneutical breadth indicated by Thiselton and the ecclesial vision of Pope Francis' re-reception of Vatican II.³⁹

4.4 Reconstructive Hermeneutics and the Integrity of Tradition

Fiorenza has described his theological approach as a 'non-foundational foundational theology'.⁴⁰ The non-foundational part is clear enough: like Murray he incorporates both a critique of foundationalism and a constructive appropriation of the American pragmatist tradition in his quest for a suitable mode of theological reasoning. Similarly, he firmly rejects any suggestion that the only post-foundationalist options are localised consensus,

³⁶ In philosophy, wide reflective equilibrium is generally considered to be a coherentist approach which is incompatible with a strong foundationalism, see Cath, pp. 218–20; see also, on support for a 'moderate' or 'weak' foundationalism in wide reflective equilibrium, Michael R. DePaul, 'Reflective Equilibrium and Foundationalism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 23.1 (1986), 59–69; also, Roger P. Ebertz, 'Is Reflective Equilibrium a Coherentist Model?', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 23.2 (1993), 193–214; and, Georg Brun, 'Reflective Equilibrium Without Intuitions?', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 17.2 (2014), 237–52.

³⁷ ITC, *ID*, §§ B.III.3, C.III.1

³⁸ *Ibid.*, §A.II.3.

³⁹ On Francis' papacy as a 're-reception' of Vatican II, see Gaillardetz, 'The Francis Moment'.

⁴⁰ Fiorenza, 'Fundamental Theology and Its Principal Concerns Today: Towards a Non-Foundational Foundational Theology', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 62.2–3 (1996), 118–39.

individualistic fideism, or incommensurable relativism where every point of view is equally valid:

No external standard, be it history or human experience, exists independent of cultural tradition and social interpretation that can provide an independent foundation of either faith or theology. The rejection of such evidential standards does not imply that there are no standards but that historical and transcendental standards are only available within a cultural and interpretive framework.⁴¹

Fiorenza's choice of 'foundational theology' to describe his project, which might appear to suggest the very foundationalism he seeks to avoid, is not merely an alternative to 'fundamental theology', nor an uncritical use of Lonergan's functional specialities.⁴² Rather, diverse foundations of Christian theology are considered together in a post-foundationalist web. Fiorenza does not deny that certain ideas and practices act as foundations, but argues that they are diverse not singular, interpreted not pre-epistemic, and constantly in need of reconstruction and practical application. A model of broad reflective equilibrium thus entails a rejection of hard foundationalism, which relies on extrinsic criteria (philosophical or experiential) as well as uncritical acceptance of the authority of the tradition in which one is located. Foundation/foundational in Fiorenza can be a kind of epistemology which he criticises, the proper name for a particular discipline in theology (which he proposes in preference to fundamental theology, not because the title is more direct but because of the historical associations of the latter discipline in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological education) or it can relate to the principal elements of a web of understanding (principal either as the introductory elements, or as the most important).⁴³ Although a careful reading can distinguish Fiorenza's various uses, the language of foundations and foundational theology lacks sufficient clarity to justify its retention, and I will avoid making use of it. Far more helpful is his language of paradigmatic concerns, principles, and integrity.

The theological task thus necessitates a *reconstruction* of the tradition through a receptive hermeneutics, a concern for integrity and identity, and a critical view of the hermeneutical task itself.⁴⁴ For Fiorenza, discerning the tradition is not the only dimension to

⁴¹ *FT*, p. 289.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.275. On the difference between Lonergan's notion of foundations and "foundationalism", see Cyril Orji, 'Using "Foundation" as Inculturation Hermeneutic in a World Church: Did Rahner Validate Lonergan?', *Heythrop Journal*, 54.2 (2013), 287–300.

⁴³ On the different senses of 'foundational', see also Fiorenza, 'Foundational Theology and Theological Education', *Theological Education*, 20.2 (1984), 107–204.

⁴⁴ Fiorenza's understanding of the role of critical theory in relation to a 'narrow' understanding of hermeneutics is most clearly expressed in Fiorenza, 'Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions', pp. 20–25.

an adequate interpretation of tradition – but it is a necessary one, and the starting point of a comprehensive hermeneutics of doctrine.⁴⁵ In particular, hermeneutical reconstruction acts as a corrective to the risk of a universalising transcendentalism which fails to respect the historical specificity of Jesus as the focal point of Christian faith. He draws a comparison with musical experience: ‘The experience of music is such that an initiation must take place into a concrete form of music and not simply into the transcendental openness to music’.⁴⁶

Additionally, tradition is afforded a logical priority because it is the case that we start our interpretation from where we are: we start in the middle, in the given-ness of tradition.

Taking the hermeneutical reconstruction of the tradition as the first elements of foundational theology presupposes that the starting point is neither historical facticity nor transcendental a priori. It presupposes that the starting-point is the givenness of the religious dimension of human life, a dimension not given – I repeat – as a bare fact or as an anthropological a priori, but given as a tradition of interpreted meaning and practice that in turn needs to be further interpreted.⁴⁷

Fiorenza thus seeks to avoid a dependence on un-interpreted foundations, whether from first philosophy, traditional authority, or from a claim to universal experiences, whilst still taking seriously the enduring claim of the tradition on the contemporary context and future vision. The approach is explicitly hermeneutical rather than correlational in orientation in that it does not seek a naïve correlation of the two horizons as if they were fully-known quantities which could be compared by an observer who has somehow stepped out of both the stream of tradition and the historical particularity of the present horizon. Rather it considers both the tradition and the interpreting subject as already interpreted phenomena, requiring a historically-informed, critical analysis.

Apart from his pragmatist influences, Fiorenza’s hermeneutical sources largely follow the arc described by Thiselton: the task of reconstructive hermeneutics both draws on, and critiques, Gadamer and Ricoeur, whom Fiorenza (like Thiselton) names as especially significant with regard to hermeneutical influence on theological reflection.⁴⁸ From Gadamer, Fiorenza traces the significance of participation in an event of tradition, the role of the classic, and the fusion of horizons. From Ricoeur, he pays particular attention to the addition of ‘explanation’ as a hermeneutical task to Gadamer’s ‘understanding’ and

⁴⁵ *FT*, p.306.

⁴⁶ Fiorenza, ‘Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church. Author’s Response’, *Horizons*, 11.02 (1984), 415–23 (p. 418).

⁴⁷ *FT*, p.305.

⁴⁸ ‘*ST*’, p.33; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, p. 228.

‘application’.⁴⁹ Ricoeur’s treatment of metaphor and testimony are also important.⁵⁰ Both Fiorenza and Thiselton emphasise the importance of Jauss’ reception hermeneutics and make use of resources of linguistic analysis, particularly speech-act theory and the later Wittgenstein. The significance of reception has already been alluded to in Chapter 3, and will be developed in more detail in Chapter 5. But the pressing question is: to what work does Fiorenza set these resources? The fundamental task is that of a recursive and expansive reconstruction of Christianity identity and integrity in theory and practice.

4.4.1 Identity and Integrity

Within the four criteria of broad reflective equilibrium, it is the element of reconstructive hermeneutics which deals most explicitly with maintaining integrity with the tradition.⁵¹ Three key ideas inform Fiorenza’s approach to integrity and identity. Firstly, integrity is a *reconstructive* principle.⁵² It does not rely on the retrieval of an isolatable essence, but emerges contextually as the community of interpretation responds to events and changes in understanding. There is a post-interpretative, reconstructive stage to a hermeneutics of tradition.⁵³ Fiorenza rejects not only views of doctrinal development which assume a static deposit or a decay from an original purity, but also any evolutionary, organic development which assumes integrity to be something that can be predefined.⁵⁴ Integrity with tradition cannot be a matter of correlating between a normative classic and an isolatable experience, as if comparing two comprehensively understood sets of bounded data.⁵⁵ In a critical, post-foundationalist reading, both the horizon of the classic and the experiential horizon of the interpreter are subject to critical interpretation, (always still from within the hermeneutical circle). Reconstructive hermeneutics involves the deliberate construction of a *gestalt* regarding Christian identity:

⁴⁹ Useful summaries of Fiorenza’s use of Gadamer and Ricoeur can be found in ‘ST’, pp. 33–34; Fiorenza, ‘History and Hermeneutics’, in *Modern Christian Thought: Twentieth Century* v. 2, James C. Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (eds.) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), pp. 341–85 (pp. 349–63). In a recent essay, he continues to work with these two authorities, see Fiorenza, ‘A Distinctive Theological Approach’, in *Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper*, Kristin Colberg and Robert Anthony Krieg (eds.) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), pp. 21–41 (p. 24).

⁵⁰ *FT*, pp. 29–31; Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, pp. 15–16.

⁵¹ *FT*, pp.29–46, 108–154, 304–306; ‘ST’, pp. 54–56; Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, p. 24.

⁵² Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, pp. 132–34, 137–39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵⁴ ‘ST’ pp. 54–56.

⁵⁵ ‘The danger of the method of correlation, understood as the correlation between revelation and the cognitional and normative claims of the modern world, consists in the risk of positing one of the two elements as foundational’: *FT*, p.303.

An interpretive decision has to be made as to what is decisive and essential to Christian faith and what is not, what is paradigmatic and what is not, what is primary and what is not. A decision as to what constitutes the identity of a faith involves much more than the interpretation of a tradition. It is not simply an act of uncovering an identity already present; rather, it is a decision based on considered judgments about what constitutes priorities and paradigms in the face of conflicts and changes in the facticity of the tradition.⁵⁶

For example, Fiorenza cites the way the Church practices theology after the holocaust: this cannot be based solely on logic or authority and fail to take into account the cost of forming Christian self-identity at the ‘expense and disparagement of the Jewish faith’.⁵⁷

In Fiorenza’s non-foundationalist approach, integrity is not an *a priori* principle which can simply be applied, nor is it an ordered set of data and relationships only needing to be uncovered, nor an isolatable essence. It is a quality based on concrete judgements and traditional material as communities respond to new events or situations, or as a result of conflicting praxis in the community of interpretation.⁵⁸ An understanding of integrity emerges therefore in the process of hermeneutical reconstruction.⁵⁹ Whilst rejecting any over-optimistic view of the classic deriving from Gadamerian hermeneutics, Fiorenza recognises that the religious classic—critically received—has a part to play in expanding horizons, challenging prevalent background theories and experience in diverse communities, thereby making a genuine contribution to a dynamic equilibrium, rather than being a static body upon which the other criteria act.⁶⁰

Secondly, there is a mix of the paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic in Christian tradition,⁶¹ experienced as a dissonance between the paradigmatic ideal and the experienced

⁵⁶ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, p. 134; See also, *FT*, p. 304-5; compare the notion of ‘Christian identity as a task’ in Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), pp. 151–55.

⁵⁷ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, p. 138.

⁵⁸ Fiorenza, ‘The Crisis of Scriptural Authority’, *Interpretation*, 44.4 (1990), 353–68 (pp. 362–63); Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, p. 139; Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, pp. 24–25; *ST*, p. 56. Compare Tanner’s critique of theological language which ‘implies that those beliefs and values already exist as some consistent whole on the level of practice and that the academic theologian is doing nothing more than laying out the elements of the whole in the proper order they already have with one another’, Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Scriptural Authority’, p. 140.

⁶⁰ Fiorenza, ‘Theory and Practice: Theological Education as a Reconstructive, Hermeneutical, and Practical Task’, *Theological Education*, 23 (1987), 125–26 (p. 115). See, for example, the role of scripture in Fiorenza’s analysis of the nature of resurrection, *FT*, pp. 5-55; and, Fiorenza, ‘The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology’, in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 212–48.

⁶¹ Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, p. 24.

facts of the tradition, discovered through historical-critical and social analysis. The result is that:

inconsistencies and conflicts require a reflective theological decision as to what constitutes Christian identity with regard to integrity of the tradition; the social, political and practical consequences of beliefs; and related theoretical assumptions.⁶²

In this diagnosis, reconstructive hermeneutics is located with other elements of a broad reflective equilibrium, namely retroductive warrants and background theories. These will be considered separately below, but it is worth noting at this point that Fiorenza is deliberately working within a tension here. On the one hand his goal is to reconstruct what is paradigmatic and therefore constitutive of Christian identity and integrity. In other words, the goal is to get at what Pope Francis calls ‘The Heart of the Gospel’.⁶³ On the other hand, Fiorenza’s approach to this task is to encompass not only diverse witnesses within the Tradition (as he does in reconstructing the role of testimony regarding the resurrection for example) but a broad field of social, scientific and philosophical considerations. This plurality of criteria and testimonies does not obscure truth, but allows it to be approached. Within this broad equilibrium, the experience of the poor and those marginalised in the community is given a certain priority in discerning what is paradigmatic, allowing for a refinement of Fiorenza’s description of the reconstructive work of broad reflective equilibrium:

Integrity, therefore, is not so much insight into a pre-given essence as reconstructive interpretation resulting from an ethic of accountability...Such reconstructions and reforms are made on the basis of considerations of what constitutes the tradition’s identity and integrity, *taking into account the experience of suffering and of those excluded from the community of discourse* in the light of relevant background theories and retroductive warrants.⁶⁴

It is important to note throughout this that the reconstruction and disclosure of the paradigmatic is not an attempt to isolate an ‘essence’ from a form. Rather the paradigmatic elements can only be observed and interpreted through the concrete historical forms.⁶⁵ What

⁶² Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, p. 139.

⁶³ *EG*, Section III.

⁶⁴ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, pp. 138–39. In *EG*, Pope Francis provides an interesting reading of Gal.2:1-10 where ‘the key criterion of authenticity’ regarding Paul ‘running or had run in vain’ was to remember the poor. He draws the conclusion that whilst we may not be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the gospel, this is one sign we should never lack. As the interpretation of doctrine is one part of the task of reflecting the gospel, it is reasonable that the experience of the poor be an interpretive criterion.

⁶⁵ As noted by the ITC, ‘Interpretation is a perennial task’, see *ID*, footnote 3.

is paradigmatic is discerned not by uncovering an inviolable historical or existential foundation but by applying the logic of question and answer to concrete experiences:

If we take the critique of foundations seriously what we need to explicate is a view of religious identity that is not simply a priori or historically grounded, although it may draw reasons from history, but is grounded in the *testing* of its identity in terms of its practice of peace and justice within a religiously diverse world.⁶⁶

In place of foundations or essential content clothed in diverse forms, such testing results in an ongoing discernment of *principles* which enable judgments regarding integrity and identity in the light of contemporary questions and diverse testimonies from the past.⁶⁷ This is a similar distinction to that made by Thiel between prospective and retrospective models of the development (or better, hermeneutics) of doctrine.⁶⁸

Thirdly, precisely as a reconstructive principle, the interpretation of tradition is not descriptive but normative;⁶⁹ decisions taken in a Christian community about interpretation of tradition become decisions about what it means to *be* Christian.⁷⁰ A broad reflective equilibrium will not simply draw on tradition to make these decisions, but on warrants from experience and background theories. These criteria also have a role in constructing Christian identity and integrity through transforming horizons of expectation and interpretation.⁷¹ Indeed, judgements about what constitutes such identity rely not only on interpretation of the tradition but on background theories, including theories about the nature of interpretation itself.⁷²

⁶⁶ Fiorenza, 'Fundamental Theology and Its Principal Concerns', p. 136, emphasis added. See also his treatment of the 'ethics and practice of interpretation' in Fiorenza, 'Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions', pp. 23–25.

⁶⁷ 'ST', p.56. Fiorenza uses the example of slavery, which is now understood as antithetical to Christian principles revealed in the NT, but cannot be shown to rest on foundations in the early tradition, when slavery was not directly challenged. A contemporary case is the question of admitting women to the diaconate: to make a decision based solely on early church practice would be to commit the error of seeking foundations rather than the rather more painstaking task of discerning principles.

⁶⁸ See Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 80–95. 'A retrospective conception of tradition measures continuity not by taking a divine stance in the original event of Christian revelation and imagining traditional time from a privileged, timeless, point of view: rather, it does so by envisaging tradition from the actual limitations of the present moment and 'looking back' to the Christian past to configure traditional continuity' (p.82)

⁶⁹ Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice', p. 128. See also Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', pp. 139–40.

⁷⁰ Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Scriptural Authority', p. 364. The question of *who* makes such a decision is raised later in the criterion of 'Communities of Discourse and interpretation'.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 367–68.

⁷² 'ST', p.57

A Christian community's practice of discipleship is not simply a practice that one adds on to a doctrine as its application after that doctrine has been established in a foundation. Instead a Christian community's practice of discipleship entails a learning and discerning process whereby one learns and discerns what Christian identity (or identities) is about... [W]hat we acknowledge and confess as revelation should be seen as a configuration of identity that we learn to interpret within a specific religious community, a specific church, with its spiritual and ethical practices.⁷³

As with traditional integrity, Christian *identity* is not a foundation, against which integrity can be measured. On the contrary, religious identity is a function of integrity and therefore a goal of reconstructive hermeneutics, achieved through discourse and interpretation.⁷⁴ It is constantly reconstructed in theory and practice in communities of discourse through complementarity: explanation with understanding; meaning with truth.⁷⁵ Identity therefore is shown to come from creative dialogue, not foundational authority,⁷⁶ and such dialogue may be unceasing if—as Tanner argues—'Christian discipleship is an essentially contested notion.'⁷⁷

4.4.2 Reconstructive Hermeneutics and Internal Coherence

Like 'foundational theology', 'reconstructive hermeneutics' means something rather different in Fiorenza's writing than might be expected. Here, as elsewhere, it is important not to be distracted from the value of Fiorenza's argument by focussing on particular decisions regarding his choice of terms. As 'reconstructive hermeneutics' is used by Guarino, following Betti and Hirsch, it is concerned with the recovery of a determinate original meaning which can then be recast in new form.⁷⁸ In contrast, Fiorenza sees the

⁷³ Fiorenza, 'Fundamental Theology and Its Principal Concerns', p. 135. The formative role of doctrine is equally emphasised in Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 81–115. In particular, Thiselton draws on Ricoeur to illustrate the importance of alterity in formation. In Chapter 6 I use this as a lens to examine the hermeneutical basis and potential of Receptive Ecumenism, as a mode of ecclesial learning.

⁷⁴ Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice', p. 128.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 136. More recently, Bradford E. Hinze has engaged a range of inter-disciplinary resources to propose a 'social imaginary focussed on collective individuation' as an alternative to individualism and as a corrective to certain models of communion ecclesiology in the formation of identity, see Hinze, 'Individuation and Communion: Implications for the Church's Identity and Mission', in *Believing in Community: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, Peter de Mey, Pieter de Witte, and Gerard Mannion (eds.) (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 3–27.

⁷⁶ Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', p. 140.

⁷⁷ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, p. 159.

⁷⁸ Guarino, *Revelation and Truth*, pp. 58–61. Fiorenza intentionally diverges from the understanding of Betti and Hirsch. See Fiorenza, 'Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions', p. 19.

hermeneutical task as *re-construction*, not reproduction, and identifies the hermeneutical category of *reception* as the key to reconstructing the integrity of church tradition.⁷⁹

A parallel concern for the integrity of tradition can be seen in Murray's coherence-based testing for 'dynamic integrity'. *Internal, or intrinsic, coherence* applies both synchronically (how the tradition 'hangs together across all of its themes and loci') and diachronically ('how it hangs together across time').⁸⁰ How these dimensions of coherence might be *tested* is not specified in detail, but three pointers may be noted. Murray, like Fiorenza, sees a connection between integrity and identity, in which internal coherence plays a particular role.⁸¹ Murray's own systematic reconstructions of tradition exhibit a creative retrieval and imaginative reconfiguration of elements of Catholic tradition, as well as learning from the wider Christian witness.⁸² Whilst internal coherence may be in practice the default move of Catholic evaluation of doctrinal development, it is not the only one. An appropriate theological rationality, according to Murray, is not only recursive insofar as it returns again and again to the traditions—often drawing on forgotten or underplayed elements through an ongoing *ressourcement*—but is only one of a number of criteria which contribute to a claim for overall integrity. External and pragmatic criteria also have a role to play, and theological rationality is accordingly also fallibilist and expansive and informed by lived experience. So too for Fiorenza:

The challenge for the Church as a community of discourse is to reconstruct the integrity of the Church tradition in the light of relevant background theories and retroductive warrants.⁸³

Hermeneutical reconstruction can be described as recursive in its retrospective orientation and attention to diverse synchronic and diachronic receptions. It is expansive in its 'reconstructive' mode, which allows new meaning to be realized through a responsible

⁷⁹ Although this notion was well received, it is not a major theme of his later writings. The hermeneutical implications of reception are however taken up at length by Rush, whose work I will consider in the next chapter. Fiorenza acknowledges Rush's contribution in Fiorenza, 'History and Hermeneutics', p. 357.

⁸⁰ Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth', p. 254.

⁸¹ 'Although radical revision of this "hard core" is by no means inconceivable, such revision would amount to the abandonment of the particular research programme in question [e.g. Catholicism].', Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', p. 209.

⁸² E.g. Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', *New Blackfriars*, 91.1032 (2010), 142–70.

⁸³ 'ST', p.74, emphasis added.

poiesis. Fiorenza's novel appropriation of Jauss and the use of reception as a hermeneutical category is the key to this creative possibility.⁸⁴

Nonetheless Fiorenza judges the employment of reconstructive hermeneutics to be similar to a *narrow* reflective equilibrium 'crisscrossing and a going back and forth from the considered judgements about identity to the reconstructed identity, and then reciprocally from the reconstructed identity to the considered judgements'.⁸⁵ Without the refinement of other elements such as background theories, this would remain the kind of bipolar correlation he intends to overcome. Achieving internal coherence without considering external and pragmatic factors—background theories and retroductive warrants—may demonstrate a satisfying correlation between elements of the tradition and a particular perspective on the present horizon, but pays too little attention to the situation of the interpreter and the interpretative contribution of alterity to be adequate for judging the tradition and proposing change.⁸⁶ Hermeneutical reconstruction therefore needs to be supplemented by the other elements of a broad reflective equilibrium and informed by a hermeneutics of suspicion which utilises critical theory.⁸⁷

Part of the reason for this is the tension inherent in hermeneutical approaches arising from the universality and limitation of hermeneutics. The very universality which provides a warrant for general hermeneutics—everything needs to be interpreted—simultaneously undermines the possibility of interpretation, as the interpreter's own prejudices are themselves subject to interpretation. This is the first reason Fiorenza cites for a 'crisis of hermeneutics'.⁸⁸ A further criticism is levelled by critical theorists that in focussing on the discovery of *meaning*, the hermeneutical quest fails to uncover issues of *power*, *domination* and *distortion*. This concern leads Fiorenza to move beyond hermeneutical reconstruction and require not only a critique of foundationalist conceptions, but a critique of hermeneutical theory and its application in correlational theology.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ In Chapter 5 I will argue that the reception hermeneutics developed by Rush continues this trajectory and offers the best hermeneutical framework for understanding what Thiel describes as dramatic and incipient development.

⁸⁵ *FT*, p. 305

⁸⁶ Fiorenza's most helpful presentation of reflective equilibrium is his essay 'Theology as Responsible Valuation or Reflective Equilibrium: The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr', in *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr*, Ronald F. Thiemann (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁸⁷ *FT*, p. 304; see also Fiorenza, 'Author's Response', p. 420. A useful introduction to the theological implications of this field of study is provided in Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990).

⁸⁸ His analysis is presented most clearly in Fiorenza, 'Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions'. Elements of the argument also appear in his earlier work, particularly 'Crisis of Hermeneutics'. See also Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Scriptural Authority'.

⁸⁹ For a helpful illustration of how these three critiques feed Fiorenza's conception of wide reflective equilibrium, see Terence Bateman, *Reconstructing Theology: The Contribution of Francis*

In *Senses of Tradition*, Thiel draws a similar distinction to Fiorenza between ‘hermeneutical’ and ‘critical’ approaches to theology.⁹⁰ He contends that different theological styles can be seen to privilege particular senses of tradition. Thus narrative approaches emphasise the literal sense which allows a story to be told and characters to be developed; a hermeneutical style of theology is identified primarily with the sense of development-in-continuity, respecting both tradition and historicity, whilst critical theologies bring the senses of dramatic and incipient development to the fore. Ultimately his argument is that these different styles need to be held in a dynamic holism, rather than exclusively opposed, in a similar way to his claim that all four ‘senses of tradition’ are required to describe and understand the dynamics of Christian tradition adequately.⁹¹ Thiel’s description of the theological styles, and their relation to the sense of tradition, is of course an idealised typology. He readily admits that each style makes use of other senses in practice. The value of such a typology is not to categorise theologians into particular schools, but to clarify pre-understandings, priorities and paradigms which may affect the resultant theologies. Seen in this way, the typology is not so much a test of theological adequacy as an analytic tool to help uncover the modes of argumentation which are being employed with regard to particular questions that arise.

Fiorenza also works from a typology of theologies, and his treatment of correlational theologies has many similarities with Thiel’s ‘hermeneutical style’.⁹² However, what is more significant for his broad reflective equilibrium is the distinction he makes not between hermeneutical and critical *theologies*, but between hermeneutical and critical *theory*. In other words, his fundamental concern is with making a distinction affecting general hermeneutics, not theology alone. The term ‘hermeneutics’ can be used in a broad sense, relating to all matters of interpretation, or in ‘the more narrow sense (which) focuses on the exemplary character and extraordinary meaning of cultural expression’ found in Gadamer and Ricoeur.⁹³ It is this narrower sense that he refers to the ‘crisis’ of hermeneutics. The reason for making a sharp distinction between hermeneutical traditions and critical theorists is so

Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 92. For Fiorenza’s critique of correlational theology, see *FT*, pp. 276-84; *ST*, pp.41-47.

⁹⁰ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 197–208.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 207–8.

⁹² There are similarities between the classifications in Thiel and Fiorenza here. Thiel associates the ‘hermeneutical’ style with correlational theologies, and includes Rahner, Tracy and Fiorenza (!) in these. He does however, further qualify Rahner’s approach as transcendental, and Fiorenza’s as ‘holistic’: *Ibid.*, p. 199. Whilst Fiorenza consistently defends himself against proposing a theology of correlation, he particularly names Tracy and Rahner as hermeneutical against Lindbeck’s classification of the two theologians: *ST*, p.33

⁹³ Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, pp. 11–12.

that the latter can be more adequately used to critique the former.⁹⁴ Nonetheless the goal remains hermeneutical in the broader sense (as Thiselton uses it, for example) in that it entails an enhanced practice of interpretation, one which integrates power and domination into hermeneutical theory:

Just as life consist [*sic*] not merely in language and communication, but in work and power, so too are cultural texts not simply expressions of freedom and meaning; instead they are also permeated with power and domination. Theories of interpretation need to take into account that interpretation should uncover not only meaning but also domination.⁹⁵

The significance of this for contemporary Catholic interpretation lies not in the terminology being used but in bringing the different approaches—critical and hermeneutical—into the kind of theological holism which is Thiel’s ideal. Although Thiel has to fit Fiorenza into his typology, and so labels Fiorenza’s approach as hermeneutical and indeed correlational, he acknowledges that Fiorenza represents a ‘more nuanced’ and ‘holistic’ style.⁹⁶ This can be pushed further; by including both hermeneutical and critical theory in his approach, Fiorenza models, or at least attempts, the holism which Thiel seeks.⁹⁷ Although ‘fusion, balance and synthesis’ are claimed to be antithetical to the critical style of theology, this is countered by precisely the dynamic, unceasing revision which Thiel attributes to hermeneutical theology and which can be seen in both Fiorenza’s broad reflective equilibrium and Murray’s dynamic integrity.⁹⁸ In practice for both Thiel and Fiorenza, the theological task requires recognition of what is paradigmatic in the tradition (the ‘literal sense’ in Thiel’s terms), understood in historical context (‘development-in-continuity’) together with a capacity for ideology critique (‘dramatic development’) and the communal discernment of integrity and innovation (‘incipient development’).⁹⁹ This

⁹⁴ With specific reference to critical theory (Habermas), deconstruction (Derrida) and post-structuralism (Foucault), Fiorenza is concerned that a broad view of hermeneutics ‘overlooks, and even downplays, the degree to which the latter movements and authors are raising significant criticism, of hermeneutical theory’. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, p. 199.

⁹⁷ Certainly Fiorenza’s reconstructive hermeneutics pays attention to what Thiel classes as the literal sense and development-in-continuity. The sense of dramatic development is clearly present in Fiorenza’s inclusion of critical theory, feminist theologies and the hermeneutical role of the oppressed, as well as his non-foundationalist approach which allows for radical re-construction or rejection of inherited traditions. The sense of incipient development is perhaps less obvious, although I suggest that it can be found (at least incipiently!) in his use of reception theory which emphasises a productive, creative aspect to interpretation.

⁹⁸ ‘Hermeneutical theologies are tireless in their efforts to discern, construct, and reconstruct the meaningfulness of tradition within this experiential pluralism’: Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, p. 199.

dynamic discernment results in diverse re-configurations of tradition, some of which remain as local understandings or may be rejected, whilst others become sedimented as development-in-continuity and the elements of a renewed literal sense.¹⁰⁰

By way of a contemporary illustration of Fiorenza's approach, consider Pope Francis' establishment in 2016 of a Commission to study the female diaconate. The remit of this Commission is limited to a specific task of hermeneutical reconstruction.¹⁰¹ Reconstructive hermeneutics in this context would therefore include a historical analysis of the evidence for 'diaconal' ministry by women in the NT and the early church: did it exist and what did it do? A second question—regarding the nature of this role, in particular with relation to ordination and the role of male deacons—is also historical, but requires a reconstruction of theological understanding of such concepts as ministry, ordination, and the diaconate in the periods under consideration (unless these concepts are understood in an ahistorical manner— which becomes a question of appropriate background theories, as discussed later). Only then can questions such as 'were women ordained?' be addressed. As Fiorenza's model indicates, not only the foundational texts, but also later receptions are important, such as the emergence of the term 'deaconess' (especially in the East), as well as the emergence of female religious orders in the West which may overlap with some functions of the historical female diaconate.¹⁰²

In order to reconstruct the tradition in this way, Scriptural texts, historical documents, liturgical rites (especially those concerned with diaconal ordination) and archaeological evidence (e.g. murals representing women in ecclesial posture and elements of clerical dress)

⁹⁹ 'Recognition' is a preferable term here to 'retrieval'. Whilst the latter suggests extraction of an essential content, the former emphasises the active role of the interpreter and continuity through integrity rather than identity of content. The possibility of recognising multiple developments which have integrity with the apostolic faith is noted in ecumenical dialogue, but applies equally with regard to diverse receptions in contemporary Catholicism.

¹⁰⁰ I am not arguing here that only those interpretations which become sedimented into the literal sense are valid or truthful: throughout this thesis is the recognition that there is a place for legitimate plurality. I have in mind here something like Rush's local, diverse expressions of a *sensus fidei* which exist as a kind of 'concrete catechism' (to appropriate Rahner's term) for particular communities but may not be wholly reflected in the wider *consensus fidelium* of the wider church. See Rush, *Eyes of Faith*, pp. 241–82. For a critique of a thick semantic tradition, see Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, pp. 159–67; see also the debate between Tanner and Thiel in *Horizons*, 29.2 (2002), 303–11, 315–21.

¹⁰¹ "The Holy Father did not ask us to study if women could be deacons," said Cardinal-designate Luis Ladaria...[but] to say in a clear way the issues ... that were present in the early church on this point of the women's diaconate", Joshua J. McElwee, 'Deacon Commission Won't Advise Francis on Ordaining Women, Says Doctrinal Chief', *National Catholic Reporter*, 26 June 2018, <<https://www.nronline.org/news/theology/deacon-commission-wont-advise-francis-ordaining-women-says-doctrinal-chief>>.

¹⁰² A useful introduction to the historical and contemporary issues can be found in Phyllis Zagano (ed.), *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 2016); see also, Gary Macy, William T. Ditewig, and Phyllis Zagano, *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).

must be consulted, together with interpretive norms (e.g. on the use of Greek terms related to ministry in the NT, early church, and wider culture), or the implication that women were assisting at the altar by reference to the existence of documents forbidding this. However, the task of hermeneutical reconstruction is wider than this and extends to such matters as: the change in how the male diaconate was understood from the early medieval period until Vatican II as preparation for the priesthood; the development of understanding of sacraments and ecclesiology, particular relating to ministry; and an assessment of how the diverse reception points towards ‘paradigmatic ideals’ or diaconal and female ministry.¹⁰³

The significance of other aspects of broad reflective equilibrium for this example will be introduced in turn as the other elements of Fiorenza’s model are laid out, beginning with the role of background theories.

4.5 Background Theories and Extrinsic Coherence

How can a sophisticated, dynamic approach to interpreting doctrine be controlled? Is there not a danger of the prejudice of the theologian exerting a definitive influence on which elements of tradition are in need of critique and which novel reconstructions are worth championing as authentic receptions? In part because his post-foundationalist stance limits any easy appeal to universal heuristic models, Fiorenza pays particular attention to the diverse web of background theories, often invisible because of being so pervasively ‘at-hand’, which are involved in the act of interpretation.

The introduction of background theories into the hermeneutical circle encompassing the text and interpreter is one attempt to overcome the ‘crisis of hermeneutics’ arising from the universality and limitations of interpretation.¹⁰⁴ The resulting model has been called a ‘hermeneutical triangle’ encompassing text, interpreting subject, and various background theories which affected the text, and influence the interpreter, as well as being involved in differing receptions of the text across time and cultures.¹⁰⁵ Fiorenza’s holistic approach ultimately goes beyond this to include retroductive warrants and the community of discourse, as will be explored below, but background theories nonetheless perform an important role in his approach.

¹⁰³ See *FT*, p.306

¹⁰⁴ ‘The crisis of hermeneutics...entails not only that traditional approaches to the question of the meaning of religious or Christian identity are no longer adequate but also that modern responses are inadequate and invalid because the interpretation of identity has become a complex interpretative endeavour’, Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, p. 118.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131. For a reading of the significance of Fiorenza’s ‘hermeneutical triangles’, see James E. Brenneeman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 56–57.

Background theories are neatly defined as ‘those implied theories that have an impact on considered hypotheses and judgements’. In philosophy of science, they act as ‘auxiliary hypotheses’ which may need to be amended in the case of anomalies between theory and observation. In ethics, they include concepts about human nature and society.¹⁰⁶ Theological reflection makes use of background theories not just in terms of understanding the world (e.g. theories of evolution and cosmology) but also in terms of the nature of the self and society (e.g. personalist approaches) and the nature of interpretation itself (e.g. appropriate modes of rationality, commensurability of different forms of life and linguistic communities, the possibility of secure foundations of knowledge). A similar role is performed in Murray’s dynamic integrity by the notion of extrinsic coherence. Whilst Murray’s emphasis is on extrinsic coherence as an evaluative factor in considering the truth or adequacy of doctrine, Fiorenza, under the influence of critical theory, also emphasises the formative—and potentially distorting—influence of background theories on the task of reconstructing and applying the tradition.¹⁰⁷

Any act of theological interpretation clearly relies on a number of such theories. In his account of foundational theology, Fiorenza lists the nature of historical testimony, the relationship of literary form and content, narrative history and identity, intentionality and action, the nature of reception, societal evolution and welfare assistance.¹⁰⁸ They both mediate between the horizons of the (reconstructed) understanding of tradition and the internal and external data with which it is brought into equilibrium, and set limits on the range of possible interpretations (for example, the background theory that the biblical canon comprises a certain set of books and no other, or that humans did not appear on earth in the first week after the big bang, or that Catholics might usefully learn from considering non-Catholic theology and praxis). At the same time, background theories are themselves hermeneutical so far as they are not pre-epistemic givens or un-interpreted foundations, but exist in a cultural context and indeed change over time, often dramatically.

Fiorenza does not simply add background theories into the hermeneutical circle (which can be thought of as existing between two poles: text and reader; or past and present) to

¹⁰⁶ ‘ST’, p. 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ On the significance of critical theory to his work, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘The Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions and Christian Theology’, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 27.1 (2000), 3–31. In addition to critical theorists (principally Habermas), Fiorenza’s critical stance is influenced by feminist theology, including the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza et al., ‘Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory on My Theological Work’, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 1991, 95–126 (pp. 95–105).

¹⁰⁸ *FT*, p.311.

make a ‘hermeneutical triangle’.¹⁰⁹ Three elements in particular are relevant to understand why background theories have particular significance for theological hermeneutics.

Firstly, although background theories provide certain limits to interpretation, they are not neutral fixed perspectives but are themselves hermeneutical in nature and requiring interpretation and judgement, including critical hermeneutics of suspicion. All background theories are themselves historically conditioned, and therefore no one theory can be uncritically accepted as a norm.¹¹⁰ This critical view challenges both foundationalist theologies, for example those based on a certainty about natural law or discrete, pre-given complementarity of male and female, but also any uncritical use of contemporary world-views.¹¹¹ For example, uncritical acceptance of contemporary gender theory or, conversely, too-ready rejection of its significance, would each be deemed inadequate in Fiorenza’s scheme. As this chapter is intended to demonstrate, his approach goes beyond a pre-modern resistance to developments in background theories *and* a liberal correlation of theology to whatever theory is dominant in a given culture by means of a broad reflective equilibrium which includes the experience of ecclesial communities alongside the reconstructive interpretation of tradition and the operative background theories.

The second significant contribution from Fiorenza is thus the location of background theories in relation to a broad reflective equilibrium, and in particular the mutual interrelationship of background theories and Christian tradition.¹¹² The interrelated development of liberal humanism and Catholic social thought suggests the richness of such mutual interaction, which is also evident in Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*.¹¹³ As a result of this ongoing interaction, background theories are formative of Catholic identity but are also affected by that identity.¹¹⁴

The most fundamental of these interactions is that which obtains between the tradition (in a broad reflective equilibrium or dynamic web) and background theories on the canons of rationality itself. Such theories determine the way we carry out any act of interpretation and are highly formative of religious identity; our understanding of tradition, nonetheless may

¹⁰⁹ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, pp. 130–31.

¹¹⁰ ‘ST’, p. 58

¹¹¹ See, for example, Fiorenza, ‘Conflict of Hermeneutical Traditions’, p. 135.

¹¹² Fiorenza gives the examples of scientific theories (e.g. evolution) and literary theories (e.g. genre criticism) as background theories which have affected a Christian reconstruction of the doctrine of creation. Conversely he highlights the influence that an understanding of the dignity of the human person found in Christian tradition has had on psychological theories of human development. See ‘ST’, p. 58.

¹¹³ Pope Francis, ‘*Laudato Si*: Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home’, (24 May 2015), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html>.

¹¹⁴ ‘ST’, pp. 57-58.

determine which theories of rationality are deemed admissible.¹¹⁵ Despite the post-conciliar position that the Catholic Church does not impose a particular theological school, for example, both *Fides et Ratio* and *ID* are at pains to point out background theories of rationality and interpretation which are *not* admissible.¹¹⁶

Fiorenza's consideration of how the doctrine of creation—particularly in its practical application—has developed neatly illustrates how background theories fit with a reconstructive, post-foundationalist hermeneutics.

The shift in the perception of creation from a belief in a divine providence ordering all life and society into distinct hierarchies to a belief in the God-given rights and equality of all involves a significant transformation. This transformation results from a new equilibrium among diverse elements: our reading of scripture, our scientific background, and our social human experience. The shift... does not refer to a pre-given reality or entail an interpretative discovery of an essence or an underlying identity. Instead, the very meaning of creation is constructive, forged in a hermeneutical reconstruction of past traditions, new background theories and new experience.¹¹⁷

In the information-rich developed world at least, the rate of change in background theories such as the remarkably rapid shift in political and public opinion in the UK and other countries on the acceptability of homosexual relationships, gender roles, and the dynamics of family life, means that reconstructive interpretation of doctrine needs to be employed almost constantly, not just to deal with perceived paradigm shifts every few hundred years (e.g. responding to the Reformation, the enlightenment, the post war global situation, and climate change).

In scientific terms background theories act as theories of instrumentation, and as such mediate between the available data and the possibility of interpretation and formulation of theories.¹¹⁸ In Lakatos' scientific rationality, auxiliary hypotheses have a role to play not only in instrumentally mediating between the data and the research project but in providing a 'safety belt' around the hard core theory such that adjustments can be made to auxiliary hypotheses (e.g. 'the instrumentation is faulty', 'the hypothesis must be revised', 'the

¹¹⁵ A recent case study demonstrates that differing background theories regarding modes of reasoning have significant implications for questions of Christian identity in world Christianity, see Broggi.

¹¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, 'Encyclical Letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason, *Fides et Ratio*', 14 September 1998 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html>.

¹¹⁷ Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', pp. 132–33.

¹¹⁸ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, pp. 130–73; Murphy, 'What Has Theology to Learn from Scientific Methodology?', in *Science and Theology: Questions at the Interface*, Murray Rae, Hilary Regan, and John Stenhouse (eds.) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), pp. 107–22.

boundary conditions need refining’, ‘additional hypotheses need adding or removing’) without requiring major revision of the hard core. Does this refinement, which Fiorenza does not include in his work on background theories, have a place in theological interpretation?¹¹⁹

Murray argues for its relevance in doctrinal development, which:

gives greater specificity and precision to the basic Quinean web-like understanding of systems of belief and knowledge and associated holistic account of justification. More clearly than Quine, Lakatos suggests that although any theory (or belief, or doctrine for our purposes) can, if desired or required, be defended against apparent contestation, the systemic cost involved needs to be carefully attended to.¹²⁰

Murray develops this Lakatosian line of thought in critical conversation with Nancey Murphy, who has demonstrated that the concept of a research project comprising a hard core which is highly resistant to revision and more malleable and/or dispensable auxiliary hypotheses can usefully be applied to specific fundamental and systematic theologies. Murphy further suggests that the production of ‘novel facts’ or new data can be used to identify productive and degenerate research programmes in theology, just as in science.¹²¹

Earlier, by way of example, I showed how the mandate for the Commission studying the female diaconate focussed mainly on certain elements of hermeneutical reconstruction. However, even a restricted remit such as this requires the employment of certain background theories: for example regarding historical method, as well as theological theories about how ‘foundational’ narratives are to be read. To consider the wider of question of whether the female diaconate *should* be reinstated in the Catholic Church, and what its nature would be, brings other background theories into play, such as: predictive theories about whether a female diaconate would increase clericalism in the church; theories of justice with regard to women in society and church; theories of ministry in general, and the character of diaconal ordination and service in particular; theories (perhaps implicit) of the ‘distinctive gifts’ (and perceived limitations) of women (in historical and contemporary horizons), and so on.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Although he neither references Lakatos, nor draws on the notion of a hard core and a protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses, Fiorenza does refer to ‘theoretical and practical fruitfulness’ as a scientific criterion and suggests that the product of ‘novel facts’ can be a part of this. Nonetheless, his interlocutor in the consideration of scientific rationality is Ernan McMullin, not Lakatos directly, ‘ST’, pp. 58-59. A sustained examination of McMullin in theological perspective, including some aspects of his analysis of Lakatos, can be found in Paul L. Allen, *Ernan McMullin and Critical Realism in the Science-Theology Dialogue* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2006).

¹²⁰ Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, p. 210.

¹²¹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, pp. 174–211. For a constructively critical assessment of Murphy’s proposals, see Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, pp. 212–15; also Thiselton, *HD*, pp 161-73; and, John Puddlefoot, ‘Response to Nancey Murphy’, in *Science and Theology*, pp. 137–47.

¹²² Murray and Fiorenza both include the reservation of *priestly* ordination to males as an illustration of the hermeneutical process involving both internal and extrinsic coherence to hard core

However, the background theories nearest to the surface in discussions are those concerning the nature of diaconal ordination, and its relationship to presbyteral ordination.¹²³

4.6 Retroductive Warrants and Pragmatic Coherence

‘The terms retroductive and retroductive warrants are not commonplace,’ notes Fiorenza regarding the third element in his model of broad reflective equilibrium.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, such warrants are in almost constant use in our daily lives, and have a significant, if underdeveloped, role to play in understanding doctrine and ecclesial renewal.

Retroduction is C.S. Peirce’s term for an abductive form of reasoning, following neither from deductive logic nor from an inductive argument from particular cases to a general rule. Rather, it is a mode of argument which proceeds from observation to a best available hypothesis. It includes, for example, ‘making inferences from a person’s traits, knowledge, carriage, ability, and the like to that person’s character or profession’.¹²⁵ Such warrants are weaker than inductive or deductive ones, and are accepted not on the basis of a strong logical proof, but because of a capacity for creative illumination. They are intrinsically fallible, but still rational, and are non-foundational in that they are not based on a single undisputed foundation but on a multiplicity of diverse factors requiring constant re-evaluation and interpretation.¹²⁶ Characteristically, Fiorenza does not offer a simple definition of this concept as applied to theology, but describes it through a stratified approach from multiple perspectives. In addition to Peirce’s pragmatism, he draws on the theoretical and practical fruitfulness of creative suggestion in science, the practical judgement (*phronesis*) associated with Newman’s illative sense, the hermeneutical role of the oppressed, and Rahner’s indirect method.¹²⁷ Taken together, these make his major point,

commitments and more-or-less revisable supporting theories, see Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, pp. 215–20; Fiorenza, ‘Presidential Address: Foundations of Theology: A Community’s Tradition of Discourse and Practice’, *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 41 (1986), p. 130.

¹²³ See ITC, ‘From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles’, (30 September 2002), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_05072004_diaconate_en.html>; Pope Benedict XVI, ‘Apostolic Letter “Motu Proprio”, *Omnium in Mentem*’, (26 October 2009) <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20091026_codex-iuris-canonici.html>.

¹²⁴ ‘ST’, p.58

¹²⁵ FT, p.307

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.310.

¹²⁷ ‘ST’, pp. 59–61.

which is that, the ‘criteria of theological argument are not simply historical or inductive or deductive, but also have a practical experiential dimension’.¹²⁸

It is important not to misread Fiorenza’s use of experience to provide the data for such warrants.¹²⁹ Firstly, he is not simply pursuing a pragmatist agenda; retroductive warrants remain just one element in a reflective equilibrium, needing to be woven together with the other factors.¹³⁰ Secondly, experience is not a source of un-interpreted data, but is shaped in the context of pre-understanding, including being embedded in a tradition, operative background theories and non-cognitive factors. Thirdly, and most significantly in terms of Fiorenza’s wider theological writing, the appeal to experience must not be confused with a transcendental foundation based on presumed universal understanding of human experience. Fiorenza rejects this on the basis of both hermeneutical principles (experience is always interpreted), and critical grounds (such interpretation can be distorted, especially by privileged groups granting it an unwarranted universality).¹³¹

Neither does he reduce the role of experience to a single pole to be correlated with a corresponding pole of tradition. To do so would be to share in the weakness of correlation theologies. As experience itself must be interpreted, it cannot therefore provide a neutral fulcrum or viewpoint for a critique of tradition. Whilst the experience of the oppressed gives them a certain hermeneutical priority in highlighting ideological distortions within a prevailing culture, this critique itself must be seen in relation to a plurality of classes, subjects and traditions, conforming to Fiorenza’s guiding principle that truth can only be approached through a process of mutual adjustment and reflective equilibrium.¹³²

On the one hand, practice as a retroductive warrant provides a testing ground for the intelligibility and veracity of a religious tradition. On the other hand, what constitutes successful and fertile practice is in part determined by the meaning of the religious tradition. One must avoid a foundationalism of practice as if practice itself were a non-epistemic criterion or non-hermeneutical datum. Practice itself is epistemic and in need of interpretation.¹³³

With these caveats in mind, what value does the inclusion of retroductive warrants bring to the task of interpreting doctrine in the contemporary Church?

¹²⁸ ‘ST’, p.61.

¹²⁹ Depending on the context Fiorenza sometimes simplifies ‘retroductive warrants’ to ‘experience’ when listing the elements of reflective equilibrium. See ‘ST’, pp.5, 26.

¹³⁰ Fiorenza, ‘Author’s Response’, p. 421.

¹³¹ *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), pp. 276–84.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹³³ Fiorenza, ‘Presidential Address’, p. 124; also, ‘It does not suffice to point to the coherence between a religious belief and contemporary experience as a warrant because religious beliefs often conflict with experience.’ *FT* p.307.

4.6.1 Hermeneutical Significance

If doctrine can be seen as an attempt at reconstructive interpretation of what is paradigmatic in tradition, then it can be at least partly understood as a theory standing in need of suitable warrants. Reading ‘theory’ as ‘doctrine’ in one of Fiorenza’s passages, points to the potential fruitfulness of such an approach:

The adequacy of warrants for [doctrines] has become an acute question today because it has become generally acknowledged that not only [doctrines] themselves but also the warrants for [doctrines] are dependent upon diverse paradigms. Accordingly, the context of the discovery of a [doctrine] and the context of its justification cannot be separated. The justification and confirmation of a [doctrine] proceeds retroductively from a [doctrine’s] fertility, that is, from its explanatory and pragmatic success.¹³⁴

There is some similarity here with the concern evidenced by Thiselton for the currency of doctrine: what is the ‘cash-value’ of doctrine in the lives of believers and the salvific transformation of the world?¹³⁵ Comparing this with *ID*, the ITC document initially appears very inhospitable to such a criterion:

Contemporary theology of the hermeneutical school tries to build a bridge between the dogmatic tradition and modern thought by asking *what meaning and what importance dogmas have for man today*. But in asking like this, one detaches the dogmatic formulations as such from the *Paradosis* and one isolates it from the living life of the Church. In that way, one makes the dogma a substance by itself. What is more, *in harping on the practical, existential or social meaning of dogma, the question of truth is lost to sight*.¹³⁶

Several points can be made about this paragraph. Firstly, the opening line conflates ‘hermeneutical’ with ‘correlational’ theology, working with two poles. The weakness of this position is precisely what drives Fiorenza’s move to a broad reflective equilibrium containing multiple criteria, and in which the tradition is not simply interpreted from the modern perspective but is allowed to challenge and transform the existential viewpoint. Secondly, the pragmatism employed by Fiorenza and Murray is not reductively practical or instrumental, but intended to allow truth to be disclosed through a coherence model. This involves a presupposition that rational, historical, cognitive truth is not something to be dismissed as unattainable in principle, to be replaced by merely local consensus, but is to be taken seriously on the basis of relevant criteria within a hermeneutical, fallibilist framework

¹³⁴ *FT*, p.307.

¹³⁵ Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 309–41.

¹³⁶ *ID* A.II.2, emphasis added.

such as Fiorenza's broad reflective equilibrium. The failure to engage with such models is a significant deficiency in *ID*. However, beyond the critical statements in this paragraph, there are some more interesting points: dogma cannot be separated from the living life of the Church, and does not exist as a substance. These are points with which Fiorenza would agree; he emphasises that in retroduction, unlike a form-content approach, meaning and application are held together, but in contrast to *ID*, he does not see the only alternative to positivistic, anthropocentric or cultural foundationalism as securing a metaphysical foundation.¹³⁷

Subsequent paragraphs in *ID* deal with the inadequacies of cultural-linguistic, liberationist and feminist hermeneutics. These are also dismissed on the basis that they give an unwarranted priority to a particular interpretative standpoint or theory. Thus, regarding liberation hermeneutics:

In radical liberation theology...everything is based on economic, political and social factors *only*; the relationship between theory and practice is governed *solely* by Marxist materialistic ideology. In consequence, the message of divine grace and the eschatological destiny of man *disappear*. Faith and its dogmatic formulations are no longer regarded in terms of truth but of economic realities, as the *sole* value. They function *only* as an inspiring force in the process of revolutionary political liberation.¹³⁸

Again, Fiorenza would not disagree with the inadequacies of such a hermeneutical approach, but this passage describes neither his use of theory nor warrants based on experience (nor does it accurately describe the hermeneutical approach of liberation theologians). The whole approach of broad reflective equilibrium is to avoid any one-sided interpretation, or naïve correlation which suggests content can be abstracted from its embeddedness in language, tradition and life.

A contrasting approach to *ID* in this regard can be seen in *EG*. Here, Pope Francis makes considerable use of retroductive warrants in arguing against unbridled capitalism and trickle-down theories of economics (which are seen as inadequate because of their effects) (*EG* §54), church traditions which are no longer useful (*EG* §43), language which does not communicate and becomes idolatrous (*EG* §41), and even the risk of his own words not translating to action (*EG* §201). In Chapter 6 I will examine the process and documents of the 2014-15 synods, arguing that these further underline a retroductive, pastoral dimension to Francis' hermeneutics.

Nonetheless, this element of a broad reflective equilibrium needs some unpacking. On the one hand Fiorenza argues that retroductive warrants have a 'limited but significant

¹³⁷ *FT*, pp. 307-8.

¹³⁸ *ID* A.II.3, emphasis added.

independence' within the hermeneutical circle, offering a tactic to address the crisis of hermeneutics. This limited independence from the interpreter and the text arises from the diverse, concrete nature of lived experience, affording it a certain practical wisdom and starting 'in the midst of things'.¹³⁹ But 'pragmatic success' cannot simply be identified with a publically verifiable independent standard, which would arbitrate over and against the other elements of a broad reflective equilibrium. This ambiguous character of 'pragmatic fruitfulness' is noted by Paul Murray, in relation to the criterion of 'novel facts' in Murphy's appropriation of Lakatos:

It is not immediately obvious how such predictive coherence might apply...[I]s this not in danger of making supposedly testable predictions into things that are already features of the existing data?...More generally, is there not something intrinsically fragile and, most likely, partial about making predictions in relation to possible future developments and thereby seeking to prove their truth? Does this not return us to the insatiable desire for an algorithmic means of truth-identification? Does it not sound a little too close to a kind of fact-making machine?'¹⁴⁰

In proposing a category of *pragmatic coherence*, to be woven together with internal and extrinsic coherence, Murray draws a comparison to Rowan Williams' celebratory, communicative and critical styles which must be woven together in the Church's understanding.¹⁴¹ As well as a structural similarity to Fiorenza's use of retroductive warrants interacting with the other elements of reflective equilibrium, this concern with multiple criteria echoes David Tracy's three publics to which theology must be credible: the Church (internal coherence, reconstructive hermeneutics); the academy (extrinsic coherence, background theories); the world (pragmatic coherence, retroductive warrants). Like Fiorenza, the roots of Murray's proposal lie in the pragmatism of William James and C.S. Peirce, but in Murray's case these are configured in the light of Rescher's coherence theory of truth, with its concern for fallible but rational 'best available' warrants, which acts as a dominant background theory in Murray's research programme.¹⁴²

Murray offers two refinements which are not prominent in Fiorenza. Methodologically, Murray embraces the potential for empirical tools to provide evidence and data for retroductive warrants to be assessed. He argues for the value of empirical studies not simply as data for reconstruction but as contributing to the critical constructive role of systematic

¹³⁹ *FT*, p. 308.

¹⁴⁰ Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', pp. 211–12.

¹⁴¹ See especially *Ibid.*, pp. 211–15. Also Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth', pp. 265–66. For the resonance with Rowan Williams, see Murray and Guest, p. 142.

¹⁴² Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 108–17.

theology.¹⁴³ Heuristically, he draws attention to the systemic cost of change within the lived tradition, thereby bringing an argument from pragmatic warrants into the heart of theological reasoning.¹⁴⁴

These methodological and heuristic refinements complement, rather than undermine Fiorenza's use of retroductive warrants. As regards the difficulty of assessing pragmatic fruitfulness, it is worth noting that Fiorenza states that the adequacy of a theory relies on its pragmatic *and explanatory* success.¹⁴⁵ By keeping an explanatory perspective, which relates the retroductive warrants to the tradition and background theories, Fiorenza avoids overstating his dependence on pragmatism and also avoids the reductionism criticised in *ID*. Thus whilst pragmatic warrants have a particular force arising from being given at-hand, and being capable of witnessing to the voices of the oppressed, they do not constitute an overriding or neutral perspective, but are related in equilibrium to the overall task of reconstructing and applying the tradition with integrity. Throughout his work, Fiorenza emphasises the limited nature of any appeal to experience, in order to avoid experience itself becoming foundational and thereby immune to criticism.

A final convergence between Murray and Fiorenza in this area is the retrospective and prospective orientation of their respective models.¹⁴⁶ Retroductive warrants, despite the name, also have a prospective function, a 'present ability to illumine and...a potential for further developments'. As such, they contribute toward the goal of doctrinal interpretation, which is not purely descriptive, but transformational.¹⁴⁷

The illuminative power of a religious belief often consists not so much in its coherence with experience as in its transformative character to challenge such experience.

Likewise, the conflict between experience and religious beliefs often challenges the religious belief itself. Moreover, beliefs are not only illuminative but also dispositional in that they entail a praxis.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth', p. 270. Fiorenza, 'Foundational Theology and Theological Education'; Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice'.

¹⁴⁴ Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', p. 214.

¹⁴⁵ *FT*, p.307.

¹⁴⁶ 'ST', p.59; On the recursive (retrospective) and expansive (prospective) dimensions in Murray's use of Rescher, see Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 131–61; see also Chapter 6 here; compare *ID* B.III.2 which states that doctrine is to be interpreted as *verbum rememorativum*, *verbum demonstrativum* and *verbum prognosticum*; see also Thiselton, who addresses this aspect of the past, present and future temporality of doctrine in his treatment of doctrine and narrative, *HD*, pp. 62–80.

¹⁴⁷ For this reason, Fiorenza is critical of interpretative approaches which rely on 'thick description' alone as insufficiently able to challenge sedimented distortions of power, or to benefit from truth disclosed outside of the present reconstruction of the tradition.

¹⁴⁸ *FT*, p.307.

Here, Fiorenza makes explicit what is also found in Murray's presentation: not just fruitful coherence, but the experience of incoherence can be an evidential warrant. Such incoherence can be described as both an individual or communal *wound* and a systemic *dysfunction*.

4.6.2 Dysfunctions, Wounds and Incoherence

Although the formal definition of retroductive warrants and pragmatic coherence along the lines of a progressive scientific programme sets out the explanatory, creative power of successful warrants, in practice both Fiorenza and Murray draw most fruitfully from this criterion in attending to dysfunction and pragmatic *incoherence*.¹⁴⁹ In Fiorenza's case, this can be seen in the hermeneutical privilege he gives to the experience of oppression and to those situated on the margins of discourse.¹⁵⁰ In particular, his use of retroductive warrants, without such experience being given foundational status has been recognised as fruitful in feminist theology, and Fiorenza himself has applied it in a post-colonial setting to reconstruct a Christological position.¹⁵¹

This is a useful contribution to the tasks of interpretation and reconstruction of the tradition, but does this have applicability beyond these well-defined examples of large scale critical discourse? In describing the notion of pragmatic coherence, Murray also recognises that doctrine may be 'confronted by live issues concerning the adequacy of the practices which they promote'¹⁵² In his recent work, he has applied this to the experience of the sexual

¹⁴⁹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson finds a similar value in starting from the dissonance between doctrine and experience: 'Theological reflection...is generated by sensibilities shaped by a *plethora of factors*, including but not limited to Christian discourse. The particular role and form of these factors are typically both inchoate and conscious-reflective...A dilemma is perceived (or felt) that generates new thinking, takes on the tradition, and develops *new configuration* and convergences of insight and reality. To make sense of the church then, I began with the notion of a *wound*', Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, 'Interpreting a Situation: When Is "Empirical" Also "Theological"?' in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Pete Ward (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 124–44 (p. 137), 'wound' emphasised in original, other emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ 'ST', pp.60–61; Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', pp. 134–36; Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice', pp. 118–20.

¹⁵¹ Fiorenza, 'Christian Redemption Between Colonialism and Pluralism', in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor (eds.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 269–302. On the value of Fiorenza's proposal in feminist theology, see Rebecca Chopp, 'Review of Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church', *The Journal of Religion*, 66.1 (1986), 81–82. Chopp identifies the introduction of pragmatic retroduction as the most significant contribution in Fiorenza's book, and goes on to make use of the method herself in *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 139. See also Donna Teevan, 'Challenges to the Role of Theological Anthropology in Feminist Theologies', *Theological Studies*, 64.3 (2003), 582–97 (pp. 594–96).

¹⁵² Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics', p. 214. Compare Tanner: 'One is prompted to engage in theological investigation when situations seem difficult to reconcile with one's beliefs, or when trying to interpret novel circumstances in the light of one's Christian commitments', *Theories of Culture*, p. 70.

abuse scandal in the Church which ‘represents one of the sharpest-felt performative contradictions between ecclesial understanding and experienced reality in the history of the church’.¹⁵³ The novel facts, to use Murphy’s term, here are not warrants for the fruitfulness of a theory but quite the opposite: ‘a very serious performative contradiction and case of pragmatic incoherence at the heart of Catholic theology and practice of order’.¹⁵⁴

The initial sociological data in Murray’s analysis suggests that a nexus of ideas around a ‘two-tier church’ and the elevated character of the ordained in Catholic theology and life has been a significant factor in distorting power dynamics, generating a sense of total impotence in victims, and reinforcing assumptions about the trustworthiness and integrity of ordained ministers.¹⁵⁵ Murray’s methodological conclusion is that such correlation does not simply warrant a change in practice, such as improved safeguarding practice, but that there is a specifically doctrinal challenge as to ‘whether the web of Catholic theology of priesthood can be reconfigured in such a manner as both preserves all that is deemed essential whilst overcoming, or suppressing, those aspects apparently complicit in the highly serious pragmatic incoherence here identified.’¹⁵⁶ The resonance with Fiorenza should be clear: retroductive warrants contribute to the disclosure and reconstruction of what is paradigmatic in the tradition, affecting not only doctrinal formulation but practice, including the practice of interpretation itself. Murray’s recent work provides a rich description of the role and implications of such warrants:

In short, what are the practical consequences that follow from, or are supported by—whether unintentionally, tacitly, or explicitly—a particular theological conviction or doctrinal tenet and how do these consequences disclose weaknesses in the conviction and tenets themselves and suggest the need for the overall web of articulations and performance to be rewoven in order to counter those weaknesses? The key principle here is that if a way of thinking consistently and recurrently promotes, or serves to legitimate, even if unintentionally, an undesirable practical consequence then it raises questions about the adequacy of the way of thinking itself and the potential need for it to be revised.¹⁵⁷

A significant development along these lines is Murray’s related project of ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning’, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 6.

¹⁵³ Murray, ‘Searching the Living Truth’, pp. 273–78.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁵⁵ Note that Murray is careful to state all the necessary caveats about the interpretation of such data, especially in a short essay focussing on methodology, not data analysis. *Ibid.*, pp. 274–75.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272. His earlier essay dealing with this does not explicitly include *unintentional* consequences of a doctrine or theological position: Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, p. 214.

Does a reading of the ITC document on doctrinal interpretation offer any support for broad reflective equilibrium? As might be expected, *ID* particularly emphasises hermeneutical reconstruction regarding scripture and dogma, but it also acknowledges the effect of background theories on the formulation of dogma, as well as the impact of doctrinal reflection on language and culture.¹⁵⁸ On retroductive warrants, however, *ID* is almost silent.¹⁵⁹ It accords a certain role for anthropocentric analysis, but its interest is in universal questions of humanity, not localised evidence: ‘Man then is not the measure but the point of reference for faith and dogma’.¹⁶⁰ A more promising line is suggested but not developed, in *ID*’s reference to the ‘signs of the times’, but again these are interpreted universally ‘the mystery of man’, ‘the most urgent problems of our times’; there is no suggestion in *ID* that the signs of the times can offer a critique of tradition and doctrine. In contrast, a model of broad reflective equilibrium would not only include lived experience as a factor in ‘receiving with integrity’ but would go some way to overcoming the risk of polarisation implicit in correlationalist and traditional approaches to this concept.¹⁶¹

Returning to the female diaconate as illustrative of establishing a broad reflective equilibrium, it is clear that the experience of women is a factor in this question being raised now in a Catholic context. A number of present realities offer potential warrants for a reconstruction of tradition, for example: a perceived lack of ordained ministers, together with related issues affecting church communities such as closures, partnerships, and impaired access to the eucharist; aging and shrinking female religious congregations; a lack of female models of God and church;¹⁶² the rise of Lay Ecclesial Ministry—largely composed of women—and a corresponding incoherence between exclusion from the diaconate and the functional roles performed; a lack of good preaching in parishes; lack of female participation in church governance and decision-making.

It is important to note that Fiorenza does not envisage the value of retroductive warrants as an exercise in theological correlation: an adequate reconstruction of the tradition must also be allowed to critique societal norms and values. The challenge here is for the church to present its understanding of women’s ministry, not only as in some sense faithful to a particular reading of history and tradition, but as possessed of a ‘transformative character’

¹⁵⁸ See *ID* §B.III.1, and §C.III.3.

¹⁵⁹ *ID* does however include Newman’s seven criteria as an appendix, of which note 4 includes ‘one can judge a development by its consequences or recognize it as legitimate or otherwise by its fruits’. It also sets dogma in a wider context of ecclesial life (§B.III.3).

¹⁶⁰ *ID* §C.III.4.

¹⁶¹ I.e. assigning a priority to the phenomena of the (worldly) ‘signs of the times’, or arguing that ‘in the light of the gospel’ warrants a reading in which the world must conform to the dogmatic tradition.

¹⁶² See ‘*ST*’, p.60.

with regard to these various challenges, and entailing a dispositional praxis which ‘either provide a warrant for the religious belief and challenges the particular contemporary experience of it or it challenges the religious belief itself.’¹⁶³

4.7 Diverse Communities of Discourse and Interpretation¹⁶⁴

Despite feminist theologians praising and appropriating his notion of retroductive warrants, the overall approach of reflective equilibrium was criticized by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as too abstract—thereby missing the effects of power relations—and for paying too little attention to the standpoint of the theologian as subject or agent as ‘interpreter, constructor and evaluator of the tradition’.¹⁶⁵ Partly in response to such criticism, and partly from developing his approach as he engaged with new sources, notably Richard Bernstein and Jurgen Habermas, F.S. Fiorenza added a fourth element in assessing the integrity of tradition:¹⁶⁶

How does the Church ascertain and assert its identity within contemporary reflection and practice? The answer is: It does so as a *community of faith and discourse* seeking to interpret its identity in its tradition, norms and practices.¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, within this community of the church, and in the wider world, there are ‘diverse communities of discourse and interpretation’, and it is important to keep this diversity in mind to avoid Fiorenza’s fourth element becoming a hypostatized ‘church’ rather than concrete communities with their various experiences, struggles, languages, cultures, and stories. In striving for a broad reflective equilibrium, Fiorenza ‘de-centres’ the reconstruction of Christian identity, now no longer founded on or justified by a single element of tradition, reasoning, or experience. In a similar way, his emphasis on diverse

¹⁶³ *FT*, pp.307-8.

¹⁶⁴ The major texts for understanding Fiorenza’s use of communities of discourse are: Fiorenza ‘Presidential Address’, pp. 136–37; and, Fiorenza, ‘Christian Redemption Between Colonialism and Pluralism’, pp. 300–302. Surprisingly, his essay entitled ‘The Church as a Community of Interpretation’ says very little about the internal dynamics of such a community and is primarily a justification for such communities to be included in public discourse on justice and communicative rationality. See Fiorenza, ‘The Church as a Community of Interpretation: Political Theology Between Discourse Ethics and Hermeneutical Reconstruction’, in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (eds.) (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

¹⁶⁵ Fiorenza, ‘From Interpretation to Rhetoric’, pp. 38–39.

¹⁶⁶ This additional element is first discussed in a *Horizons* review symposium in 1984, just after the publication of *Foundational Theology* and is elaborated in his presidential address to the CTSA two years later. The desire to include marginalised voices is most clearly expressed in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’, pp. 136–37. In his recent work Fiorenza includes this aspect of broad reflective equilibrium as ‘the Community of the Church’, ‘*ST*’, pp. 61-64.

¹⁶⁷ Fiorenza, ‘Presidential Address’, pp. 132–2; also, Fiorenza, ‘Theory and Practice’, pp. 122–23.

communities of discourse de-centres the act of *handing on* tradition in such a way as to address potential corruptions arising from overly individualistic, elitist, or authoritarian hermeneutics,¹⁶⁸ to allow diverse voices to be heard,¹⁶⁹ and to recognise the linguistic and intersubjective nature of understanding.¹⁷⁰

Terence Bateman, in his book-length treatment of Fiorenza's theology, argues that the 'flexibility and therefore the applicative power of Fiorenza's method are highlighted in how this fourth element is differently understood and presented in diverse contexts.' There is some truth in this, but the community of discourse remains the least well-defined element of broad reflective equilibrium.¹⁷¹ On the one hand, the recognition of the locus of reconstructing tradition as a communal discernment within a plurality of communities goes some way to addressing criticism that Fiorenza pays too little attention to the question of 'whose interpretation?'" On the other hand, despite the inclusion of the poor and women, among others, in contemporary discourse,¹⁷² the mode of dialogue which Fiorenza actually details remains largely a dialogue of experts, specifically theologians restored to their rightful place in a dialogue with the magisterium or with diverse publics in ethical, scientific

¹⁶⁸ On Fiorenza's analysis that de-centring previously foundational positions is a defining characteristic of contemporary Catholic theology, see 'ST', pp. 66-74; see also his claim that interaction of experience and rationality 'dethrones an abstract autonomous rationality', Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', p. 130.

¹⁶⁹ 'The nature of rationality and interpretation is not a problem primarily between an individual subjectivity and an objective reality but a problem of the interrelationship between discourse and power, between dominative discourses and excluded discourses, and between those who are included in the community discourse and those who are oppressed and excluded from that discourse': Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', p. 136. On diverse voices, compare Murray, 'On Valuing Truth', p. 170. Murray's notion of a 'redeemed catholicity' gives some initial direction as to what a community of discourse might look like in practice. See Murray, 'Redeeming Catholicity', pp. 86-87.

¹⁷⁰ Fiorenza, 'The Church as a Community of Interpretation: Political Theology Between Discourse Ethics and Hermeneutical Reconstruction'; Fiorenza, 'Christian Redemption Between Colonialism and Pluralism'.

¹⁷¹ To illustrate this, consider Fiorenza's essay 'The Church as a Community of Interpretation'. For Bateman this represents 'perhaps Fiorenza's most developed thought on this element', *Reconstructing Theology*, p. 90. In contrast, Michael Haspel criticises it for revealing 'very little' about the community of interpretation, whilst addressing the question of discourse ethics and political theology in some depth. (Haspel, 'Hermeneutical Reconstruction and Discourse Ethics: A Critical Assessment of Francis Schuessler [sic] Fiorenza's Concept of "The Church as a Community of Interpretation"', *Scriptura*, 82 (2003), 49-62 (p. 50). Nonetheless, he uses Fiorenza's essay as a point of departure for his own model of the church as a community of interpretation and discourse, partly because he view Fiorenza's model as specifically 'catholic [sic]', in Haspel, 'The Protestant Church as Institution of Interpretation and Organization of Action in Modern Society', *Scriptura*, 85 (2004), 14-23. While Haspel is correct regarding the focus of Fiorenza's essay, the notion of a community of discourse *ad intra* can be found elsewhere in his writings, as I show here.

¹⁷² 'Major shifts are taking place within contemporary experiences because of the broadening of the community of experiences. Not just male experience, but female experience is entering into the discourse of the community. Not just the rich, but also the poor. To the extent that the community of discourse becomes broadened, to that extent what constitutes contemporary experience is broadened', Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', p. 129; see also Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice', p. 122; also, Fiorenza, 'Crisis of Hermeneutics', p. 136; also, 'ST', pp.61, 64.

and political spheres.¹⁷³ The actual instruments by which other lay voices might be heard, or the sense of faith in distinct communities appropriated, are not examined in depth here.¹⁷⁴

Fiorenza's contribution to understanding the role of the community in assessing and developing the integrity of tradition is thus more systematic than practical. The community provides the key to understanding identity and continuity in terms of ongoing reception, rooted in practice, rather than an *a priori* division of form and content, which remain 'inseparable':¹⁷⁵

The complexity of religious belief and practice is such that, on the one hand, practice serves as a criterion by which the tradition is judged and assessed. New practice leads to new insights into what is considered the essence or the paradigm of the tradition. Consequently, one cannot simply *a priori* determine the essence or paradigm of a tradition and apply it. Instead practice also contributes to the specification of what is essential or paradigmatic of the tradition. On the other hand, this tradition *mutually interacts with practice as a means of interpreting practice*.¹⁷⁶

Here the principle of the pastorality of doctrine is applied in non-foundationalist mode, with the community determining not only the content but also the interpretative canons of a tradition, whilst nonetheless being formed and normed by them in practice. The church acts as both ground (or 'foundation') of truth—insofar as it is the community that determines what is paradigmatic—and as object of truth—insofar as the scriptures, traditions and practices (including interpretive practices) are passed on within the church.¹⁷⁷

Fiorenza contrasts his approach with a classic 'textbook' view of the community as only involved in a passive reception or post-hoc '*justification*' of interpretations produced solely

¹⁷³ Having argued that the whole community of believers has a role to play in discovery, not just justification of beliefs, he goes on to argue this only in terms of the 'community of scholarship', 'academic teaching' and the 'voice of theologians': Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', pp. 132–33. A similar issue arises regarding Pope Francis in *EG*: having highlighted the cognitive dissonance between the ideal of service as power in the church, and the concrete experience of women, he concludes that this is a challenge for *pastors* and *theologians* to work out. (§104). As was pointed out to me—by a woman—in a group discussing *EG*, all such pastors and many theologians (particularly close to the magisterium) will be *men*.

¹⁷⁴ For a compelling phenomenological, hermeneutical and critical account of how such dialogue might be realised, see Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*. On the *sensus fidei* in contemporary theology, see Rush, *Eyes of Faith*; Finucane; Hinze and Phan; Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), pp. 141–43.

¹⁷⁵ 'What constitutes the criteria by which beliefs are translated into present experience—keeping in mind the inseparability of categorical scheme and content?' Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', pp. 133–34.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁷ Fiorenza, *ibid.*, p. 133; Fiorenza, 'Theory and Practice', pp. 134–35. After the publication of *FT*, Fiorenza wished he had developed the notion of the church as 'foundation' as well as object of faith: Fiorenza, 'Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church. Author's Response', p. 423.

by the magisterium's task of interpretation or '*discovery*'.¹⁷⁸ The proposed model of broad reflective equilibrium uses reception hermeneutics to describe the activity of the whole community in discovering and interpreting truth. In his post-foundationalist model, it is not 'autonomous reason' but the inter-subjective, linguistic-cultural community of discourse and interpretation that is instrumental in applying the criteria for broad reflective equilibrium. The community *discovers* the paradigmatic meaning of tradition, the interpreted understanding of experience, and the developing norms of rationality, through dialogue and critical praxis:

Theological interpretation entails the contemporary attempt of the community to interpret the *meaning of the originating interpretations* of the earliest communities.¹⁷⁹

[N]ot just the historical foundations but also *contemporary experience* entails a community of discourse and practice. Experience takes place within communities of discourse and practice...Since the logic of experience is in part dependent upon the community discourses explicating that experience, appeals to experience necessarily involve appeals to communities of discourse.¹⁸⁰

(The) *logic of rationality* is neither static nor autonomous but is intertwined with the history, norms, and paradigms of concrete communities. Rationality does not depend only upon the transcendental subjectivity of an individual, but depends upon communities of discourse. Such an interdependence between the logic of rationality and communities of discourse dethrones an abstract autonomous rationality. It locates rationality historically within a community of discourse and points to the *intrinsic relation between criteria of good theology and communities of discourse*.¹⁸¹

Finally, to conclude the example of female deacons, can this additional criterion be illustrated with reference to the female diaconate, as Fiorenza's original three elements have been? Three specific points might be made here. Firstly, whilst the Commission studying the historical question is composed of ordained, lay and religious members, with equal number of male and female contributors, any decision on the reinstatement of the diaconate would need to consider not only the episcopal college, but the wider faithful. On the one hand,

¹⁷⁸ 'The community comes to play a role in several ways—It is not simply the settling of the community into the agreed-upon conclusions of the practiced deductions, inductions, and hypothesizing. Instead there is an evolving understanding of what constitutes appropriate methods of inquiry and justification as well as the setting in the approximation of the result of the evolving method of inquiry', Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', p. 126. In more explicitly theological terms, the community of discourse exercises its *sensus fidelium* both in discerning the content of faith *and* the norms of theological rationality as a 'sense for the faith'. See Rush, *Eyes of Faith*, pp. 65–66.

¹⁷⁹ Fiorenza, 'Presidential Address', p. 128, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129, emphasis added.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130, emphasis added.

therefore, how might the *sensus fidelium* be tested in this matter? On the other hand, how can the lived experience of women and the special contribution of feminist theologians, be brought into a dialogue with the Magisterium on this matter? Secondly, there is a diversity of cultures and communities within the larger Catholic community. Whilst the authorisation for reinstating the diaconate might be made in Rome, there should be no obstacle to allowing different communities to implement it in a time and manner which is both appropriate and prudent. Such a decision could be made at the level of a Bishops' Conference, or even as individual dioceses (as has been the case for the male permanent diaconate). Thirdly, if the Catholic church takes seriously the ecclesiology of Vatican II, then other Christian communities should be considered as ecclesial 'communities of interpretation and discourse' from which it might be possible to learn; for example, the Anglican and Methodist experience and theology of female deacons, and the order of deaconess in certain Orthodox churches using the principles of 'Receptive Ecumenism'.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I contributed a reading of two theological approaches to the notion of dynamic systemic integrity, and identified a hitherto unrecognised convergence between Murray and Fiorenza in this field.

In terms of the individual elements of these models, Murray's focus on pragmatic coherence, and his inclusion of empirical methods—as well as insights arising from diverse ecclesial communities in Receptive Ecumenism—enhance Fiorenza's account of communities of discourse and retroductive warrants. Conversely, internal and extrinsic modes of coherence are largely assumed rather than worked through in Murray's model here (though they are dealt with extensively, in slightly different terms, in his pragmatist approach to theological rationality).¹⁸² Fiorenza, on the other hand, both elaborates and demonstrates these in some detail through his criteria of reconstructive hermeneutics and background theories.

Perhaps more importantly, both provide complementary insights on the need for multiple criteria to be held *in dynamic equilibrium*, as befits analysis of a dynamic system. Although Fiorenza affords a certain priority to the hermeneutical privilege of the oppressed, his insistence that no single criterion can be turned into a foundation is a particular strength in his approach. Such equilibrium is implicit in Murray's presentation, not only in his choice of a web-like model of knowledge and the notion of dynamic integrity, but in a holistic concern for the (total) systemic cost of adaptation.

¹⁸² See Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, and Chapter 6 here.

However, Fiorenza's critical hermeneutics allows for Murray's justifiable attention to the systemic cost of any proposed change to be critiqued: a concern for systemic cost cannot be detached from the overall principles of broad reflective equilibrium. Specifically, the ability to absorb the cost of change is itself a function of the system under investigation and as such may be subject to critical analysis through retroductive warrants, reconstructive hermeneutics, background theories, and communities of discourse. Put simply, the inability of the Church to absorb change may itself be a warrant for change if this impassibility lacks coherence with the evidence from scripture and tradition, experience from diverse communities of interpretation and suffering, and critically viewed background theories. *The appropriate response to the inability of a system to adopt change due to the systemic cost would thus be to look for ways of increasing the adaptability of the system, not simply to close down the possibility of change, even if a direct approach is impossible at a given moment.*¹⁸³

Fiorenza's work has, however, attracted criticism in two main areas. Most commonly, he has been accused of oversimplifying or incorrectly rendering the view of his sources, particularly Rahner, in order to create contrasting typologies of traditional, transcendental and correlational theology.¹⁸⁴ Whatever the merits or usefulness of deciding which

¹⁸³ This is an important hermeneutical move in the practice of Receptive Ecumenism, albeit one which has received less comment than the notion of receiving gifts and learning from the other.

¹⁸⁴ Fiorenza has received criticism for using a rhetorical device of setting up counter positions with a broad brush and failing to do justice to the subtlety and complexity of Gadamer, Ricœur, Tracy, Lonergan and especially Rahner. See Jessica M. Murdoch, 'Contesting Foundations: Karl Rahner and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's Nonfoundationalist Critique', *Philosophy and Theology*, 27.1 (2015), 127–52; also (on Fiorenza's treatment of Rahner) Michael M. Canaris, 'Francis A. Sullivan's Hermeneutical Approach to Magisterial Documents: Its Method and Application' (Fordham University, 2012), pp. 92–95, and (on his treatment of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and especially Tracy), Peter P. Kenny, 'Modern Hermeneutics and Catholic Fundamental Theology: The Use and Critique of the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur in Edward Schillebeeckx, Claude Geffré and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza' (PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 2006), pp. 200–255. A useful article, with a nuanced view of Fiorenza's own development with regard to Rahner, is Marijn de Jong, 'Theology after the Hermeneutical Turn', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 2014, 485–514. These criticisms do not necessarily detract from the value of his proposal for the current topic of discussion, but do reinforce Thiselton's sharp critique of over-easy, typological division of positions into theological schools. Certainly Fiorenza's later writings view Rahner in a non-foundationalist light. See Fiorenza, 'Karl Rahner: A Theologian for a Cosmopolitan 21st Century', in *In God's Hands: Essays on the Church and Ecumenism in Honour of Michael A. Fahey, SJ*, J. Z. Skira and M. S. Attridge (eds.) (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 109–35; 'Method in Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds.) (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 65–82. In these essays, Fiorenza locates Rahner as primarily a practical *ressourcement* theologian concerned with overcoming particular difficulties in the church through a theology informed by hermeneutics, praxis and historicity. In this regard, Karen Kilby's non-foundationalist reading of Rahner reaches a similar conclusion: see Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 100–114. It is notable that Kilby also includes Rahner's desire for fundamental and dogmatic theology to be brought into closer unity (p.107). This concern is significant in Fiorenza's own approach, see *FT*, pp. 268–89. The aim of the present thesis is not to critique Fiorenza's classification of Rahner, Tracy, *et al*, but to constructively appropriate his proposal in new, resonant, conversations.

theologians belong in which category, this should not distract us from the major point Fiorenza is making: faithfulness to tradition requires a dynamic integrity co-ordinating diverse criteria. His typology of pre-modern and modern theologies serves to highlight the foundations on which they explicitly or implicitly rely, and how insecure those foundations are.¹⁸⁵ His remedy is to pursue a broad reflective equilibrium which seeks to treat seriously tradition, experience, background theories, and the role of the community, all in the light of hermeneutical and critical theory and a privileged hermeneutic of the oppressed.

More significantly for the overall thrust of Fiorenza's project is the criticism that it is too complex to be applied. In a direct response to one of Fiorenza's essays, James Gustafson compares wide reflective equilibrium to 'trying to shoot a jack-rabbit with a single-shot 22, sitting on the fender of a Model A Ford riding through a Kansas pasture'.¹⁸⁶ Bateman, who largely endorses Fiorenza's approach, nonetheless approvingly cites this criticism, and notes the additional danger of never reaching a stable position in the ever-dynamic nature of the task.¹⁸⁷ A similar concern on the difficulty of sophisticated dialogical approaches is raised by Paul Murray in relation to the potential 'elitism' of sophisticated reading strategies such as Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology in contrast to a more democratic but theologically informed approach in Receptive Ecumenism.¹⁸⁸

Two initial replies might be made to this criticism. Firstly, although such criticism has a certain force if broad reflective equilibrium is seen solely as a method to be followed, Fiorenza argues that:

combining retroductive warrants, background theories, the integrity of the tradition, and the catholicity of the church as a community of discourse is not a task than can simply be viewed as a method.¹⁸⁹

EG can cast some further light on this; Pope Francis expounds four key principles to assist the Church in renewing its mission in fidelity to the Gospel. The first of these, 'time is

¹⁸⁵ Correlational theologies may not at first appear foundationalist, but Fiorenza's argument is that they tend towards one or other of the two poles (revelation or the world) in order to overcome the hermeneutical circle and in so doing, effectively create a foundation. A further point is that some correlational approaches rely on a form-content essentialism which does not adequately take into account change and development. In Thiel's terminology, all of these would be prospective approaches and suffer from an inability to account for dramatic and incipient development.

¹⁸⁶ James M. Gustafson, 'Response to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza', in *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr*, Ronald F. Thiemann (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 73–82 (p. 82).

¹⁸⁷ Bateman, *Reconstructing Theology*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁸ Murray, 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology, and Receptive Ecumenism', *Modern Theology*, 29.4 (2013), 76–92 (p. 90).

¹⁸⁹ 'ST', p. 75. As he does in various places, Fiorenza here makes a substitution for one of his standard terms, here replacing 'reconstructive hermeneutics' with 'integrity of tradition'. Note that he also explicitly links the notion of the church as a community of discourse with the criterion of catholicity in this citation.

greater than space', recognises the importance of initiating processes, changing mind-sets, not just classifying and controlling:

Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. (EG §223)

In seeking a broad reflective equilibrium the *process* itself acts as an enabler for participants to creatively develop understanding which is not available as a given in advance. Giving priority to time means that while all elements of tradition are in principle revisable (and thereby complex to analyse holistically), the alternative—possessing spaces—may not only inhibit dialogue but prevent the understanding needed to escape a conceptual or practical impasse.¹⁹⁰

Secondly, and far less abstractly, collaboration between experts in different fields makes the challenge of analysing reflective equilibrium more feasible. I will address this further, regarding Murray's development of Receptive Ecumenism, in Chapter 6. However, it can be illustrated in microcosm by reference to a church document issued in 1973 which somewhat anticipates Fiorenza's approach. *Music in Catholic Worship*¹⁹¹ is a guidance document issued by the US Bishops' conference which includes criteria for choosing music for the parish liturgy. Contrary to many liturgical instructions before and since, it does not attempt to lay out a strict *method* but argues for three 'judgements'—liturgical, musical, and pastoral—to be considered. Importantly, the three judgements are *mutually* interpreting and must be equilibrated in practice, requiring not just the coordination of criteria but the collaboration of different specialists.

All three judgements must be considered together, and no individual judgement can be applied in isolation from the other two. This evaluation requires cooperation, consultation, collaboration, and mutual respect among those who are skilled in any of the three judgments, be they pastors, musicians, liturgists, or planners.¹⁹²

It is not unreasonable to expect something of the same in the practice of theological hermeneutics in a wide coherentist mode. Seeking broad reflective equilibrium in this case would thus entail the kind of active synodality which not only forms a key element of Pope

¹⁹⁰ This theme will be taken up again in Chapter 6 with regard to Receptive Ecumenism.

¹⁹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Virgil C. Funk (ed.), *Music in Catholic Worship: The Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1988). Replaced in 2007 by *Sing to the Lord*, although it is notable that the latter document retains the three criteria in equilibrium despite otherwise revising much of the earlier document, see USCCB, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2008).

¹⁹² USCCB, *Sing to the Lord*, §126.

Francis' reception of Vatican II, but is found in Rush's multi-dimensional approach to reception hermeneutics (and also to the *sensus fidelium*) which forms the substance of the next chapter.

5 A VESSEL RENEWED: RECEPTION HERMENEUTICS AND ECCLESIAL LEARNING

5.1 Introduction

One of the dangers identified in *Evangelii Gaudium* is ‘disjointed doctrines’. Thus far, I have argued that the alternative—doctrinal integrity—requires an approach which not only integrates any given doctrine in a wider framework of church teachings, the hierarchy of truths, and ecclesial and liturgical practice,¹ but which also attends to external factors (Fiorenza’s background theories and Murray’s extrinsic coherence), as well as lived experience (retroductive warrants and pragmatic coherence). I turn now to address a second danger noted in *EG*: the ‘insistent imposition’ of doctrine. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, with regard to the ‘pastorality of doctrine’, this is not simply a matter of changing how doctrine is presented and applied *after* understanding, but is rather a question of theological hermeneutics, concerning who plays an active part in determining the meaning of a text, what factors should be considered in that act of interpretation, and how understanding may be informed by praxis. Developing this line of thought, I suggest that the appropriate alternative to a ‘hermeneutics of imposition’ is a ‘hermeneutics of reception’. Since the

¹ ‘Just as in the case of the *Paradosis* of the Church as a whole, contemporary interpretation of dogmas takes place in and by means of the life of the Church in all its aspects. This happens in preaching and catechesis, in the celebration of the liturgy, in the life of prayer, in service, in the daily witness of Christians, and also in the juridical and disciplinary side of the Church.’ *ID*, § C.III.2.

Second Vatican Council, ‘reception’ has been recognised as a significant theological concept, an ‘ecclesiological reality’ with particular value for conciliar history and ecumenical dialogue.² Rather than dealing with this directly ecclesiological application, however, in this chapter I will engage with the theological-hermeneutical reading of reception developed by the Australian theologian, Ormond Rush, noting particularly how he affords a significance to the effects of the interpretation in terms of renewing the church and the world.³

After briefly introducing Rush’s hermeneutical and theological sources (5.2), I outline how he structures these into a systematic matrix, focussing on the core architectural elements (5.3) and on the dynamics which are entailed in reception (5.4). The contribution which Rush’s model makes to the concept of ‘receptive integrity’ is assessed (5.5). A final section considers the application of reception hermeneutics in contemporary Catholicism, illustrated by the 2014-15 Synods and the subsequent production and reception of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. (5.6). I conclude by introducing the significance of reception hermeneutics for ecumenical dialogue

5.2 Rejuvenating Reception: Ormond Rush

Rush has engaged deeply with questions of interpretation, particularly the reception hermeneutics of Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997),⁴ and the role of the *sensus fidei* in doctrinal

² Yves Congar, ‘Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality’, *Concilium*, 77 (1972), 43–68. (This is an abbreviated version of original French article, ‘La “Réception” come réalitie ecclésiologique’, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 56 (1972), 369-402); also Aloys Grillmeier, ‘The Reception of Church Councils’, in *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress, 1970*, Philip McShane (ed.) (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), pp. 102–14.; also Michael J. Himes, ‘The Ecclesiological Significance of the Reception of Doctrine’, *The Heythrop Journal*, 33.2 (1992), 146–60; also William G. Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); also *Seeking the Truth of Change in the Church: Reception, Communion and the Ordination of Women*, Paul D. L. Avis (ed.) (London: T & T Clark, 2004). More recently, a threefold notion of ecclesiological reception as *suscipere* (‘Christ’s acceptance of us’), *accipere* (‘our reception of the mystery’) and *agnoscere* (‘mutual recognition’) has been proposed in Derek Sakowski, *The Ecclesiological Reality of Reception Considered as a Solution to the Debate over the Ontological Priority of the Universal Church* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2014).

³ I will principally engage with his 1997 monograph, *RD*. Other relevant texts are Rush, ‘Reception Hermeneutics and the “Development” of Doctrine: An Alternative Model’, *Pacifica*, 6.2 (1993), 125–40; *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004); *Eyes of Faith*; ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium* : Expanding the Categories for a Catholic Reception of Revelation’, *Theological Studies*, 78.3 (2017), 559–72; ‘A Synodal Church: On Being a Hermeneutical Community’, in *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence: Hermeneutics, Critique, and Catholic Theology*, Bradford E. Hinze and Anthony J. Godzieba (eds.) (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2017), pp. 160–75.

⁴ The major primary texts available in English are Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Literary Reception*, Timothy Bahti (tran.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Michael Shaw (tran.), (Minneapolis:

reception, interpretation and praxis. His work on reception not only builds on Fiorenza's initial insight into the theological value of Jauss' work, providing the hermeneutical and theological justification which is only sketched in *Foundational Theology*, but also exhibits certain parallels to Fiorenza's model of reflective equilibrium insofar as a dynamic reading and configuration of diverse sources, interpretative communities and sites of reception are essential for an adequate understanding of doctrine and revelation.⁵

In *RD*, Rush specifies his discussion in terms of a 'hermeneutics of doctrine', and both terms are significant.⁶ In choosing to frame his work as hermeneutical, he consciously moves away from the language and conception of 'development of doctrine'.⁷ In describing its scope as 'doctrine' he goes beyond the limited field of 'dogma' in the more restrictive, modern sense. Following Jaroslav Pelikan, Rush employs these terms rather broadly, and I have also followed this approach throughout the present thesis:

Christian doctrine is what the Church believes, teaches, and confesses as it prays and suffers, serves and obeys, celebrates and awaits the coming of the kingdom of God.⁸

This distinguishes his work from that of the language of earlier post-conciliar theologians, as well as the ITC which is somewhat ambiguous in its application of terminology.⁹ At the same time, Rush makes a distinction between doctrine and the wider field of theology, reserving the former to teaching of the Church in diverse forms: 'Doctrine is theology but not all theology is necessarily Church doctrine'.¹⁰ From a Catholic perspective, this removes a potential confusion between doctrine and systematic theology which is not always avoided in Thiselton's writing, and it allows Rush to provide a nuanced account of the relationships

University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, Michael Hays (tran.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). A detailed analysis of Jauss' aesthetics and hermeneutics falls considerably beyond the scope of the present thesis. Rush provides a clear exposition in the first two chapters of *RD*, as well as a selected bibliography. A concise introduction to Jauss and reception can be found in Rush, 'Reception Hermeneutics', pp. 127–31.

⁵ The fruitful influence of Fiorenza on Rush's work is evident in a 1993 essay which introduces reception hermeneutics as an alternative to developmental models of doctrine, as well as in *RD*: Rush, 'Reception Hermeneutics', p. 126. Rush wrote his licentiate dissertation on Fiorenza's theological methodology, wherein 'a name kept cropping up, Hans Robert Jauss, with his notion of reception hermeneutics.', Rush, 'Schillebeeckx's Piercing Inquiry Brought Jesus Alive', *NCR Today*, 19 December 2016 <<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/schillebeeckxs-piercing-inquiry-brought-jesus-alive>>.

⁶ Rush, *RD*, pp. 277–34.

⁷ Rush, 'Reception Hermeneutics'; *RD*, pp. 183–84.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (Yale University Press, 1969), p. 143. Cited in *RD*, p. 181.

⁹ *ID* refers to dogma 'in the strict sense' and dogma 'in the wider sense' at one point (§B.III.2, §B.III.3) but the term is used without qualification in the rest of the document.

¹⁰ *RD*, p. 181.

between differing theologies, theologians and communities of faith, and theologians and the magisterium.¹¹

Rush's doctoral work, published in monograph form as *The Reception of Doctrine* appropriates Jauss' reception aesthetics and literary hermeneutics as background theories to be read in parallel with the recovery of reception as a theological (specifically ecclesiological) category in the work of Alois Grillmeier and Yves Congar. Jauss' significance is as the instigator of an aesthetic theory of reception which incorporates the role of the reader or receiver into evaluating a literary work. By bringing the role of the receiver to the fore, he challenges an essentialist notion of the 'classic' in which a text has an intrinsic value independent of its reception. Jauss maintains that in addition to the two horizons of past author and present interpreter, meaning is conveyed in successive concrete *receptions* of the text. Significant for Rush's appropriation is Jauss' argument that a truly classic work continues to be productive only through the dynamic process of production, reception and communication, not through a pre-formed, essential meaning waiting to be discovered in the text or through an absolutely fixed canon of tradition. As reception occurs in multiple readers and contexts, diverse meanings can be extrapolated from the original text. In different times and contexts, a plurality of interpretations is not only possible but inevitable.¹² Nonetheless, the text and originating horizon exercise a limiting control of the range of possible interpretations. Such a 'pluralising hermeneutic', it is claimed, also has an ethical dimension in contrast to monological or 'singularising' which can literally be deadly.¹³ Both this pluralising dynamic, and Jauss' 'moderate' reader-response approach which maintains that 'the work' involves producer, receiver and object (text) shape Rush's proposal for a theological hermeneutics of reception.¹⁴

The central notion of Rush's hermeneutics is that reception is neither passive nor purely retrospective, but is 'rejuvenating reception' in which the receiver plays a productive role,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 336–50. ; also Rush, *Eyes of Faith*, pp. 175–214.

¹² 'There is no one way of understanding, but only ways of understanding...for to understand is to understand differently and then differently again', *RD*, p. 290.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ 'At one extreme [of a spectrum of views on reception] is the text as an authoritative work which mediates the writers' intention to a receptive reader. At the other extreme is the text as object providing no access to authorial intention. At both extremes, the imagination of the reader is determined...The mid-point of the spectrum I occupied by an intersubjective communication model of reading which guarantees, through the structure and function of imagination, a degree of freedom for the reader in interactions with the authoritative presence of both texts and interpretative conventions...Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss occupy a mid-position in this spectrum', Linda L. Gaither, *To Receive a Text: Literary Reception Theory as a Key to Ecumenical Reception* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 75–77.

and which is oriented towards an expansion of initial horizons.¹⁵ Although he takes the term and insights from Jauss' reception aesthetics, Rush situates his theological adoption of rejuvenating reception alongside the notion of an *aggiornamento-ressourcement* rejuvenation of the Church through the Word and tradition by paying attention to diverse contemporary experiences of church life.¹⁶

A favoured metaphor for rejuvenating reception in this ecclesiological perspective is that of Irenaeus' image of the vessel renewed by the nature of its content: God's active revelation, and the primary object of revelation – the Word.¹⁷ A more recent theological warrant is found in Second Vatican Council, where theology is described as 'constantly rejuvenated' by the Word of God.¹⁸

The potential fruitfulness of reception hermeneutics for theology is first suggested by Fiorenza in *Foundational Theology*, and reception theory has subsequently been applied to biblical hermeneutics and ecumenical dialogue.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the question may be raised, what justification does Rush provide for claiming that reception theory may, *mutatis mutandis*, be applicable to doctrine? He makes twelve arguments for the suitability of this appropriation.²⁰ Most significant for the present question of how the Church may learn from diverse others and be able to change with integrity, are: the interdisciplinary nature of interpretation, and the methodological role of background theories proposed by Fiorenza (#1 in Rush's list); the creative reconstruction of tradition in an interpretative process, rather than the recreation of a pristine object from the past (#2); the analogy of aesthetic experience and faith both in terms of an initial pre-reflective response (#4) and a cognitive evaluation (#6), both of which are influenced by the communities, traditions and experiences in which the interpreter is situated; and finally, the importance of praxis in the receiver's understanding and creation of meaning (#9).

The thrust of Rush's proposal is that reception theory provides hermeneutical *principles* for interpreting doctrine, not only descriptively with respect to historical doctrines and councils, but also prescriptively and therefore with a potential contribution to contemporary

¹⁵ The term recurs throughout RD: as a parallel to Jauss' 'actualising reception', pp.89-95; as a key concept in Rush's own hermeneutics, pp.187-8, 197-9, 203-4, 207-8, 218, 239, 242, 244-5, 247, 249-252, 255-6, 258, 261-3, 266, 270, 294, 309-10, 312, 314, 317, 323-4, 326-30, 337, 340, 342, 349, 351, 359-360, 362).

¹⁶ Rush, *RD*, p. 187.

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.10.2.

¹⁸ DV §24. Rush traces the phrase 'constantly rejuvenated' to a passage in *Humani generis* §21. *RD*, p. 204.

¹⁹ Fiorenza, *FT*, p.118. In biblical studies, David Paul Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009). In respect of ecumenical dialogue—specifically ARCIC—and making use of Wolfgang Iser, rather than Jauss, see Gaither.

²⁰ *RD*, pp. 174–81.

debates.²¹ His argument is, on the one hand, highly systematic, with carefully enumerated components and perspectives for each element of his model. At the same time, it is an approach which stresses plurality and alterity, and acknowledges post-foundationalist concerns. In order to explore this careful and complex model, I will first outline the major *architectural* components of Rush's approach, and then examine in more detail the *dynamics* of his proposal.

5.3 The Architecture of Reception: Diverse Objects, Sites, and Readings

5.3.1 Two Basic Hermeneutical Triads

As Rush makes clear when he comes to apply his theological hermeneutics to the contested reception of Vatican II, two fundamental hermeneutical triads are important in developing principles for interpretation. Philosophical hermeneutics provides the first triad – understanding, interpretation, and application:

These three are inextricably linked but can be distinguished for the sake of clarity. Briefly, we only ever come to understanding because we already have a framework of interpretation out of which we comprehend the meaning of some text or event or person: the new or unfamiliar is understood in terms of the old or familiar. Therefore such an interpretive understanding is already an application to my present context.²²

A second triad, drawn from literary and historical hermeneutics describes the basic elements of a communicative event: 1) the author (producer); 2) the text (message), and; 3) the reader (receiver). For Jauss it is the elements of this communicative triad considered as an integrated whole which form 'the work', and Rush emphasises that all three must be addressed in an adequate hermeneutics.²³ This is underpinned theologically by *Dei Verbum* §12, in which the authors, texts and readers of scripture are bound into a unity in the Holy Spirit.²⁴ Whilst acknowledging the importance of historical-critical methods for understanding authors and texts in their original contexts, Rush's focus is principally on the role of the receiver or reader.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²² Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, x., following Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 306–10.

²³ *RD*, p. 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

5.3.2 Four Objects of Reception

Neither doctrine, nor tradition, nor scripture exists as an absolute foundation for faith. Rather than a series of propositions, the model of revelation elaborated in Vatican II presents revelation as an active *dialogue*: God's self-revealing as the possibility of conversation:

Once one accepts this historical and dialogical nature of ecclesial teaching, such as *Dei verbum*, the dialogue will never end: history goes on, and historical contexts keep on changing. In all of this, the principle of the dialogue itself remains an important new insight of Vatican II.²⁵

This dialogical dynamic is realised in Rush's model as a pattern for the modes and *loci* of reception, but first it is necessary to locate doctrine within this divine-human conversation. Rush is rightly concerned to emphasise the priority of revelation, not doctrinal formulae, and thus relativizes all doctrinal statements within a theological horizon, in much the same way as they are relativized hermeneutically within historical-linguistic horizons. Starting from this principle, Rush distinguishes four objects of revelation, each related to the other and to the ultimate source.

In order to avoid falling into any reductionism, it is necessary to understand the reception of doctrine as a fourfold intersecting process of reception: 1) reception of revelation, God's self-communication, 'the Word', God's revelatory and salvific offer in Jesus Christ; 2) reception of the normative scriptural testimonies to that offer, 3) reception of the multi-dimensional living tradition which transmits that offer, and 4) reception of the church's doctrinal teaching which names the reality of that offer... An adequate reception of doctrine therefore takes place at the intersections between these four simultaneous receptions.²⁶

In carefully distinguishing these four objects of reception Rush has established an intrinsic plurality in the objects under investigation, not simply a plurality of possible readings.²⁷ Apart from the first object (God's revelation), these objects are realised in a plurality of concrete instantiations such as diverse scriptural testimonies across theologies and

²⁵ Lieven Boeve, 'Revelation, Scripture and Tradition: Lessons from Vatican II's Constitution *Dei Verbum* for Contemporary Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 13.4 (2011), 416–33 (p. 425). Also, responding to *Dei Verbum*, Pope Benedict XVI refers to the 'dialogical nature of all Christian revelation': 'Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010' <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html>.

²⁶ *RD*, p. 191.

²⁷ A similar clarification was noted in 3.3 with regard to the diversity of scriptural testimony on justification, before addressing historical and contemporary diversity between Lutherans and Catholics.

denominations, diachronic and synchronic differences in traditions, and a breadth of doctrinal teachings.

To refine the fourth object in the list, doctrine itself can be distinguished not only from the wide field of theology, but also from the narrower specialisation of formally defined dogma. Furthermore, doctrinal *statements*, which are the main focus of Rush's analysis, can be distinguished from other doctrinal media such as liturgy, traditions and praxis.²⁸ A further classificatory dimension—the authority of a doctrinal statement—is not given special consideration in *RD* as Rush argues for a general applicability of the dynamics of reception to all doctrinal pronouncements, regardless of doctrinal weight.²⁹

5.3.3 Twelve Sites of Reception

These objects of *revelation* become objects of *reception* in diverse sites of reception, or *loci receptionis*. At the heart of Rush's model are twelve *loci receptionis* in which the objects of reception may be received. Again, these identify abstract classes, not concrete instances, and especially in the case of dialogue between local church and context, have a wide range of instantiations, including a spectrum of feminist and liberationist concerns. What is significant about this model is that it goes beyond the response of an individual reader to a text, and instead locates reception in a diverse series of *dialogues* set in communal contexts. This emphasis on multiple sites of dialogical reception is one of the elements of Rush's hermeneutics which clearly shows an affinity with Fiorenza's insistence on 'diverse sources' in his foundational theology.

The twelve *loci receptionis* Rush identifies are the dialogues between: 1) God and humanity; 2) God and the whole Christian community; 3) God and the Catholic Church; 4) the *sensus fidelium* of the whole body and the episcopal magisterium; 5) the local church and its context in the world; 6) local churches to each other; 7) churches in communion with Rome; 8) the local church and diverse theologies; 9) theological discussion among diverse theologies; 10) theological discussion and the magisterium; 11) churches and ecclesial communities separated from each other; 12) Christian and non-Christian religions.³⁰ Rush contends that only an interpretation which takes all of these into account can be considered to have the breadth to make a claim for 'what is believed by all, everywhere'. Furthermore such an interpretation can only add 'and always' if it also considers the diverse diachronic receptions and concretizations of the doctrine through history. What a 'nexus' of all twelve

²⁸ *RD*, p. 257.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 325–58. Nine sites of dialogue in the contemporary Catholic Church, which can be mapped to Rush's *loci receptionis*, are explored in Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*.

loci might mean in practice will be considered later in this chapter. For now, the significant thing is to note how these distinctive objects and sites of reception form the initial building blocks of Rush's architecture.

5.3.4 Further Hermeneutical Triads

Two triadic structures used by Rush have already been noted: the 'hermeneutical triad' comprising distinct but interpenetrating activities of understanding, explanation, and application; and a literary or communicative triad describing the inter-related roles of author (producer), work (message) and reader (receiver). A further triad introduced by Jauss and employed by Rush, names three '*historic effects*', or ways in which tradition interacts with history. Firstly, as recognised in *ID* and *ME*, doctrinal statements are formed *in* history in response to particular questions and from the cultural-linguistic horizon of that time and place. Secondly, doctrines *have* a history as they are received, interpreted, re-contextualised and reformulated. Thirdly, and perhaps less obviously, doctrines *affect* history.³¹ In the same way that a classic work of art, say *Hamlet*, affects our store of language, concepts and understanding, so doctrines have an effect on the world in which they are situated. They form modes of thinking and refine language (e.g. in the novel use of *homoousios* at Nicaea, which went beyond secular philosophical use).³² They can initiate religious wars and bring about reconciliation. The history of the Authorised Version of the Bible illustrates these distinctions. As an English translation with roots in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts, as well as early modern translations such as the Tyndale and Geneva Bibles, and being itself developed through several editions, it clearly has a history. In the context of the English reformation, and the political needs of the principal actors, including King James I, the text was affected by historical factors outside of its own boundaries.³³ Finally, considering the impact it has had on the English language—both through original phrases and through presenting idioms from earlier translations as 'authorised'—as well its more directly

³¹ '[W]e can speak of a doctrinal statement, firstly, in its original historical context (the doctrine within history); secondly, of the statement's later receptions in time by the reading public (the doctrine through history, or the history of the doctrine); and thirdly, of the statement in relation to a general history, and thus of the doctrine's capability to change lived experience and affect even general history (the doctrine affecting history).' *RD*, p. 234.

³² On the faith tradition refining language, the ITC states that 'the *Paradosis* incarnates itself in the symbols and languages of all mankind, purifies and transforms their inherent values and inserts them into the whole process of the unique mystery of salvation', *ID* §B.III.1.

³³ See Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611 — 2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

ecclesial influence in the Church of England and further afield, it can be said to have affected history.³⁴

The significance of this threefold historicity for Jauss is that it can help an interpreter to avoid three dangers: (1) historicism or historical positivism which reifies the original horizon, or a later ‘definitive’ interpretation; (2) immanentism which affords the text an ahistorical ability to transcend historical, cultural and linguistic particularity; (3) essentialism which separates form and content and locates the timeless meaning of a work ‘above and beyond its historical expression’ and therefore inaccessible to human interpreters.³⁵

For the purposes of the present study, however, it is two triads relating to the activity of reception which provide the distinctive contribution of Rush’s dialogue with Jauss. Firstly, the hermeneutical triad of understanding-interpretation-application is represented as three ‘readings’: 1) a pre-reflective aesthetic encounter; 2) a reconstructive reading, attending to the original horizon of production, and subsequent receptions by employing background theories such as aesthetic canons, and (3) an applicative reading, which seeks to make the understanding concrete for the interpreter through an ongoing dialogue between interpreter and text, addressing the questions which arose in the first, pre-reflective reading.³⁶ Secondly, Jauss’ reception hermeneutics are rooted in his literary aesthetics, which provide a further triad distinguishing three *senses* which are operative in the act of reception: *poiesis*, *aesthesis*, and *catharsis*. Whilst all of the above triads inform the following analysis, I will focus on this description of three ‘senses’ in order to explore and apply Rush’s hermeneutics, using the three ‘readings’ and three ‘historic effects’ as secondary resources where necessary.³⁷

5.4 The Dynamics of Reception: *Poiesis*, *Aesthesis* and *Catharsis*

Throughout each of the three readings (pre-reflective, reconstructive, applicative), proposed in Rush’s hermeneutics, three ‘senses’ are active, and it is these senses which I want to bring

³⁴ See David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁵ *RD*, pp. 234–38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 315–25, 362–63.

³⁷ Amos Yong discerns a Trinitarian motif to various hermeneutical triads, and develops his own post-foundationalist and pneumatological approach around the triad of Spirit (acts of interpretation), Word (objects of interpretation) and Community (contexts of interpretation) in conversation with both Trinitarian theological hermeneutics (including Rush) and the triadic epistemology and metaphysics of C.S. Peirce, see Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

to the fore, as they address issues raised in the preceding chapters, and lay the ground work for an examination of Receptive Ecumenism.³⁸

In Jauss, *poiesis* refers to the creative role of the reader as a co-producer of meaning in a work of art. Transposing to a theological key, Rush argues that the instinctive faith of the individual *sensus fidei* is an essential part of interpretation, as faith proceeds *ex fide ad fidem*.³⁹ A second sense—*aesthesis*—focuses on the receptive, perceptive action. This involves the application of norms from previous receptions, including interpretative canons (for Jauss, the aesthetic canons of art; for Rush, the sense of faith) as well as other background theories. Rush sees a parallel here with the wider *sensus fidelium* expressed throughout the life of the Church in doctrine, liturgy, art and tradition. The third sense—*catharsis*—involves praxis and ethics. As Jauss rejects the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, and argues for a social, ethical function in production and interpretation, so a theological analogue of this might be ‘no doctrine for doctrine’s sake’. This resonates with Thiselton’s concern to avoid a disjunction between doctrine and life, as well as with key themes in *EG*, and finds expression in Rush’s statement that to ‘proclaim certain beliefs about God is to proclaim a way of life.’⁴⁰

5.4.1 *Poiesis* and Productive Receptivity

In contrast to earlier adopters of reception as a theological category,⁴¹ Rush brings to the fore the active participation of the receiver of tradition (an individual, a community, or the whole church) in the production of meaning:

There is a creativity at the core of a believer’s on-going act of faith which is a reconstructive and reinterpreted imagining ... It is here that the rejuvenating reception of doctrine begins.⁴²

The receiver is not passively contemplative, but rather productive and constructive in the constitution of the doctrine’s meaning.⁴³

³⁸ *RD*, pp. 225–34. For Rush’s overview of this triad in Jauss’ aesthetics, see pp. 70–79. Although as aesthetic categories *poiesis*, *aesthesis* and *catharsis* might be seen as primarily associated with the first pre-reflective phase of the ‘triad of readings’, a careful reading of Rush indicates that these are—in different ways—associated with the entire hermeneutical process ‘at all moments in the continuum from faith through to theology, through to official doctrine and promulgated dogma’ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁹ *RD*, p. 227.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232. See also Thiselton, *HD* p 19–32 on dispositional accounts of belief.

⁴¹ ‘acknowledgement of the poietic dimension has not been make [*sic*] explicit in recent theologies of reception. For example... [J.M.R.] Tillard and [G.H.] Tvard present reception as somewhat passive’. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

Rather than meaning residing in the intent of an author, or a determinate text, a unity is presupposed between the originating horizon of production, the text itself, and the receiver, which *together* form ‘the work’.⁴⁴ In this process, on the one hand, the producer of a work already receives from the tradition, and on the other hand, productive reception of the work both ‘finishes’ the work and gives rise to new interpretations which include new works to be handed on and received in due course.⁴⁵ As Catholic teaching recognises, the canonical gospels are best understood as productive interpretations of experience and tradition, which subsequently became normative for later readers, but which nonetheless constantly need to be received anew.⁴⁶

This is not to say that any interpretation is equally valid; limits are set by the text itself, as well as by historical conditions and background theories affecting producer and receiver. Rush’s use of *poiesis* is best understood as a post-foundationalist commitment, rather than a radically non-foundationalist one, in that it supports a plurality of interpretations but not an unconstrained relativism.⁴⁷ However, it does exclude the notion of continuity found in what Thiel calls ‘prospective’ theories of development, such as form-content essentialism:

Reception is not a passive process in which the object being received can be presumed to be understood (and therefore interpreted and applied) in the same way as it was in its original context.⁴⁸

However, if the reception of doctrine is considered as ‘creative’, is there not a danger of introducing relativism and subjective preferences? Here the value of Rush’s systematic presentation can be seen, particularly in his fundamental questions. What are the objects of reception? What are the sites of reception? Who is receiving? By this multi-dimensional architecture, Rush avoids reifying any single element such as doctrinal statements, recognises the social nature of interpretation, and by virtue of the dynamic tension of diachronic and synchronic plurality of concrete receptions, respects the alterity of God and the possibility of joining the revelatory conversation between God and humanity which

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13, 227.

⁴⁶ *Dei Verbum* § 19. The implications for fundamental theology of this understanding of the gospels as receptions and interpretations is at the heart of Fiorenza’s *Foundational Theology*, which is an influence on Rush’s work. The gospels area thus an example of Rush’s understanding of tradition as signifying both content and process e.g. *RD* p.197.

⁴⁷ ‘Over against the objectivism of foundationalism and the extreme relativism of most forms of nonfoundationalism, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality helps us to acknowledge contextuality, the shaping role of tradition and of interpreted experience, whilst at the same time enabling us to reach out beyond our own groups, communities, and cultures, in plausible forms of inter-subjective, cross-contextual, and cross-disciplinary conversations’. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?: Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 10. On Rush’s implicit adoption of a post-foundationalist approach, see Rush, *RD*, p. 270 n.237.

⁴⁸ *RD*, p. 190.

forms the fundamental *locus receptionis*.⁴⁹ Rush argues for the poietic sense being found particularly in the *sensus fidei* of individual Christians and in the ecclesial *sensus fidelium*.⁵⁰ Practically therefore, a dialogue between the *sensus fidei/fidelium* and other *loci receptionis*—e.g. various theologies, local context, and the universal magisterium—is essential for receiving with integrity.

5.4.2 *Aesthesis*, Recognition and Integrity

In part, the productive reading of a work (including doctrine) is achieved through creating a meaningful whole, locating the work among other works and in the world at large. Here *poiesis* merges with the perceptive sense of *aesthesis*, in which ‘the worldview of the viewer enters the interpretative act’.⁵¹ Although Rush describes *aesthesis* as perceptive and reconstructive, in the light of the previous chapter it can also be thought of as *integrative*. Viewed in this way, *aesthesis* involves reweaving the web through selective recovery and forgetting in order to create a coherent whole – a *gestalt*. Thus in doctrinal interpretation the question is asked:

What is the ‘way of seeing’ (*aesthesis*) contemporary life that would enable believers to construct a meaningful whole of their daily existence?⁵²

The constant activity of receiving doctrines together with prior receptions, lived experience and interpretive frameworks of meaning (e.g. methodologies, canons of rationality) into a usable whole is paralleled in Fiorenza’s broad reflective equilibrium, Murray’s internal, extrinsic and pragmatic coherence, and the dynamics of sedimentation, development and dramatic change in Thiel’s ‘senses of tradition’:

Human horizons of expectation are constantly challenged and provoked in the encounter with divine reality. But such horizons enable understanding to take place. Indeed, understanding could not take place without them. Such horizons include the believer’s religious tradition as well as the current worldview at work in his or her everyday life. Far from being devoid of revelatory value, such ways of seeing are precisely the way in which God continues to reveal God’s self in history.⁵³

⁴⁹ ‘The reality of God is an objective reality that determines the content of belief, albeit experienced interpretively’, *Ibid.*, pp. 231–32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Not only does this find a resonance in Thiselton's argument for discovering the living God in the living world, and echo the instruction to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the gospel (*GS* §§4,11), but it reveals a refined understanding of the role background theories play in broad reflective equilibrium (paralleled, *mutatis mutandi*, in the significance of extrinsic coherence as a test for 'dynamic integrity' in Murray.)

Receptive construction of a *Gestalt* involves not only selection of what is to hand but also recovery of what is obscured, and selective forgetting of unsuitable elements of tradition, including earlier interpretations and applications.⁵⁴ Without this selective retrieval and letting go there can be no creative reception, only mimicry. *Aesthesis* relies both on being embedded in a tradition of existing norms and on being able to extend and overcome them.⁵⁵ Such horizons of understanding form the matrix in which continuity of tradition can be claimed but are nonetheless constantly challenged by the alterity of God, the text and the intersubjective other. It is in the light of this constant challenge of otherness that individual elements may therefore be developed, accentuated, reinterpreted, re-contextualised, overturned or simply quietly forgotten.⁵⁶

5.4.3 *Catharsis* and Receptive Transformation

As explored in the previous chapter, Fiorenza's method of broad reflective equilibrium involves not only integrity with a reconstructed tradition and with relevant background theories, but with retroductive warrants arising from the practical implications of an understanding of the Christian tradition. Similarly, Murray's coherence model includes pragmatic as well as internal and extrinsic coherence. In Rush's appropriation of Jauss, an analogous commitment towards praxis is found in the sense of *catharsis*. A rejuvenating reception is also a 'concretizing reception':

[A] doctrine can be seen as a concretization of the indeterminate schema of Scripture and living tradition, since it concretizes in a particular context what was only virtual in the narratives of scripture and the practice and previous traditions of the living tradition.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50. The desire for a holistic view of any doctrine, in relation to other doctrines, living tradition and the whole life of the Church is evident in *ID* §§C.III.1–C.III.2.

⁵⁵ For example: 'the free, learning comprehension by example' is contrasted with 'the unfree, mechanical following of a rule'; and 'emulation' of a hero as a 'progressive behaviour' is contrasted to the 'regressive' disposition of 'imitation', Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, pp. 110, 159.

⁵⁶ Rush, *RD*, pp. 261–65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

The newness with which rejuvenating reception is concerned has a practical orientation: there is no ‘art for art’s sake’.⁵⁸ For Jauss, *catharsis* indicates new ways of thinking, breaking out of existing horizons of expectation and testing the implication of a work in daily life, eventually resulting in changes to living. Appropriating this, Rush highlights the formative and ethical role of doctrine:

Doctrine too has a social function. To affirm such a function is to affirm the link between theory and praxis, between doctrine and life. To proclaim certain beliefs about God is to proclaim a way of life.⁵⁹

As with ‘no art for art’s sake’, so too doctrine should have as its goal a practical, transformative outcome, not self-replication or preservation. This principle is evident in *EG*:

In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. (§95).

There is pragmatic concern here. Productive, imaginative, reinterpretation and reconstruction is needed in diverse sites of reception in order that the tradition can be *fruitful* in new contexts.⁶⁰ Reception is not merely a link in the chain of tradition, necessary because handing on requires a receiver as well as a giver. Rather, receptive fruitfulness means that tradition continues to have an effect (and therefore a history) in the world. The concern for fruitfulness has a particular significance for receiving with integrity. In *EG*, Pope Francis repeatedly stresses the need for the Gospel to be comprehensible and received: to hold onto a formulation of doctrine which is no longer fruitful is to obscure the gospel itself, and is the ‘greatest danger’.⁶¹

Returning to the image of Irenaeus’ vessel renewed by its contents, it is not doctrine as such which is renewed in rejuvenating reception, but persons and communities. In this sense, reception can be seen as a process of ecclesial learning. Doctrine, like hermeneutics, has a formative dimension, which is clearly brought out in rejuvenating reception. In the act of receiving, communities and individuals come to an understanding of revelation not just through intellectual activity in the Church in the form of propositional doctrinal statements but also through the lived communal praxis.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232. On dispositional account of belief, see Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 19–32.

⁶⁰ *RD*, pp. 213–14.

⁶¹ *EG* §39, 41. ‘The Gospel’ in *EG* plays much the same role as ‘The Word of God’ in Rush’s four object schema.

5.5 Diachronic and Synchronic Plurality

5.5.1 An Alternative to Essentialism

Jauss reacted against literary complacency with a canon of ‘great works’ of literature, identifying in this dominant theory an ahistorical essentialism. Rush brings the same critique to bear on essentialist approaches to doctrine.⁶² Against a sharp form-content distinction, Rush argues along the same lines as Schillebeeckx for the impossibility of separating out a doctrinal essence:

At no stage in that complex process can we speak of an essence of a doctrine nor indeed an essence of Christianity, apart from the rich historical forms of particular communities, within whose lives doctrines function in a particular way.⁶³

Reception hermeneutics, built around an alternative, holistic view of the work comprising author-text-receiver introduces a new dimension into the understanding of continuity:

In rejuvenating reception, no doctrinal ‘content’ takes on new ‘form’. Rather the rejuvenating reception is its meaning, conveying truth within a new horizon of understanding.... The ‘essence’ is not first extracted in order to then clothe it in contemporary clothes. The reconstruction of the answer as the content is the new form.⁶⁴

And even more directly,

[t]he meaning and truth of a doctrine is to be found only in its reception.⁶⁵

In this model, there is no need for undisclosed meaning to endure, in some mysterious way, in the text. Rather the text sets limits to the plurality of possible meanings whilst meaning is produced in the encounter of a receiver with the text. This is not simply in the initial aesthetic encounter, but in subsequent critical and practical readings involving consideration of the context of production and history (reconstructive hermeneutics) and how it answers questions put to it in concrete contemporary situation (applicative hermeneutics). If the receiver is alert to the sense of *catharsis*, they may change their own preconceptions as a result of these answers. This expansion of horizons can be described—metaphorically—as the text questioning the reader.

⁶² *RD*, pp. 255–61.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

What mechanism drives and connects these diverse receptions? Rush finds this in a chain of thought stretching back from Jauss via Gadamer to Collingwood:⁶⁶

To understand doctrine in such a non-substantialist way is to understand doctrine in terms of question and answer...A doctrinal statement in its original formulation is a true answer to a particular historical question.⁶⁷

The full meaning of a doctrine is not restricted to the selected question to which it was an answer in its original context, or in successive receptions. Reconstructive hermeneutics, like, Schillebeeckx's retrospective view, allows a *partial* reconstruction of earlier horizons of expectation and attempts to determine the relevant background theories, prevalent theological models and pressing existential concerns which shaped the question and answer.⁶⁸ But the dynamics of reception also involves applicative hermeneutics, which opens up a 'dialogue' with the text, with a new set of contemporary questions, informed by specific background theories and retroductive warrants from experience, set in the context of the community of faith, discourse and interpretation.

Summarising this in explicitly theological terms, Rush proposes rejuvenating reception as a hermeneutically and theologically coherent alternative to form-content essentialism:

The stability and continuity of doctrine is maintained through the mediation of rejuvenating reception. In ever new situations believers address new questions to their God and to their past. Furthermore, through the stirrings on the Holy Spirit, God address new questions to humanity in their journey through history. Thus newness and the demand for innovation come not only from these ever-changing, diverse situations, but such newness comes from God, through the impulse of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

In Rush's reception hermeneutics, it is the *sensus fidei*, both as a pre-reflective instinct and a conscious reflection according to the canons of doctrine and theology, which provides this continuity. The sense of faith mediates the new through the old.⁷⁰ This leads to an interesting conclusion. Rather than changes in doctrinal understanding being a challenge to the deposit of faith, such 'rejuvenating reception' is essential to maintain continuity with

⁶⁶ On the role of question and answer in understanding, see Thiselton, *HD*, p. 4; also Gadamer, pp. 363–71; also John P. Hogan, *Collingwood and Theological Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 43–70.

⁶⁷ *RD*, pp. 310–11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249. This is strongly resonant with the core of Murray's argument in Chapter 4 of *Reason, Truth and Theology* that 'an authentically Christian theological rationality will be shaped in accordance with the Christian understanding of God as a dynamic interrelatedness of ineffable sustaining source, illuminating self-revealing presence, and generative transforming power that shapes situations in ever fresh yet always consistent performances ("non-identical repetitions") at ever-intensifying levels of expression', Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 135.

⁷⁰ Rush, *RD*, pp. 251, 258.

past receptions, and to claim any plausible, even if fallible, claims to integrity with Tradition. Innovation in this reading is not the enemy of traditional faithfulness but its condition. Conversely, as Pope Francis notes in *EG*, doctrinal formulations and interpretations which remain static and are not changed through re-receptions result in an ecclesial proclamation that is not just ineffective but potentially idolatrous.⁷¹

Compared to theories of progressive development, a strength of reception hermeneutics is that it easily accommodates the partial, selective, nature of interpretative judgements, whereby the Church is involved in a constant dynamic of discerning which themes and elements of the tradition are to be brought forward from its memory and which must recede into forgetfulness.⁷² The weakness with an essentialist view of doctrine, and with a development model of doctrinal change, is that this role of tradition in selectivity and forgetting is itself forgotten. A further weakness in *ID*—and one which Rahner identifies in *ME*—is the pervasive myth of progress and the absence of any possibility of wrong turns, ambiguities or reversals. Rush acknowledges the selective and potentially distorting nature of receptions, and takes this as a warrant for ongoing rejuvenating reception.⁷³ To adapt Murray's terminology regarding dynamic integrity, rejuvenating reception involves recursive but fallibilist *ressourcement* as well as expansive and creative *aggiornamento*.

Finally, canons of judgment are themselves historically conditioned and subject to the same kind of rejuvenating reception, even if they are stable enough for most practical purposes.⁷⁴ In this regard, they perform as background theories according to Fiorenza's model of reflective equilibrium. A significant but easily overlooked insight of Rush's model is precisely this point: the ways in which we interpret and judge integrity and continuity and so on are themselves not 'given' but subject to historicity and contingency, and therefore in need on ongoing interpretation and critical re-reception.

One way to view a history of receptions is as an account of diachronic plurality, albeit in a significantly different way to models which account for continuity through perduring essence and changeable form. Diverse receptions do not only occur across time, however, but also within a synchronic plurality, as Rush indicates by his twelve *loci receptionis*. What, then, can be said regarding plurality among different contemporary communities of interpretation and the possibility of learning from these other receptions?⁷⁵ Here another

⁷¹ 'With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger.' *EG* § 41.

⁷² *RD*, pp. 261–64.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 264–76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

significant concept enters Rush's account: the contrast between singularizing and pluralizing hermeneutics.

5.5.2 A Pluralising Hermeneutics

Odo Marquard, in his 1989 essay 'The question, to what question is hermeneutics the answer?' draws a distinction between singularising hermeneutics and pluralising hermeneutics.⁷⁶ The former is characteristic of dogmatism, seeking the 'one correct reading', 'the absolute text'.⁷⁷ The latter 'traces out many possible meanings and the most various kinds of spirit in one and the same literal form'.⁷⁸ It is a literary practice of *interpretation* which involves discourse around the non-absolute text. In a striking application of what Fiorenza would label a retroductive warrant, and Jauss an extreme application of *catharsis*, Marquard argues that such pluralising hermeneutics arise because the result of singularising hermeneutics can be civil war:

The dogmatic quality of the claim to truth that is made by the unambiguous interpretation of the absolute text can be deadly: that is the experiences of the religious civil wars. When, in relation to the sacred text, two interpreters assert, in controversy, 'I am right; my understanding of the text is the truth, and in fact—and this necessary for salvation—in this way and not otherwise': then there can be hacking and stabbing. Hermeneutics, when it turns into pluralizing hermeneutics, gives an answer to precisely this situation when it asks: Could this text not be understood, after all, in still another way, and—if that is not sufficient—still another way, and again and again, in other ways?⁷⁹

This analysis is adopted by Jauss and by Rush, the latter starkly acknowledging the effect of singularising hermeneutics in the history of the Church, and in the Church's effect on history.⁸⁰ Rephrasing this critique positively, interpretation should be transformative, life-giving, liberative and, in a Christian context, lead to Christ.

Rush's systematic presentation of rejuvenating reception; with its twelve dialogical *loci receptionis* clearly entails a degree of intrinsic plurality. But Rush makes a stronger claim,

⁷⁶ Odo Marquard, 'The Question, To What Question Is Hermeneutics the Answer?', in *Farewell to Matters of Principle*, Robert M. Wallace (tran.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 111–37.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123. He has in mind the European wars of religion, particularly the Thirty Years' War. Rush offers the terse epithet 'Singularising hermeneutics kills', Rush, *RD*, p. 60.

⁸⁰ 'A review of Church history reveals not only the "cruelty of heresy" but also the cruelty of orthodoxy', *RD*, p. 290.

that an adequate hermeneutics of doctrine, based on a reception model, must be a *pluralising*, not a singularising hermeneutics.⁸¹ That is, interpretation of doctrine must not only handle unavoidable plurality, but also resist any unwarranted universalism, and challenge such dogmatic closures as are discovered. Given all of this, how does Rush substantiate his claim to be offering a pluralising theological hermeneutics? In terms of Fiorenza's model of broad reflective equilibrium, Rush endorses a search for retroductive warrants:

A theological hermeneutic which claims to safeguard the truth of revelation must be tested by the way in which it contributes in practice to the building up of God's reign in the world.⁸²

As noted in Chapter 3, John O'Brien affords a certain priority to the pastoral aspect of doctrine because it is 'in the pastoral rather than the doctrinal, that salvation occurs'.⁸³ In Rush's theological hermeneutics an analogous argument for reception, one which gives rise to comprehensive plurality:

What mediated the newness of that once-for-all event [God's act in Jesus Christ] is rejuvenating reception, since revelation is achieved when it is received. Salvation requires reception. Reception is always poetically interpretative and interpretative understanding is as plural as the horizons of human experience.⁸⁴

Of particular note from a Catholic perspective is the recognition that there is not a single community of discourse and interpretation within the church, but a plurality of individual *sensus fidei* and communal expression of a *sensus fidelium*. The *de facto* state of the church is one of plural 'concrete catechisms' at both individual and congregational levels.⁸⁵

However, a significant dynamic in Rush's account of this expansive, pluralizing reception is that it is orientated towards reintegration and wholeness through development of a *consensus fidelium*. Such consensus is neither a static 'reconciled diversity', nor a presumption that truth can be fully obtained, but rather a relative stability, which makes it possible for new questions to be asked of the tradition. In the light of the previous chapter, Rush's reception model for doctrine offers an appropriate hermeneutical counterpart to the recursive,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 288–92. On Jauss' claims for a pluralising hermeneutics and opposition to dogmatism, following Marquard, see *Ibid.*, pp. 53–63.

⁸² *RD*, pp. 288–89.

⁸³ O'Brien, 'Ecclesiology as Narrative', p. 152.

⁸⁴ *RD*, pp. 294–95.

⁸⁵ On 'concrete catechisms', see Karl Rahner, 'What the Church Officially Teaches and the People Actually Believe', in *TI 22* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991) [1981].

expansive catholicity proposed by Murray. The significance of this will be developed in Chapter 6 with reference to Receptive Ecumenism.

5.5.3 Reception and Alterity

Closely related to the intrinsic plurality of rejuvenating reception is a commitment to a hermeneutical role for alterity.⁸⁶ Again, there are both philosophical and theological warrants for this, as Thiselton notes regarding Ricoeur's claim that the narcissistic self cannot see itself truly without engaging the other:

Mere introspection will not breach the barrier of disguise. Genuine hermeneutical engagement with 'the other' may begin to erode this spell of idolatrous self-deception.⁸⁷

As for Thiselton (following Ricoeur), so also for Rush (following Jauss), encountering alterity is essential for the expansion of horizons in the act of interpretation.⁸⁸ In both cases, particular emphasis is given to the *difference* between the horizons of original production and contemporary reception. These horizons are not fused, but differentiated, in such a way that otherness be respected as other – requiring therefore a hermeneutics of alterity.⁸⁹

Even though established canons of interpretation are needed to receive and interpret a work, such reception may nonetheless result in a provocation which challenges established norms and therefore existing readings of both the work itself and other works in the canon. Both the differentiation of horizons and the notion of provocation allow the strangeness of the work to be preserved. We might say that interpretation must be conservative in order to maintain alterity, and innovative in order to maintain continuity, identity and integrity. Rush complements these hermeneutical and ethical perspectives with a theological appreciation of the alterity of God. This both acts as a normative criterion in his hermeneutics and provides the warrant for a reception approach: reception hermeneutics provides 'a most appropriate hermeneutics for safeguarding divine alterity'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Thiselton identifies both reception and alterity as key themes for contemporary theological hermeneutics, see Thiselton, *HD*, pp. 98–115. also, Thiselton, 'Resituating Hermeneutics in the Twenty-First Century: A Programmatic Reappraisal', in *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 33–50. See also Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

⁸⁷ Thiselton, *HD*, p. 85.

⁸⁸ *RD*, pp. 230–31.

⁸⁹ See 2.4.2.

⁹⁰ *RD*, p. 296. Commenting on this argument, Thiselton notes that Rush 'makes an excellent point'. Thiselton, 'Reception Theory, H. R. Jauss and the Formative Power of Scripture', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 65.3 (2012), 289–308 (p. 296).

How does the practice of rejuvenating reception preserve God's alterity? Rush locates this concern for alterity with respect to four principal 'others': 1) the past in relation to the present; 2) the text in relation to the reader; 3) the intersubjective other in relation to the inquiring subject, and; 4) above all, the otherness of God, experienced in our encounter with otherness in the world. Thus,

*God's alterity is immediately experienced mediately through the alterity of past horizons and the alterity of revelation taking place within present experience and the diverse horizons of contemporary reception.*⁹¹

Practically, this involves 'reading the signs of the times and attending to the provocation of the Holy Spirit'.⁹² Through this attentiveness, new questions may be put to tradition as a possible source of an answer to this question, with the goal of expanded horizons and liberating action. In this, alterity acts both as a precaution against premature closure, particularly any attempt to set limits on the offer to humanity, and as a simulating provocation towards expanding understanding through dialogue.⁹³ This sensibility to the other is echoed by a remarkable phrase in *EG*. Speaking of accompanying the other encountered in the world, Pope Francis consciously invokes the image of the mediated immediacy of God in Exodus 3:5.

The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.⁹⁴

How does this constant dynamic of alterity and plurality fit with the stress Rush lays on the *consensus fidelium*? On the one hand, plurality and the need for encounter with the provocative other suggest a major role for dialogue, and indeed that is what is found in Rush's model. The twelve *loci receptionis* are not static points of reference but a collection of 'dialogues'. The unceasing dialogue of question and answer (including 'impudent', 'non-canonical questions') is a means of preserving the alterity of God in our interpretations:

The once-for-all event of revelation in Jesus Christ continues to be experienced precisely within the creative tensions between effect and reception, between tradition and reception, between tradition and innovation, between expectation and experience, between familiarity and provocation, between self-centredness and other-centeredness,

⁹¹ *RD*, p. 300.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁹⁴ *EG* §169, emphasis added. Compare 'The reality of God is an objective reality that determines the content of belief, albeit experienced interpretatively. Reception names the mediation of this immediacy.' *RD*, pp. 231–32.

between self-understanding and understanding the other, between self-understanding and understanding God.⁹⁵

On the other hand, a goal of this dialogue is arriving at a consensus:

Guided by the episcopal magisterium, a *consensus fidelium* concerning the church's belief regarding a particular doctrine is ideally achieved through the dialogue occurring at the nexus of the twelve loci receptionis. This judgment of a consensus, expressed in new doctrinal statements, constitutes a rejuvenating reception of the doctrine.⁹⁶

Does this mean that consensus, as a single agreement or master narrative, is the goal of this 'pluralising' hermeneutics? Is truth therefore assured by agreement between the dialogues of the twelve *loci receptionis*? A number of criticisms could certainly be levelled at such a claim. To begin with, there is an immense practical challenge. What would it look like to be able to say that all twelve sites agreed? In practice, of course, the number of concrete sites of reception is far more than twelve; there are many theological interpretations, many local churches, many situations in the world, and so on. This is the familiar question of how to ascertain the *sensus fidelium*, which I cannot enter into here. In addition to this practical challenge, the notion that consensus is an indicator, let alone guarantor, of truth is controversial. Rescher provides a careful argument to demonstrate that consensus has a limited value as a limited good, but of itself consensus is neither indicative of truth nor an unquestionable ethical goal.⁹⁷

Consensus...is no more than one positive factor that has to be weighed on the scale along with many others.⁹⁸

However, a careful reading of Rush does not support the idea that truth is assured by consensus at the nexus of the twelve sites of reception, but rather that a broad, non-foundational approach is needed to address the inescapably historical and hermeneutical nature of both doctrine and interpretative criteria. Therefore, a number of things can usefully be said regarding Rush's use of consensus as a criterion for responsible reception.

Firstly, the nexus of the twelve loci receptionis is not a static lowest common denominator, but a dynamic dialogue in multiple synchronic and diachronic dimensions. Any consensus that is achieved through this dialogue must reflect this dynamic character:

⁹⁵ Rush, *RD*, p. 295.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁹⁷ See Rescher, *Pluralism*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Sensus fidei alone is no guarantee. Its communal expression in the *sensus fidelium* is to be tested in an ongoing search for the consensus fidelium. *Such a search is never-ending because of the illusive character of any consensus.*⁹⁹

Secondly, therefore, consensus fidelium cannot strictly be seen as a goal in Rush's scheme. The goal remains a dynamic faithfulness to the revelation of God in which mystery and alterity are not only respected but intrinsic. Thirdly, even the proximate goal of dialogue is not consensus as such, but an expansion of horizons. *Consensus fidelium* represents one possible mode of this expansion namely a mode of concretization into a classic formulation. Rather than indicating that truth has been fully disclosed, the dynamic movement towards consensus represents, on the one hand, sedimentation into the tradition, as diverse receptions find expression in a common conceptual language and praxis, and on the other hand, an acknowledgement of the genuine plurality which allowed this new reception to occur. Outcomes other than a new formulation are possible, such as reframing the questions or asking new questions, or discovering the weakness of a particular methodology and needing to develop new interpretive tools and background theories. In the final section, I argue that the 2014 and 2015 synods demonstrate something of this dialogical expansivity.

Fourthly, *consensus fidelium*, even in the broadest sense encompassing all twelve *loci receptionis*, is not a super-criterion which allows us to disregard other principles and criteria any more than a hermeneutical reconstruction of authorial intention or reflections of experience allow the multi-dimensional nature of reception to be overturned.¹⁰⁰ Precisely because reception hermeneutics as a method does not account for the totality of interpretation, it must be in dialogue with other disciplines in what various authors describe as a transversal relationship.¹⁰¹ Partiality also applies to interpretations, which must be selective in order to be fruitful. Finite human interpreters simply do not have the time to take everything into account, nor to critique every possible inherited position. As Marquard

⁹⁹ *RD*, p. 272.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 270, citing Fiorenza.

¹⁰¹ 'Thus, beyond the assistance of philosophy as a dialogue partner, the church looks to the multiplicity of human sciences to provide background theories in its rejuvenating reception of doctrine', *Ibid.*, p. 340. This multi-disciplinary approach is endorsed as 'transversality' by Pope Francis: Pope Francis, 'Address to the Council of Europe', 25 November 2014 <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-consiglio-europa.html>. See also, Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, William Madges (tran.), (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), pp. 85–87, 116. Kasper, notes the presence of this concept 'above all in Enrique Dussel who comes from Argentina'. J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen uses the same term to describe Fiorenza's reflective equilibrium; van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 277–79; *Alone in the World?*, pp. 30–34., in turn drawing on Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 148–79.

notes, *vita brevis*.¹⁰² Consensus—like Thiel’s literal sense—remains a *sense* and continues to develop as new receptions succeed the old,¹⁰³ and the church interprets and interprets again with the teaching office itself situated in a web of dialogic situations.¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, rejuvenation, reconstruction and re-weaving entail not just formulations of doctrine but praxis.¹⁰⁵ Dialogue and learning, rather than consensus emerge as the necessary conditions for approaching truth, and this involves a process which is unceasing and dynamic, only part of which involves the sedimentation of consensus into ‘new formulations’, or classic, ‘literal’ elements of tradition. Although Rush’s description of the consensus ‘reached in the expression of church doctrinal teaching’¹⁰⁶ would seem to be vulnerable to the criticism Tanner makes of Thiel’s apparent prioritising of the literal sense,¹⁰⁷ it is important to remember that Rush does not postulate reception theory as the only element of a hermeneutics of doctrine, or of ecclesial decision-making: it is ‘a model that needs to be supplemented by other models’,¹⁰⁸ nor does he see any such consensus as an absolute end point.¹⁰⁹ The role envisaged for Rush in the notion of ‘receptive integrity’ pursued in the present thesis lies on the ‘receptive’ side, demonstrating the creative, renewing dynamics of reception. Of course, such reception still needs ways of discerning truth; if consensus alone does not determine the adequacy of a particular ‘sedimentation’ into tradition, how can the adequacy of any proposed reception be assessed? I have proposed the coherentist models of Fiorenza and Murray in this regard, using the concept of ‘integrity’. Interpreted together, then, the insights of Rush, Fiorenza, and Murray give substance to an understanding of doctrinal interpretation as orientated towards both *receptive integrity* and *receptive integrity*.

In this regard, Rush draws a challenging and important conclusion from this plurality of method and understanding, highlighting an important methodological commitment to ongoing ecclesial learning in his appropriation of Jauss and is worth quoting in full:

There is no one way of understanding, but only ways of understanding. *Indeed one’s own ways of understanding must necessarily be a changing of perspective and a*

¹⁰² Marquard, pp. 116, 119.

¹⁰³ ‘The literal sense is, of course, a sense of the Church. Its experience and its claims are not timelessly fixed; rather they are continually affirmed in every historical moment.’, John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁴ *RD*, p. 210. Also Gaillardetz, ‘The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives’, in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, Bernard Hoose (ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 95–114.

¹⁰⁵ This is implicit in Rush and Fiorenza, and more explicit in Murray.

¹⁰⁶ *RD*, p298.

¹⁰⁷ Tanner, ‘Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith’.

¹⁰⁸ *RD*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; pp. 184, 259

broadening of one's horizon if understanding continues to occur, for to understand is to understand differently, and then differently again. Therefore just as no one methodology can claim totality of truth and must be open to other methods, so too one way of understanding cannot claim totality of understanding but must remain open to other ways of understanding.¹¹⁰

If the Church were to adopt this position one would expect significant implications for the handling of internal questions of doctrine and practice, interaction with background theories in the world, and ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. Is such a thing possible? What would it look like? Building on Rush's contribution, in the final part of this chapter I examine some potential sites of rejuvenating reception in contemporary Catholicism.

5.6 Putting Reception to Work

Rush suggests that the strength of a reception model is its ability to address four pairs of bipolar tensions: 1) continuity and discontinuity; 2) unity and plurality; 3) clarity and ambiguity; 4) normativity and relativity. In each case, the first term in the pair has historically been valued and sought after in Catholic doctrine and practice, whereas the second term has been largely ignored or even actively avoided.¹¹¹ Rush contends that an adequate and fruitful understanding of tradition requires both poles to be fully engaged, and that reception hermeneutics allows for this by bringing the second term in each pair into play more fully than other models of so-called 'development'. That these issues continue to be live ones for the Church can be demonstrated by, on the one hand, the substantial body of literature regarding the question of continuity and discontinuity in the interpretation of Vatican II, and on the other hand, the appearance of Rush's other three pairs in the strains and stresses in the Church during the 2014-15 Synods and their aftermath, including the promulgation of the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), and the response this received. I will return to this example in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a similar tension is described in more general terms by Thiselton as a dialectic between coherence and contingency, universality and hermeneutical specificity. Ben Quash has also described a tension between the 'given' and the 'found' in a recent book, drawing particularly on Dan Hardy, Peter Ochs and Rowan Williams.¹¹² He

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.290, emphasis added.

¹¹¹ Rush, 'Reception Hermeneutics'. He takes a similar approach towards the hermeneutics of Vatican II, with six dialectical pairs. See Rush, 'Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents', *Theological Studies*, 73.3 (2012), 547–569.

¹¹² Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Quash's approach has a number of points of contact with the notion of receptive integrity being developed in this thesis. As well as a section on Jauss and reception (in which he acknowledges

develops his argument from the important insight that God's revelation is encountered not only in the 'given' (scripture, tradition, 'classic' interpretations, universal concepts and rules, and so on), but in the 'found' – the concrete, contingent specificities of the world, which cannot be specified in advance.¹¹³ The principle Quash derives from this is one which may be particularly challenging for Catholicism, given the historical bias to one pole of the tensions Rush identifies, but which nicely illustrates the warrants for reception hermeneutics:

The premise that each new encounter is to be taken with utter seriousness in its own unique particularity, and *not prematurely universalized or made illustrative of something already familiar*, is a warrant both for theological responsibility...and for pastoral sensitivity.¹¹⁴

While we may accept that 'Revelation has overcome any ambiguity about God's basic intention toward humanity',¹¹⁵ Rush holds it as axiomatic that

[t]he priority of God's revelation is maintained by a theological hermeneutics which gives priority to God's otherness or alterity. But the alterity of God is not preserved by giving priority to some presumed divine answer.¹¹⁶

If the teaching church is also to be the learning church,¹¹⁷ then doctrine—as a concretisation of church teaching—needs to integrate the dialectical pairs outlined above. Without abandoning a concern for truth—indeed *because* of the quest for a fuller appreciation of the truth of the Gospel—doctrinal interpretation would be sensitive to interpretations which prematurely universalise or presume to give a divine answer to an ongoing dialogue.

Rush's contribution to theological hermeneutics), there is an extended reflection on the theological value of abductive reasoning, referencing Peirce and Dan Hardy which has relevance for Fiorenza's use of retroductive warrants.

¹¹³ '[T]he perfection of God's revelation in Christ is not compromised by—indeed, precisely implies—an ongoing historical dynamic whereby, in God, human beings are constantly invited to relate the given to the found. The given come alive only in the indefinitely extended series of encounters with new circumstances, and the Christian assumption ought to be that no new found thing need to be construed as a threat to what has been given, for we have to do with the same God both in the given and the found', *Ibid.*, *xiv.*; also, 'doctrines assume a living, dynamic, ongoing form because God is the living, dynamics, ongoing God', Thiselton, *HD*, p. 63.

¹¹⁴ Quash, p. 18, emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ *RD*, p. 294. On the basic Gospel message which is 'so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent' that it must not be relativised or obscured, see *EG* §194, also *EG* §39.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 296. See also Pope Francis: 'God's word is unpredictable in its power...The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking', *EG* §22.

¹¹⁷ See Pope Francis, 'Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops', 17 October 2015 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html>; also Lash, 'The Church: a School of Wisdom?', in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, Murray (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 63–77.

A recent work on the Eucharist by Thomas O’Loughlin illustrates a number of sites where a singular interpretation now dominates against historical richness, plurality, or fluidity.¹¹⁸ O’Loughlin’s concern is historical and practical, identifying a number of ‘displacements’ between the main elements of Eucharist in the early church (especially as attested in the *Didache*) and current practice and doctrine. These include a shift of focus from thanking the Father to remembering the words and actions of Jesus,¹¹⁹ resulting in an almost exclusively Christological focus to the Mass; developing doctrine around the *material* of bread and wine, rather than the *action* of thanksgiving, eating together, and sharing a single cup;¹²⁰ and on separating sacred and secular ever more sharply,¹²¹ in opposition to an activity which emerges not so much from a foundational event of institution as a reception in the early church of Jesus’ meal fellowship in the context of their own community meals and indeed the basic human instinct for eating and drinking together.¹²² The ringing of a bell following the consecration reinforces the message that *this* is the only interpretation that matters – changing bread and wine by the action of the priest.¹²³ Not only is the possibility of a richer interpretation of the whole activity lost, at least to the majority of participants, but the singularizing narrative forms and reinforces a particular version of Catholic identity, with corresponding implications for ecumenical dialogue.

Turning from liturgical to more doctrinal aspects of interpretation surrounding the Eucharist, a further example of singularising hermeneutics can be seen in the insistence in *Inter Insigniores* of the necessity of a male to represent Christ, ignoring or minimising other ways in which the faithful might recognise Christ in the actions and person of the priest and

¹¹⁸ Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Eucharist : Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–59.

¹²⁰ See especially the contrast between the order and focus of action in the Eucharistic Prayer and the account in Mk 14, *Ibid.*, pp. 180–82.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

¹²² This understanding of the Eucharist as an interpretive reception in the context of existing shared meals stands in marked contrast to the practical instructions for celebrating Mass today: ‘The celebration of Holy Mass is not to be inserted in any way into the setting of a common meal, nor joined with this kind of banquet. Mass is not to be celebrated without grave necessity on a dinner table nor in a dining room or banquet hall, nor in a room where food is present, nor in a place where the participants during the celebration itself are seated at tables. If out of grave necessity Mass must be celebrated in the same place where eating will later take place, there is to be a clear interval of time between the conclusion of Mass and the beginning of the meal, and ordinary food is not to be set before the faithful during the celebration of Mass’, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, ‘Instruction on Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*’, (25 March 2004), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_r edemptionis-sacramentum_en.html>.

¹²³ O’Loughlin, *The Eucharist : Origins and Contemporary Understandings*, p. 182.

the Eucharistic assembly.¹²⁴ Similarly arguments around the 2014-15 synods on whether divorced and remarried Catholics may be readmitted to the sacraments frequently involved not only a particular interpretation of Matt 5:32 and 19:8-12 but also a singularising hermeneutic of the relationship between the Eucharist signifying the marriage of Christ and the Church and the mirroring of that in human marriage.¹²⁵ Whilst such interpretations may be *valid*, it is another thing entirely to apply that interpretation to the practical exclusion of all others. This is the case *a fortiori* for a highly symbolic open text such as the collection of wedding imagery in the Old and New Testaments, which can at best bear analogically, and perhaps only metaphorically, on the matter of human marriages and concrete Eucharistic communities.

Having briefly illustrated some instances of singularising hermeneutics in contemporary Catholicism, I now turn to three sites where the reception hermeneutics proposed by Rush may be a suitable counter-model for ecclesial learning, beginning with the 2014-15 synods.

5.6.1 *Amoris Laetitia* and the 2014-15 Synods

To ensure the somewhat abstract discussion of hermeneutics touches down with concrete questions that arise, it will be useful to consider three areas which have put some of the principles of reception hermeneutics into ecclesial practice. This section looks in some depth at (1) the 2014 and 2015 Synods on the family, and the reception of *Amoris Laetitia*, before briefly noting (2) Rush's theology of the *sensus fidei*, and (3) the role of reception in ecumenical method.

Throughout this thesis I have been reading *Evangelii Gaudium* alongside selected contributions to theological hermeneutics. I have argued that a dynamic model of interpretation coheres with the 'pastorality of doctrine' and missionary outlook of Pope Francis' magisterium. I have also emphasised the significance of Francis' principle that

¹²⁴ The argument is based both on a particular interpretation of scripture, a specific hermeneutic of history in regard to tradition, and an exclusive understanding of how Christ might be sacramentally represented. In all of these cases, singularising hermeneutics can be discerned. The later text, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, focusses on a singularising interpretation of a foundation narrative. Space does not permit a more detailed examination of these texts in the light of reception hermeneutics, but they clearly illustrate the concrete effects of choosing particular hermeneutical strategies. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, *Inter Insigniores*', 15 October 1976 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html>; Pope John Paul II, 'Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*', 22 May 1994.

¹²⁵ E.g., 'there turns out to be a singular relationship between marriage and the Eucharist. However one can only understand this if he [sic] thinks of matrimony in its relationship to Christ and to the Church', Carlo Caffarra, 'Sacramental Ontology and the Indissolubility of Marriage', in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Robert Dodaro (ed.) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), pp. 166–80.

‘time is greater than space’ as underlining an authentically Catholic resistance to premature closure and an encouragement to exploration even when the path of understanding is unclear. In short, I have tried to show that *EG*, whilst not directly concerned with doctrinal hermeneutics in the way that *ID* and *ME* are, nonetheless demonstrates a sensitivity to hermeneutical issues. This is particularly evident in *EG*’s emphasis on listening and concern for the practical application of doctrine, both of which are defining characteristics of a hermeneutical approach to doctrine according to Thiselton’s analysis which I examined in Chapter 2, and which are evident in reception hermeneutics. Developing this line of thought in the light of Rush’s work, I suggest that the merits of reception hermeneutics can be seen not only in abstract principles but in the ecclesiological practice of the present papacy. Pope Francis is doing new things, and it is reasonable to expect that these new things need new theoretical resources to aid theological reflection. Here the gaps in earlier models of development and interpretation which are addressed by Rush become particularly relevant.

This can be illustrated by considering the 2014-15 synods and, in particular the post-synodal exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. In the case of *AL*, not only does the document align itself to a number of principles familiar to reception hermeneutics, but the process of its production and subsequent reception models the kind of approach Rush has proposed. I will highlight three areas which suggest that Francis’s ‘pastorality of doctrine’ shares many of the concerns and tactics of reception hermeneutics, and which reception hermeneutics may therefore be useful in understanding and applying more fruitfully.

Firstly, both *AL* and the praxis of the Synods grant a priority to ‘questions that arise’, not timeless ‘problems to be solved’.¹²⁶ Evidence for this can be found in the synodal process itself, perhaps most strikingly in the difference between the questions issued in the preparatory document for the 2014 Synod¹²⁷ and the *lineamenta* for the 2015 Synod, based on the discussions arising in 2014.¹²⁸ When the preparatory questions for 2014 were issued

¹²⁶ The importance of this principle in Thiselton’s hermeneutics of doctrine has already been noted. In the light of the previous chapter, and to anticipate the next chapter, it is significant that the same principle is at the heart of Murray’s conception of the theological task: ‘theology as critical and constructive reflection on the practice and understanding of faith, and on the questions, issues, and difficulties raised there, with a view to enhancing and renewing the quality of such practice and understanding... Here theology is understood to be geared towards the rigorous, systematic identification and diagnosis of the various questions, difficulties, and dissonances thrown up by Christian practice and belief.’, Murray, ‘Engaging with the Contemporary Church’, in *The Routledge Companion to the Practice of Christian Theology*, Mike Higon and Jim Fodor (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 278–92 (p. 279).

¹²⁷ Synod of Bishops, III Extraordinary General Assembly, ‘Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Preparatory Document’, 2013 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-assemblea-sinodo-vescovi_en.html>.

¹²⁸ Synod of Bishops, XIV Ordinary General Assembly, ‘The Vocation and the Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World, *Lineamenta*’, 2014 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html>.

as a questionnaire, there was much criticism regarding the technical, ecclesial language, but the more fundamental issue is the methodological horizon revealed in the questions. To borrow Thiel's terminology, the questions are posed prospectively, from an apparently secure foundational knowledge of revelation expressed in doctrine whereby any application or development will be seen to be already implicit in the formulated tradition. In hermeneutical terms, the 2014 Synod started out with a 'priority of the answer' in which Church teaching metaphorically issues questions to the faithful (e.g. how well is natural law understood; how can the birth rate be increased?). Such an approach is contrary to the insights of Gadamer and Jauss, and the corresponding theological application to doctrine by Thiselton and Rush. A pluralising hermeneutics, it will be recalled, relies on this logic of question and answer.

In the light of reception hermeneutics, I propose that this preparatory document for the 2014 synod can be read as prioritising existing (often generalised or abstract) answers and therefore disclosing a singularizing hermeneutics concerned with fitting experience into an existing narrative and a pre-formed horizon of understanding. In contrast, the *lineamenta* for 2015 moves the priority towards the actual questions which arise in concrete experience. Both the structure and the content of the later document reflect this shift, as can be illustrated by considering 1) the questions asked; 2) the language used in respect of 'irregular' situations, and; 3) the way in which *Humanae Vitae* acts as a point of reference.¹²⁹

Thus the questions for 2014 begin with a section on 'The Diffusion of the Teaching of the Family in Sacred Scripture and the Church's Magisterium', followed by 'Marriage according to the Natural Law' before going onto issues of pastoral care and education. *HV* is explicitly mentioned in the context of 'the openness of the married couple to life.'¹³⁰ Throughout, the language is negative, repeatedly referring to obstructions, difficulties, and crises. The priority of the (pre-formed) *answer* is evident from the fact that in the document these obstructions are most frequently associated with a deficient reception or formation in the faithful.

In contrast, following the synodal dialogue, the questions for 2015 are explicitly posed in the context of 'life's periphery'¹³¹ and the 'questions arising' from the dialogue.¹³² The

¹²⁹ Pope Paul VI, 'Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth, *Humanae Vitae*', 25 July 1968 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html>, henceforth *HV*.

¹³⁰ 'What knowledge do Christians have today of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood? Are they aware of how to morally evaluate different methods of family planning?...What natural methods are promoted by the particular churches to help spouses put into practice the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*?', (*Preparatory Document*, questions 7a and 7c).

¹³¹ *Lineamenta*, 'Questions Aimed at a Response to an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi*', Part I

structure of the questions follows a pattern associated with the pastoral cycle and a ‘see-judge-act’ method: ‘Listening’; ‘Looking at Christ’; ‘Confronting the Situation’. The basic similarity of this with the three readings of initial perception, reconstructive hermeneutics and applicative hermeneutics in reception hermeneutics need not be laboured, but it clearly marks a different starting point to problematizing why the answers provided by the magisterium are not being put into practice by the faithful.¹³³ The language used throughout these questions also differs from the preparatory document. Like *EG*, it focusses on attraction, expansive growth and fresh reception of the gospel. Separated, divorced and single-parent families are treated not as ‘irregular’ but ‘wounded’. The language reflects a shift in the horizon of interpretation from a juridical perspective to a pastoral one. Rather than giving a definitive rule on contraception, *HV* is relativized as a particular concretization of one possible answer to the question ‘how can the beauty and dignity of becoming a mother or father be promoted?’¹³⁴ Finally, the questions are formed with an orientation towards change, towards an expansion of horizons. Rather than problematizing the response of the faithful, the recurring question is how the Church can make the gospel more attractive and support those who are struggling.

How is this change brought about? The *lineamenta* suggests that this orientation is a result of how Francis has exercised his primacy and magisterium.¹³⁵ This is affirmed by the attention given in *AL* to concrete situations and questions that arise, not abstract doctrinal problems. Richard Gaillardetz’ description aligns neatly with Thiselton’s identification of the fundamental challenge for the contemporary relevance of doctrine:

Pope Francis is a pastor who recognises church leadership’s past tendency to offer eloquent, confident and authoritative answers to questions no-one is really asking.¹³⁶

¹³² *Lineamenta*, ‘Questions Aimed at a Response to an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi*’, Part II

¹³³ A parallel pattern can be observed in Murray’s reading of theological rationality in the light of the ‘essentially interwoven character’ of Christian discipleship in the dynamics of: ‘faithful attendance to the reality of things as held in being by God the sustaining source of all that is; hopeful discerning of creative possibilities in the light of the ever fresh yet constant patterning of God’s self-revealing truth and loving enactment of certain of these possibilities inspired by the generative and transforming power of God.’, Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 135–37.

¹³⁴ *Lineamenta*, q.41

¹³⁵ ‘The path of renewal delineated by the Extraordinary Synod is set within the wider ecclesial context indicated by Pope Francis in his Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*’ (*Lineamenta*, ‘Questions’ Part I, before q.1); ‘Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, the Church looks to Christ in his enduring truth and inexhaustible newness’ (*Lineamenta*, ‘Questions’, Part II, before q.7); ‘Aware of the obvious limitations and imperfections present in many different situations, the synod fathers assumed the positive outlook indicated by Pope Francis’ (*Lineamenta*, ‘Questions’ Part II, before q.20)

¹³⁶ Gaillardetz highlights that some form of the word ‘concrete’ is used 20 times in *AL*. See Gaillardetz, ‘In the Service of the People’, *The Tablet*, 16 April 2016, pp. 6–7.

Francis, indeed, is aware of the pragmatic consequences of ‘solving problems’ rather than dealing with ‘questions that arise’ regarding the topic under discussion:

At times we have proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situation and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization...has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.¹³⁷

On this point, the shift in method could hardly be more emphatic.¹³⁸ It is not just a question of methodological starting point, but also the methodological end point which is significant in reading *AL* alongside reception hermeneutics. In dealing with ‘irregular situations’ including the controversial question of admission to the Eucharist for divorced and remarried Catholics, Francis resists any attempt to define the precise cases where use of the internal forum might lead to re-admission to the sacraments. This cannot be read as simply reinforcing the *status quo* – to do so would be to ignore the repeated and nuanced attention Francis gives to this topic; but neither does it represent a change to a new, predetermined, juridical doctrine, which would be to replace one singularising hermeneutic with another. Rather, Francis insists on the irreducible significance of the concrete application, an application which cannot be classified in advance but which emerges through intersubjective dialogue within the community of interpretation (the pastor and the individuals) paying attention to the concrete situation and its implications (e.g. care of children) and a careful reading of tradition which emphasises the alterity of the text (looking through Christ’s eyes).¹³⁹ To appropriate Quash’s comment on the found and the given, we might say that the Pope is exercising the Petrine ministry precisely in virtue of resisting a premature universalising or explaining something in terms of what is already assumed to be understood. The example given here is a very specific *locus receptionis*, but it is reception of doctrine nonetheless, a reception which includes perceptive listening (*aesthesis*), creative reception (*poiesis*), and transformative application (*catharsis*).

The direct influence of the Pope is not the only factor to consider. A second area of interest is the application of a pluralising hermeneutic *in the synodal process*. Listening to the actual questions which arise is an exercise in discerning the *sensus fidelium*, without attempting to reduce the process to achieving a simple consensus. Kasper describes the

¹³⁷ *AL* §36. See also *AL* §201.

¹³⁸ E.g. the instruction given to bishops’ conferences in the *Lineamenta* to ‘avoid, in their responses, a formulation of pastoral care based simply on an application of doctrine, which would not respect the conclusions of the [2014] Extraordinary Synodal Assembly and would lead their reflections far from the path already indicated’, *Lineamenta*. This shift from an application of doctrine to a hermeneutics informed by the lived experience of families is also noted in Cupich, ‘*Amoris Laetitia* as a New Paradigm of Catholicity’.

¹³⁹ *AL* §78.

Synodal process as ‘a process-oriented, dialogical style, in which the entire people of God should be involved...[It is] a matter of communal listening to what the spirit is saying to the communities’.¹⁴⁰ Continuing the pneumatological significance of hearing different voices, the synod recognised a ‘multiplicity of charisms, not a closed system with single immanent point’.¹⁴¹ The German language group (including Kasper, Christoph Schönborn, Gerhard Mueller and Reinhard Marx) disqualified a ‘one-sided deductive hermeneutic which subsumes concrete situation under a general principle’.¹⁴² On certain aspects of the doctrine of marriage, at least, there was a rejection of singularizing hermeneutics.

But is this a genuinely pluralist hermeneutics, or does it simply confirm Marquard’s criticism that dogmatic interpretations subsume diversity into a dominant master narrative? There are at least two indications that the 2014-15 process represents in part, a Catholic attempt at a pluralising hermeneutics. Firstly, there is the inclusion of diverse voices and allowing them to be heard. Not only was freedom of speech (*parrhesia*) encouraged in the synod itself but the divergent interpretations were reported, both informally through press briefings, and formally in the various synod documents, particularly the *relatio* and the publication of voting figures in the interim report. Even in *AL*, dialogue and discernment, rather than consensus is valued.¹⁴³ As is evident in *EG* and elsewhere, Francis sees the need for a dialogue involving multiple perspectives as the best way to discern truth,¹⁴⁴ not indeed through compromise or synthesis, but through expanding horizons.¹⁴⁵ This unity in diversity

¹⁴⁰ Kasper, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, p. 51.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁴² An English translation of the German language report is available at <<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/justice-and-love-come-together-god>>. On the significance of this contribution, see Luigi Gioia, ‘The Recent Practice of Synodality and Its Ecclesiological Significance in the Light of Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*’ (presented at the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, 2016), pp. 12–14 <https://www.academia.edu/25532592/The_Recent_Practice_of_Synodality_and_its_Ecclesiological_Significance_in_the_Light_of_Pope_Francis_Evangelii_Gaudium>.

¹⁴³ See for example the references to ‘a large number of’ or ‘many’ Synod Fathers in *AL* §244, §299, suggesting a lack of complete consensus.

¹⁴⁴ This dialogical transversality echoes a coherentist understanding of truth, as modelled in Murray’s ‘dynamic integrity’, and in diverse models of reflective equilibrium found in Rawls, Fiorenza, and others. See 4.2-4.3.

¹⁴⁵ Writing as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, in language which anticipates *EG* §226-230, Francis connects diversity and journeying with reconciliation through an expansion of horizons not a compromise: ‘The two poles of tension are resolved at a higher level, looking towards the horizons, not in a synthesis, but in a new unity...There is a quote from a German Lutheran theologian, Oscar Cullman, that refers to how to bring together the different Christian denominations. He says we should not seek that everyone, from the outset, affirm the same thing, but instead he proposes that we walk together in a reconciled diversity...It is the way of advancing the resolution of a conflict with the virtues of all.’ See: Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Abraham Skorka, *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, Alejandro Bermudez and Howard Goodman (trans.), (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 217–18.

is represented in his image of a polyhedron¹⁴⁶ or a multifaceted gem.¹⁴⁷ According to Kasper, the significance of this is not just as a suggestive image but as a deliberate change from traditional notions of concentric circles with the Catholic church at or near the centre to an endorsement of the ecumenical ‘unity in diversity’ model associated with Oscar Cullman.¹⁴⁸

Secondly, this plurality of perspectives is not a matter of simply re-clothing a doctrinal core in new cultural-linguistic garments. Francis describes it precisely as a matter of interpretation and application, involving local sites of reception and openness to new questions and horizons of understanding:

Since ‘time is greater than space’, I would make it clear that not all discussion of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth.¹⁴⁹

There is a two-way movement here involving receptive plurality: many voices must be heard to determine a *sensus fidelium*. But any such consensus from these diverse voices must immediately be received in a plurality of situations through a plurality of interpretations, which contributes to an ongoing dynamic of dialogue, interpretation, production, reception and application. There is thus a constant dynamic of production and reception involving multiple dialogues (Rush), multiple criteria (Fiorenza, Murray) and multiple senses (Thiel) in which a dynamic equilibrium between diverse factors, set within expanding horizons, must be discerned. This suggests the pluralist, recursive, expansive, fallibilist orientation which characterises the pursuit of dynamic integrity in Murray’s theological methodology.¹⁵⁰

The notion of ‘synodality’ itself, as Francis uses it, can in fact be seen as a productive reception. Prior to recent use by Pope Francis, it is largely used as a synonym for ‘collegiality’, particularly in the context of relationships between Petrine primacy and the college of bishops.¹⁵¹ Francis’ use of this term is a receptive *poiesis*: it creates a new space

¹⁴⁶ *EG* §236

¹⁴⁷ *AL* §4

¹⁴⁸ Kasper, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, pp. 56–58.

¹⁴⁹ *AL* §3. See also Michel de Certeau: ‘The “proper” is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for “opportunities”... Whatever it wins, it does not keep’, de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. xix.

¹⁵⁰ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 152–60.

¹⁵¹ See Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 270. Kasper makes a case for a ‘Synodal principle’ in the Church which resonates with Francis’ desire for a ‘Synodal church’. In both cases, this principle arises out of an understanding of the Church as communion. Francis is however more explicit on the role of the lay faithful and the

within which dialogue and praxis may happen. It is an aesthetic move too, in that it examines the tradition and present reality and weaves a meaningful whole. In particular, Francis produces (or creatively recovers) a new and effective meaning for synodality through locating the notion not just in relation to the college of bishops but to the action of the Holy Spirit in the *sensus fidelium* in all the faithful, and to the pilgrim people of God ‘walking together’.¹⁵² In addition to Francis’ recognition of the term in Cullman, the ARCIC statement, *The Gift of Authority* makes use of an all-encompassing sense of synodality along these lines as something distinct from (episcopal) collegiality.¹⁵³ The image of a pilgrim people walking together integrates both Vatican II ecclesiology and the expansive horizons of ‘time is greater than space’.¹⁵⁴ In this approach, questions are not closed prematurely, from a prospective knowledge but are uncovered through journeying – each interpretation gives enough light to journey on, but not to light the whole landscape ahead.¹⁵⁵ In the light of reception hermeneutics, the notion of synodality which comes to the fore in Francis’ teaching and actions can be seen as a creative reception of a meaningful whole from existing

dynamic, horizon-expanding nature of synodal dialogue. Examples of earlier use of the notion in Papal and Vatican documents can be found, *inter alia*, Pope John Paul II, ‘Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Gregis*’, (16 October 2003), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis.html>; see also, International Roman Catholic-Old Catholic Dialogue Commission, ‘The Church and Ecclesial Communion’, 1982 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/vetero-cattolici/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20090512_report-church-ecclesial-communion_en.html>. A wider sense of synodality starts to emerge in the Ravenna document where synodality still ‘primarily denotes a gathering of bishops exercising a particular responsibility. It is also possible, however, to take the term in a more comprehensive sense referring to all the members of the Church (cf. the Russian term *sobornost*)’, Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, ‘Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority, (“The Ravenna Document”’, (13 October 2007), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20071013_documento-ravenna_en.html>.

¹⁵² In addition to *EG*, key texts for Francis’ understanding of synodality include: Francis, ‘Synod of Bishops 50th Anniversary Address’; also Pope Francis, ‘Homily for the Closing Mass of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family’, 19 October 2014 <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141019_omelia-chiusura-sinodo-beatificazione-paolo-vi.html>; also Antonio Spadaro, ‘Interview with Pope Francis’, 19 August 2013 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html>.

¹⁵³ ARCIC II, ‘The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III (1999)’, in *Looking towards a Church Fully Reconciled: The Final Report of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)*, Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky, and Charles Sherlock (eds.) (London: SPCK, 2016), pp. 127–76.

¹⁵⁴ Significant in this regard is the first agreed statement in the third phase of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Commission is entitled *Walking Together on the Way: ARCIC III, Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*. (Erfurt, 2017) <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20180521_walking-together-ontheway_en.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ *Lumen Fidei* §57 According to Kasper, an addition which ‘certainly derives from’ Francis rather than Benedict XVI, with the latter authoring or approving the bulk of the encyclical, Kasper, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, p. 20.

elements of the tradition – communion, collegiality, and *sensus fidelium*, as well as through ecumenical learning. It is a creative application of the ecclesiology of Vatican II – the pilgrim Church whose medicine is mercy. Furthermore, Francis, like Rush, is alert to the Word of God being received, in the Holy Spirit, in many different *loci receptionis*, as illustrated in his address on the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, held during the 2015 Synod:

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).¹⁵⁶

The emphasis on listening, dynamic movement together towards understanding, and the involvement of the whole Church in both interpreting revelation and learning from the other suggest that a reception model is a particularly appropriate hermeneutical resource for use alongside a synodal ecclesiology in the sense employed by Pope Francis.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps most significantly, interpretation of doctrine and traditions is seen as fundamentally dialogical. Francis’ principles for the practice of dialogue within marriage might indeed be read as a model for dialogue within the Church.¹⁵⁸ The model of interpersonal dialogue envisaged by Francis parallels the logic of question and answer involving the whole community proposed for theological hermeneutics by Rush, Thiselton and others. These principles could be fruitfully applied within several of Rush’s dialogical *loci receptionis*, not least in ecumenical dialogue, to which I will return. Even more striking than the evidence from the text and the synod for hospitality to reception hermeneutics, however, is the after-life of *AL*: its own reception.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Francis, ‘Synod of Bishops 50th Anniversary Address’. A striking number of Rush’s *loci receptionis*, including the role of the *sensus fidelium*, are emphasised in this address.

¹⁵⁷ Two recent essays by Rush, focussing on the *sensus fidei* and synodality, illustrate the resonance between synodality and (hermeneutical) reception: Rush, ‘The Church Local and Universal and the Communion of the Faithful’, in *A Realist’s Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph A. Komonchak*, Christopher Denny, Patrick Hayes, and Nicholas Rademacher (eds.) (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015), pp. 117–30; ‘A Synodal Church: On Being a Hermeneutical Community’.

¹⁵⁸ *AL* §136-141. The principles may be summarised as: 1) Take time to listen (§ 137); 2) Respect the perspective, truth and concerns of the other (§138); 3) Keep an open mind and choose words with care (§ 139); 4) Demonstrate affection and love for the other (§140), and; 5) Engage in depth, not superficially (§ 141).

¹⁵⁹ A useful paper setting *AL* in context of the Synod and post-conciliar teaching, through a careful analysis of its structure, style and sources is Gerald O’Collins, ‘The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*): The Papal Exhortation in Its Context’, *Theological Studies*, 77.4 (2016), 905–21.

5.6.2 The Reception of *Amoris Laetitia*

Massimo Faggioli, commenting on the Synod and the reception of *AL*, notes that there are two competing hermeneutics in use.¹⁶⁰ One looks for precision, classification and universal answers to be taught. The other is concerned with dynamic growth and learning, specific cases and productive receptions and interpretations in different communities and contexts. They entail different commitments to hermeneutical method, at least partly along the lines of a singularizing and pluralising hermeneutics and certainly reflecting the tensions between contingency and coherence, hermeneutics and system, identified by Thiselton as a challenge for any hermeneutics of doctrine. Pope Francis' commitment to interpret doctrine in the concrete circumstances of life can be seen in his refusal to answer the *dubia* raised by a group of four disaffected cardinals who pressed for clarifications in *AL*.¹⁶¹ More positively, it is evident in his approval of the Argentine Bishops' proposal for accompaniment and discernment where readmission to the sacraments is not a question to be decided by a general abstract law, but a possibility, to be discerned in dialogue of concrete situations, responding to specific warrants, such as care of children.¹⁶²

In an interview shortly after the publication of *AL*, Cardinal Schönborn, whose interpretation Francis has endorsed on several occasions, and who was appointed to present the text of *AL* in April 2016, describes the approach adopted in the Synod and the exhortation as a 'broadening of perspectives' – in hermeneutical terminology, an expansion of horizons.¹⁶³ This is illustrated by the way *AL* qualifies references to 'irregular' and 'regular' marriage situations, prefixing these terms with 'so-called' or wrapping quotation marks around the qualifying adjectives. Schönborn identifies this as Francis changing the horizon of understanding, going 'beyond the categories of "regular" and "irregular" and focussing instead on the need for conversation and growth in all the *viatores*- "travellers"'. Again, this is an example of Francis's principle that time is greater than space. Rather than

¹⁶⁰ Massimo Faggioli, 'A Non-Synodal Reception for a Post-Synodal Exhortation', 12 July 2016, available at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/non-synodal-reception-post-synodal-exhortation>.

¹⁶¹ See Louis J. Cameli, 'Pope Francis Still Hasn't Responded to the Dubia. He Has Good Reason Not To', *America*, 5 January 2017 <<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/01/05/pope-francis-still-hasnt-responded-dubia-he-has-good-reason-not>>.

¹⁶² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, CVIII, 10 (7 October 2016) <<http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/2016/acta-ottobre2016.pdf>>.

¹⁶³ Antonio Spadaro, 'The Demands of Love: An Interview with Cardinal Schönborn on "The Joy of Love"', *America*, 215.4 (2016), 23–27. According to Massimo Faggioli, Schönborn 'offer something very close to the authentic (even though not official) interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia*', Massimo Faggioli, 'A Non-Synodal Reception for a Post-Synodal Exhortation', *Commonweal*, 12 July 2016 <<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/non-synodal-reception-post-synodal-exhortation>>.

classifying, he is concerned to journey onward. Schönborn confirms the concern for questions which arise and the rejection of ‘abstract pronouncements unconnected with the subject’. Doctrine is not relativized, in refusing to apply general laws at the level of discipline, but is received into diverse situations of praxis and opportunities for growth. A living interpretation means having ‘to draw a distinction between the continuity of doctrinal principles and the discontinuity of perspectives or of historically conditioned expressions.’¹⁶⁴

Reading this in the light of Rush’s work, we can say that whilst Francis does not explicitly adopt concepts and language from Jauss and Rush, he is nonetheless radically implementing a hermeneutics of reception *in practice*, not only in regard of received content but also in rejuvenating process. At one level, as interpretation requires application, so there is always a role for the receiver, but by being attentive to the tension between the universal and the local, and thereby insisting on the *intrinsic* need for reception by bishop’s conferences, pastors and individuals in their specific contexts, Francis is applying a rich understanding of reception, as productive, not passive. Viewed in the terms of Fiorenza’s reflective equilibrium, this is achieved through reconstructive hermeneutics,¹⁶⁵ attention to background theories,¹⁶⁶ the concrete existential warrants from experience used to discern a meaningful application of interpretation and doctrine (e.g. in considering the new spouse and children),¹⁶⁷ and in the role of diverse communities of discourse in a synodal church, allowing the voices of all the faithful to be heard.¹⁶⁸

5.6.3 Hermeneutics, Reception and Ecumenism

While the ‘Synod in two acts’ and the reception of *Amoris Laetitia* demonstrates a receptive instinct at work in the pastoral interpretation and application of doctrine in the contemporary Church, Rush himself has shown how fruitful a deliberate theological application of reception hermeneutics can be. For example, in assessing the interpretation and reception of Vatican II, he brings the triad of author-text-receiver to bear on the contested question of the correct interpretation of the Council and moves beyond polarisations of continuity/reform,

¹⁶⁴ Spadaro, ‘Demands of Love’, p. 23.

¹⁶⁵ E.g., the exegesis of Corinthians in *AL* §§90-119 and especially the reconstructive, re-contextualizing exegesis in *AL* §185-6.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., the use of Aquinas in *AL* §304. Commenting on *AL* Cardinal Schönborn talks of an ‘evolution...in the church’s perception of the elements that conditions and that mitigate, elements that are specific to our own epoch’, Spadaro, ‘Demands of Love’, p. 24.

¹⁶⁷ *AL* §298

¹⁶⁸ Francis, ‘Synod of Bishops 50th Anniversary Address’.

letter/spirit and the like by focussing on the wholeness of the ‘work’.¹⁶⁹ Alongside more general questions of how to understand the Council as an event, Rush has developed a substantial theology of the *sensus fidei*, which builds on the distinctive insights on this topic in *RD*. This has proved capable of bringing a range of important theological perspectives into a constructive and practically-oriented whole.¹⁷⁰ In several important ways, Rush anticipates concerns which have been brought to the fore through *EG* and *AL* using a rich notion of reception which incorporates both hermeneutical and theological precedents at the heart of a theology of the sense of faith.¹⁷¹

In comparison, the ecumenical potential of receptive hermeneutics has received rather less attention. Rush summarises a range of research questions to be addressed in *RD* as follows:

In other words, does reception aesthetics and its literary hermeneutics give any insight into present ecumenical dialogue with ‘the other’?¹⁷²

He subsequently makes some strong claims: that the ‘creative, innovative, ecclesial activity’ of rejuvenating reception, above all, ‘has implications for processes of dialogue and the discovery of truth within the Church and between the churches today’,¹⁷³ and that a hermeneutics of reception delivers the ecumenical hermeneutics desired by Tillard, Wainwright and others, because it is a pluralising hermeneutics of alterity.¹⁷⁴ In this chapter I have attempted to show that Rush does indeed deliver a pluralising, rejuvenating, hermeneutics of alterity. He also applies it ecumenically in considering ‘reception between separated churches and ecclesial communities’ as a *locus receptionis* involving: 1) the reception of ecumenism itself by the Catholic Church; 2) reception of the receptions made by the other church in regard to the Word, Scripture, tradition and doctrine; 3) reception of

¹⁶⁹ Rush, ‘Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents’; also, Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*.

¹⁷⁰ See Rush, *Eyes of Faith*; Rush, ‘Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church’, *Theological Studies*, 78.2 (2017), 299–325.

¹⁷¹ Rush, *Eyes of Faith*, pp. 8–11. In summary, these are: 1) as a root metaphor representing ‘human relationships, communication, interaction and learning’; 2) spiritual (religious) reception; 3) juridical reception, ‘understood as the canonically required assent to a teaching by the magisterium’; 4) theological reception involving theologians and their communities; 5) approbative reception – the judgement of the whole Church of particular spiritual, juridical or theological reception are faithful to revelation; 6) literary reception; 7) intra-ecclesial reception; 8) ecumenical or inter-ecclesial reception; 9) a general hermeneutical sense, referring to the interrelated moments of understanding, interpretation and application. A number of these are clearly associated with particular *loci receptionis* in his earlier work.

¹⁷² *RD*, p. 186.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

common ecumenical statements; 4) recognition of a common faith in history and the limited nature of one's own perspective.¹⁷⁵

Can more be done with this? Ecumenical sites of reception would seem to be particularly suitable for application of the elements which Rush brings to the fore in *RD*. For example, an active, creative role for reception,¹⁷⁶ the priority of the question,¹⁷⁷ alterity and the differentiation of horizons,¹⁷⁸ open, expansive dialogical horizons,¹⁷⁹ and the corresponding limits of a single horizon¹⁸⁰ in the reception of doctrine. The notion of pluralising hermeneutics and the theological grounding in pneumatology and the Word also lends itself to an inter-confessional application. I suggest that there is an emerging body of work which might be usefully engaged in this context, as Rush has engaged with the conflict of interpretation regarding the Council and, above all, the theology of the *sensus fidei*. This is a recent approach to ecumenical method named, tellingly, 'Receptive Ecumenism', which is the focus of the next chapter.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 350–54.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 122.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10.

¹⁸¹ Rush has engaged with Receptive Ecumenism using his theology of the sense of faith, but not at the more fundamental level of reception hermeneutics. See Rush, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*'. This essay is developed from a paper Rush delivered at the Second International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism, held in Durham, 2009.

6 ECUMENISM AS A SITE OF RECEPTIVE INTEGRITY

6.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have been asking what ‘receptive integrity’ might entail, using selected tools from theological hermeneutics. In doing so, the intention has not been to reveal previously untapped philosophical resources but rather to integrate and apply insights of key theological interlocutors who have brought hermeneutical resources into fruitful conversation with the Catholic tradition in the light of contemporary challenges. In the previous chapter, I showed that although Rush claims an ecumenical significance for reception hermeneutics, his own application of reception theory to specific *loci receptionis* has been predominately on the use of reception as a root metaphor for understanding the *sensus fidei*. Whilst this important task has ecumenical implications, it nonetheless leaves open the question of how reception theory, as Rush has appropriated it, can be fruitfully applied in Catholic ecumenical practice. My proposal here is that a recently developed ecumenical strategy known as ‘Receptive Ecumenism’¹ represents a concrete instance of the

¹ Key texts for understanding the aims, scope and methods of Receptive Ecumenism (henceforth RE) are: *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Paul D. Murray (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), henceforth *RECCL*; Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, *Louvain Studies*, 33.1–2 (2008), 30–45; Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda’, in *RECCL*; Murray, ‘Families of Receptive Theological Learning: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology, and Receptive Ecumenism’, *Modern Theology*, 29.4 (2013), 76–92. A useful introduction to the approach can be found in Murray, ‘Introducing Receptive Ecumenism’, *The Ecumenist*, 51.2 (2014), 1–7. Murray’s first reference to the notion of ‘receptive’ ecumenism is in the context of ‘the more constructive spirit of receptive ecumenism evinced by *Ut*

concern for dynamic integrity which I identified in Fiorenza, Murray, Rush, and Thiel. In this chapter, I briefly describe the background and key characteristics of this approach before addressing two questions which are significant for this but which are under-developed in the literature on RE. Firstly, what are the methodological commitments involved in RE?² And secondly, how does RE instantiate reception hermeneutics in ecumenical *loci receptionis*?

As this switch from theological hermeneutics to ecumenical method may seem surprising, I will attempt to summarise where my argument is heading. Receptive Ecumenism is a new strategy for ecumenical activity, developed initially by Paul D. Murray at Durham University. It has generated considerable interest across a wide range of constituencies: from major theological conferences and academic publications, to church talks, practical resource and projects, and local study groups.³ The concept can be found in papal addresses,⁴ ecumenical gatherings,⁵ and bilateral dialogues,⁶ and has been appropriated for doctoral theses⁷ and faith formation resources.⁸ Although emerging from a Catholic

Unum Sint, Murray, 'Roman Catholic Theology after Vatican II', in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, David F. Ford (ed.), Third Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 274, 280–81. It is given a more substantial introduction as one element of 'Catholicism Transfigured: Explorations in Ecclesial Learning' in Murray, 'On Valuing Truth', pp. 181–82.

² On the location of RE within the field of ecumenical methodology, see Murray, 'In Search of a Way', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies*, Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

³ Four international conferences on RE have been held: 1) 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism', (Durham, UK, 2006); 2) 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together' (Durham, UK, 2009); 3) 'Receptive Ecumenism in International Perspective' (Fairfield, USA, 2014); and, 4) 'Leaning into the Spirit: Discernment, Decision-making and Reception', (Canberra, Australia, 2017). Selected presentations from the first conference, together with commissioned essays are published in *RECCL*. Further volumes covering the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th conferences are currently in preparation. Examples of ecclesial, academic, and pastoral publications are given in subsequent footnotes.

⁴ 'Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other's gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, without waiting for the others to learn first', Pope Francis, 'Homily at Vespers for the Solemnity of the Conversion of St Paul', 25 January 2017 <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170125_vespri-conversione-san-paolo.pdf>.

⁵ E.g., 'One of the most important of recent ecumenical developments has been the concept of "Receptive Ecumenism"', Archbishop Justin Welby, "'Ecumenical Spring": Speech at World Council of Churches 70th Anniversary', 16 February 2018 <<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/ecumenical-spring-archbishop-justins-speech-world-council-churches>>.

⁶ The first agreed statement from the third phase of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III) explicitly recognises that the shift in methodology to 'receptive learning' which permeates the final text is 'the way in which ARCIC III has appropriated the approach of receptive ecumenism': ARCIC III, iii. The ARCIC III Meeting at Erfurt issued an initial communique on how '*Walking Together on the Way* employs the method of Receptive Ecumenism, <https://iarccum.org/archive/ARCIC3/2017-05-20_arcic-iii_communique_erfurt.pdf (20 May 2017)>.

⁷ The most sustained engagement with RE among recent doctoral theses is Antonia Pizzey, 'Heart and Soul: Receptive Ecumenism as a Dynamic Development of Spiritual Ecumenism' (PhD thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2015) <<https://doi.org/10.4226/66/5a9cc282b0bb2>>. The principles

context, with significant Anglican, Methodist, Orthodox and Reformed input, it has also been applied in a number of Baptist and Pentecostal contexts, and its potential for inter-religious as well as inter-church dialogue has been noted in its ‘family relationship’ to scriptural reasoning and comparative theology.⁹ In short, it is an ecclesial phenomenon worth serious academic and practical attention and is outlined below (6.2).

Academic engagement with RE, on the other hand, has been somewhat limited in scope. Whilst the practical and affective-spiritual dimensions of RE have been widely received, rather less has been published on the underlying commitments of RE. In particular, the way in which RE implicitly or explicitly employs hermeneutical resources has received little attention. There is a consequent danger of RE being only superficially appropriated, as has recently been acknowledged.¹⁰ I therefore seek to explicate the fundamental commitments which ground RE as a distinctive contribution to ecumenical method, and which provide orientation to its practice (6.3). I argue that RE is a strategy which embraces critical-constructive theological questions as well as a spiritual orientation and practical ecumenical action. I provide a warrant for this claim in the unity between RE and Murray’s work on theological rationality, which I have characterised as a search for ‘dynamic integrity’ in theology and ecclesial praxis.¹¹

Drilling deeper still, the *hermeneutics* of RE have been identified as an area needing further research.¹² ‘Reception’ is clearly a major concept in RE, and therefore reception

of RE are applied in a growing range of contexts, e.g.: Sarah Timmer, ‘Receptive Ecumenism And Justification: Roman Catholic And Reformed Doctrine In Contemporary Context’ (PhD thesis, Marquette University, 2014) <http://publications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/362>; Nicola James, ‘Jane Gardam: Religious Writer’ (PhD thesis, Glasgow University, 2016) <<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/7628>>; Mary Josephine Cullen, ‘Looking to the Future: The Development of a New Partnership Between Priests and People in the Catholic Church in Scotland’ (PhD thesis, Glasgow University, 2017) <<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/7981>>; Maria Ágústsdóttir, ‘Receiving the Other: The Lived Experience of Oikoumene as a Practical, Relational, and Spiritual Reality’ (Doctor of Theology thesis, University of Iceland, 2016).

⁸ E.g., Callan Slipper, *Enriched by the Other: A Spiritual Guide to Receptive Ecumenism*, Grove Spirituality (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2016); also South Australian Council of Churches, ‘Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands: The Promise and Potential of Receptive Ecumenism’, 2014 <http://www.sacc.asn.au/_data/Healing_Gifts_for_Wounded_Hands_May_2014.pdf>.

⁹ Murray, ‘Families of Receptive Theological Learning’.

¹⁰ ‘The apparent simplicity of RE can support superficial receptions of it: either labelling anything that moves as RE; or remaining at the level of merely practical, instrumental learnings of technique – an ecumenical “pick-n-mix”’, Murray, ‘Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: On Being Reasonable and Responsible in the Way of Receptive Ecumenical Learning.’ (presented at the 4th International Receptive Ecumenism Conference, ‘Leaning into the Spirit: Discernment, Decision-making, and Reception’, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra: Unpublished, 2017).

¹¹ See 4.2.

¹² See, *inter alia*, the following essays in *RECCL*: Ladislav Orsy, ‘Authentic Learning and Receiving: A Search for Criteria’, pp. 39–51; Riccardo Larini, ‘Texts and Contexts: Hermeneutical

hermeneutics might be expected to be a suitable background theory to situate Murray's attention to dynamic integrity in a wider context of 'receptive integrity' in ecumenical mode. I argue that the mode of ecclesial learning proposed by RE is consonant with that developed in Rush's receptive hermeneutics of doctrine and that the two may be integrated in a mutually beneficial way (6.4).

The original contribution in this chapter is to make explicit key methodological commitments in RE, and to give these commitments a thicker systematic description using reception hermeneutics. The aim is to provide an additional tool for practitioners of RE, assisting them to engage with the method in depth and access the 'deep resources' of RE as well as the more easily accessible surface principles.

6.2 What is Receptive Ecumenism?

Before looking at the more properly hermeneutical dimensions of Receptive Ecumenism it is necessary to outline the major characteristics of RE as an ecumenical strategy. What follows is by no means an exhaustive discussion of RE, but is intended to serve as an outline of the principles and practices which make it a discrete topic of interest. My concern in this chapter is principally with the hermeneutical commitments of RE, broadly conceived to include the dispositions, methods, and applications involved in ecclesial learning as a mode of understanding. Consequently, I do not address questions regarding the ecumenical context and antecedents for RE, nor do I describe the full breadth of conversations in which RE has been invoked, engaged or assimilated.¹³ The wider ecumenical context is nonetheless important insofar as it generates an initial retroductive warrant for RE, and it is here that an understanding of RE might usefully begin: in the supposed 'ecumenical winter'.

At the surface level, we may say that RE is about learning not teaching, about receiving not giving. Despite certain similarities, this distinguishes RE from models of ecumenism based on an 'exchange of gifts'.¹⁴ What is most distinctive about RE and, at its simplest,

Reflections on Receptive Ecumenism', pp. 89–101; Mannion, 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Hermeneutics of Catholic Learning - The Promise of Comparative Ecclesiology', pp. 413–27.

¹³ In addition to papers on particular ecumenical dialogues included in *RECCL*, a comprehensive list maintained by the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University gives details of ecclesial, pastoral, and academic engagement with RE, available at www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/projects/receptiveecumenism/publications/

¹⁴ On ecumenism as an exchange of gifts see Margaret O'Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998); 'Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue', in *RECCL*, pp. 26–38. In her thoughtful analysis, which interweaves throughout the themes of gift exchange, spiritual ecumenism and RE, Pizzey ultimately locates RE as a type of Spiritual Ecumenism, and suggests that RE stands to benefit from developing or recovering the concept of an exchange of gifts rather than a one-sided emphasis on learning. Whatever the merits of such a revision for ecumenical practice overall, in this chapter I retain the notion of the radical emphasis on learning in RE as both an authentically distinctive feature of the concept, and as significant in terms of expressing a

sums up the whole approach, is the ethic of learning from other traditions, rather than looking to get them to change. However, the simplicity of the formulation, and the ease with which this principle can be appropriated, belies the subtlety and significance of its presuppositions. This apparent simplicity results in two different problems in terms of appropriation. On the one hand, there is certainly the risk of a superficial adoption, but on the other hand, even readers who critically engage with RE can over-emphasise the distilled question ‘what can we learn from the other’ by not following the links to an underlying methodology which Murray provides. For example, Antonia Pizzey argues that ‘RE has not yet been systematically outlined... definitively speaking, this simple question is almost all that there is.’¹⁵ Regarding the literature on RE, ‘how to unlock and activate RE’s potential is not explained in any systematic manner, nor is there an elucidation of the principles and criteria involved in ecclesial learning.’¹⁶

In contrast to Pizzey, who develops organising principles using the virtuous mutual receptivity of Spiritual Ecumenism and accordingly emphasises the *affective* nature of RE, Eric Dart discerns a lack of *cognitive* coherence in RE, and a corresponding lack of *practical* effectiveness:

[RE] lacks an articulation of what ‘discernment, criticism, and appropriate concern for integrity’ involve. Put another way, Receptive ecumenism and ecumenical learning acknowledge the need for a conversion of the narrative disposition of individuals and churches within ecumenical dialogue, but it does not adequately attend to the cognitive conversion that is also required. Receptive ecumenism acknowledges the need to think differently, but it does not address the logic that facilitates and supports thinking differently... The lack of systematic coherence is demonstrated by Paul Murray’s description of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’s core theological principles’ of which he articulates twenty-seven. In no way is this meant as a criticism of the theological quality of the principles Murray establishes; however, its practical application is questionable.¹⁷

hermeneutical virtue and a methodological commitment derived from Rescher’s principle of committed pragmatic idealism—that we always start from where we are—in the middle of things. See Pizzey, ‘Heart and Soul’, pp. 155–86, 245–48. For a related— but distinctive —reading of RE as primarily a way of spirituality, see Sara Gehlin, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Nathan Söderblom’s Ecumenical Vision’, *One in Christ*, 52.1 (2018), 78–92 (pp. 78–92).

¹⁵ Pizzey, ‘Heart and Soul’, p. 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁷ Eric S. Dart, ‘Anglican-Roman Catholic Ecumenical Dialogue: A Case for a Rahnerian Logic of Symbol’ (Duquesne University, 2016), pp. 249–50. Although I do not agree with Dart’s critical analysis of the systematic nature of RE, his constructive thesis that Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue is challenged by the predominantly phenomenological outlook of the former communion, and the ontological commitments of the latter, which might be addressed by employing Rahner’s use of symbol (p. 250) is one which could be fruitfully engaged by using the greater depth of RE resources which I engage in this chapter. For the list of twenty-seven principles to which Dart refers, see Murray, ‘Families of Receptive Theological Learning’, pp. 85–88.

Whilst it is true that a large-scale systematic presentation of RE in its various dimensions is still lacking,¹⁸ my proposal here is that key principles of ecclesial learning and the logic of thinking differently are presented in Murray's fundamental theology, and can be—indeed need to be—brought into view for a rich understanding of RE. Despite the force of the above criticism, therefore, I argue that RE demonstrates affective, cognitive and practical dimensions both in its formal presentation and in its underlying commitments.

6.2.1 Third Wave Ecumenism

Several authors have described the ecclesial climate during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as less conducive to ecumenical progress than the heady days following the Council, indeed as an 'ecumenical winter'.¹⁹ This changed institutional context can be seen in the less than encouraging responses from the Vatican to the work of ARCIC I and ARCIC II,²⁰ the negative *tone* (regardless of the interpretation of the specific content) of *Dominus Iesus*,²¹ and the consequences of the ordination of women to the priesthood and

¹⁸ The main principles of RE are stated in numerous essays by Murray, including systematic presentations in academic handbooks: e.g., Murray, 'In Search of a Way'. However, the book arising from the first RE conference, which remains the only substantial volume on RE, has more of an exploratory than systematic focus as a whole, despite a number of programmatic essays. Pizzey's doctoral thesis presents RE systematically through the lens of Spiritual Ecumenism, but does not engage in depth with Murray's pragmatist commitments. A different systematic perspective is provided in a recent *Maîtrise en Théologie* thesis which gives an exceptionally clear presentation of RE in ecclesiological terms: see Jean-Baptiste Siboulet, 'Le "Receptive Ecumenism" de Paul Murray: Une Nouvelle Approche Oecuménique Au Service de La Croissance Du Mystère de l'Eglise Dans Les Communions Chrétiennes' (Bruxelles Institut d'Études Théologiques, 2018). A brief analysis of the significance of Rescher for RE can be found in Cullen, pp. 196–209.

¹⁹ E.g. S. Mark Heim, 'Montreal to Compostela: Pilgrimage in Ecumenical Winter', *The Christian Century*, 109.11 (1992), 333–35; Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Review of "Method in Ecumenical Theology: The Lessons So Far" by R.R. Evans', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 67.3 (1998), 422–24; Ola Tjørhom, 'An "Ecumenical Winter"? Challenges in Contemporary Catholic Ecumenism', *The Heythrop Journal*, 49.5 (2008), 841–59; Nicholas M. Healy, 'Review of "Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning" by Paul D. Murray', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 13.4 (2011), 480–82; Minna Hietamäki, 'Finding Warmth in the Ecumenical Winter: A Nordic Viewpoint', *The Ecumenical Review*, 65.3 (2013), 368–75. Walter Kasper prefers to talk of a time for harvest, but nonetheless acknowledges a shift from ecumenical 'enthusiasm' to 'sobriety': Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 2; *The Catholic Church*, p. 29.

²⁰ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 'Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I', 1991 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_1991_catholic-response-arcici_en.html>. The key documentation and further commentaries are listed by Jeffrey VanderWilt, who anticipates a key concern of RE in arguing that '[t]he inability of the Catholic Church to hear the voices and receive the wisdom of non-Catholics is part of the "wound" the Church suffers for its divisions', Jeffrey VanderWilt, *A Church without Borders: Eucharist and the Church in Ecumenical Perspective* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1998), pp. 109–19.

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, *Dominus Iesus*', 16 June 2000 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_

episcopate in the Church of England for prospects of mutual recognition of ministry and intercommunion.²² Responses to this situation have included, on the one hand, a retrenchment of ecclesial identity at the expense of the other, and, on the other hand, a shift of focus away from organic structural unity to a focus on living and working together in diversity which lacks visible unity. Particularly notable in this regard has been the programmatic shift in the focus of the WCC, away from prioritising ‘faith and order’ and toward ‘life and works ecumenism’.²³

In this setting, RE has emerged as a ‘third way’, one which acknowledges the changed dynamics of ecumenical engagement in the last thirty years but which does not lose sight of the goal of visible unity. To this may be added the observation that whilst RE does owe much to Paul Couturier’s pioneering notion of ‘Spiritual Ecumenism’ and its more recent championing by Kasper, John Paul II, and Rowan Williams,²⁴ it does not locate the spiritual character of ecumenical activity in opposition to theological dialogue and structural reform but rather grounds all of these activities in human desiring, willing, thinking, and acting within with the free movement of the Holy Spirit. It is reasonable to view RE is a kind of Spiritual Ecumenism but it is equally a theological-doctrinal ecumenism, an ecumenism of everyday pragmatics, and an ecumenism of prophetic witness. Any intrinsic spirituality is but one strand of a multi-stranded cord.

As a third ecumenical wave, RE complements and engages both the ‘ecumenism of truth’ exemplified in concerns for faith and order and the bilateral dialogues, and the ‘ecumenism of life’ which focusses on ‘life and works’ in a milieu of unresolved visible disunity at the structural level.²⁵ Nonetheless, it is important to note that RE is not conceived

dominus-iesus_en.html>. For responses, see *Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, Stephen J. Pope and Charles C. Hefling (eds.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

²² Kasper, ‘Mission of Bishops in the Mystery of the Church: Reflections on the Question of Ordaining Women to Episcopal Office in the Church of England’, 5 June 2006 <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060605_kasper-bishops_en.html>.

²³ See Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, T. Coates (tran.), (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991).

²⁴ See Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 155–72. On the work of Abbe Paul Couturier and spiritual ecumenism, see Clifford, *Groupe Des Dombes*. On the significance of spiritual ecumenism for the development of RE, see Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, pp. 15–16.; and Paul D. Murray and Andrea L. Murray, ‘The Roots, Range and Reach of Receptive Ecumenism’, in *Unity in Process*, Clive Barrett (ed.) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2012), pp. 79–94 (p. 85).

²⁵ Gerard Kelly, ‘A New Ecumenical Wave’ (presented at the National Council of Churches Forum, Canberra, 2010) <www.ncca.org.au/faith-and-unity/46-a-new-ecumenical-wave>; also Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Faith and Order’, *One in Christ*, 43.3 (2009), 189–94; ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, pp. 40–41; ‘Establishing the Agenda’, pp. 9–12; ‘In Search of a Way’.

as a pragmatic accommodation to present difficulties,²⁶ but as a graced moment to journey into a space where new things may become possible:

The ‘softwood’ of relatively easy early gains has now been exhausted, giving way to the ‘hardwood’ of lasting substantive difference...[Therefore] a different third phase strategy is required...aimed more at long-term mutual change, development and growth by bringing the traditions into encounter with each other precisely in their differences.²⁷

A fundamental principle of RE is that such otherness is not purely to be viewed as an obstacle to be overcome but as an opportunity for learning and so progressing through the possibilities opened up in a new horizon of understanding:

At the heart of RE is the basic conviction that further substantial progress is indeed possible but only if a fundamental, counter-instinctual move is made away from traditions wishing that others could be more like themselves to instead each asking what they can and must learn, with dynamic integrity, from their respective others.²⁸

Drawing principally on Murray’s writings on RE, I suggest that five characteristics are particularly significant in elaborating this fundamental principle as a set of dispositions, methods and practices: (1) as already noted, RE is a third wave of ecumenism, distinguished from—but not opposed to—the ecumenical concerns of faith and order, and life and works; (2) beginning with an attitude of humble realism; (3) instantiating receptive ecclesial renewal; (4) paying attention to affective, cognitive, and pragmatic concerns; (5) evidencing a synodal and transversal breadth as an ecumenical practice fit for a pilgrim people.

6.2.2 Humble Realism and Realistic Humility

If RE takes a realistic stance towards the limits of existing practices in twenty-first century ecumenism, it is also realistic about the nature of the participants. The subject of RE is not an idealized church, modelled according to what Nicholas M. Healy calls a ‘blueprint

²⁶ ‘Receptive Ecumenism is here being understood not simply as a compensatory second-best suited to the present interim situation, but as the essential way forwards’, Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 15.

²⁷ Murray, ‘Introducing Receptive Ecumenism’, p. 3.

²⁸ A ‘quite remarkable’ resonance between this conviction and some of the ecumenical reflections of then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger concerning the priority of learning from the [ecclesial] other ‘while respecting his or her otherness’ over trying to teach the other is claimed by Murray, see Murray, ‘Ecumenism, Evangelisation and Conflicting Narratives’ (citations from p. 114 and p. 117); compare Ratzinger, ‘The Progress of Ecumenism’, in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, R. Nowell (tran.) (Slough: St Pauls, 1988), pp. 135–42.

ecclesiology'.²⁹ Nor is it only the sweeping vista of the universal church, fragmented in the scandal of disunity, awaiting the resolution of Christ's prayer *ut unum sint*. Rather the understanding of the subject in RE is the wounded, particular church, honestly acknowledging the dysfunctions, strains, and stresses which it experiences, whether at the local level of parochial/diocesan life, or at the regional/national level, or at the global/international level. In Murray's homely image, it is not an ecumenism where we bring out the best china, but an ecumenism of wounded hands in search of healing,³⁰ not as a tactical 'second-best' but as a long-term strategy. Nonetheless, RE is concerned particularly with *ecclesial* wounds arising from a dominant interpretation, practice, structure or attitude in a given church rather than the wider sense of wounded humanity which can be found in, say, Catholic Social Teaching or Schillebeeckx's concern for the *humanum*.³¹

In Fiorenza's terms, starting with dysfunctions and wounds in this way is an example of a 'retroductive warrant'. It is a justification or 'warrant' claimed by a community to challenge a prevailing theological interpretation on the basis of its negative concrete effects (for example in supporting oppression of a particular group) and, thus, to begin the process of hermeneutical reconstruction afresh, reconsidering background theories, reception of sources, and the diverse witness of communities. The connection made between doctrine or practice and the effects is not deductive and foundational but abductive or 'retroductive', identifying regular patterns of association between the situation and the tradition, or some element of it. The 'ecumenical winter' can be construed as a large-scale retroductive warrant for a new approach such as RE, just as particular instances of pragmatic incoherence provide warrants within RE for reassessing elements of tradition.

It is significant that RE has potential to address wounds and dysfunctions *within* a broad tradition such as Catholicism, through engaging in learning from the other. This aspect of RE is often overlooked, but forms an important part of Murray's initial vision: through learning from the ecumenical other, a church communion may be better able to deal with

²⁹ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25–51.

³⁰ Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', p. 5.

³¹ Both the healing of ecclesial wounds and attending to the signs of the times are however ultimately concerned with human flourishing as God's plan. In considering ecclesial wounds, a resonance may be noted with Antonio Rosmini's *Cinque Phiage*, and indeed two contributors to the first RE volume make this connection. Murray's published work contains no explicit working out of the relationship of RE to Rosmini, although he has commented that the image of ecclesiology addressing the wounds in the ecclesial body of Christ is 'related to' Rosmini's usage, with the latter acting as reference point and influence, 'not yet explicit'. (Personal Communication, 20/06/2018). See Antonio Rosmini, *Of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church*, H. P. Liddon (ed.), (London: Riddingtons, 1883). Also Paul Lakeland, 'Potential Catholic Learning Around Lay Participation in Decision-Making', in *RECCL*, pp. 226–40 (p. 239 n. 8); Henri Legrand, 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Future of Ecumenical Dialogues—Privileging Differentiated Consensus and Drawing Its Institutional Consequences', in *RECCL*, pp. 385–98 (p. 398 n. 39).

internal limits, diversity and tensions.³² This second distinctive requirement for the practice of RE, therefore requires a humble ecclesial disposition, one which is ready to learn from a number of sources, and which accordingly attends to the empirical realities of concrete and diverse communities. Furthermore, in exercising an ecclesial humility, the practitioner of RE (for example a theologian, or an official church body, or a local community) looks for limitations and failings not only within *individuals*—with the church constituted as a ‘church of sinners’—but also within the ecclesial *structures, procedures, and habits* which encode personal limitations and dysfunctions as part of the tradition.

6.2.3 Receptive Renewal as Ecclesial Learning

The principle of asking what a tradition can learn with dynamic integrity from the other not only requires an attitude of humility, but involves an act of reception. In other words, RE is not concerned with simply ‘learning about’ other traditions, but ‘learning from’ them. This introduces a vital, and challenging, element into RE: the possibility of change, perhaps even significant change, in the receiving community.

However, not all instances of learning from another tradition are examples of receptive learning. Purely instrumental appropriation which does not engage a theological reflection—that is, practice rather than praxis—may deliver a real good, but it is not the focus of the recursive, expansive, self-critical dynamic which underpins RE. For example, a Catholic parish might improve their website by studying the website of a neighbouring Anglican parish, but no more so than had a professional designer been brought in. On the other hand, the same parish looking at the same website and being challenged by the way the Anglican site explicitly laid out a mission plan in which the laity and clergy were stakeholders could very much be an opportunity for genuine ecumenical learning at the local level. As this example illustrates, all kinds of practices, symbols and ideas could in principle be received. The challenge however is for such innovations to be ‘received with integrity’.

How then should Murray’s use of ‘receptive’ in RE be understood? As the previous chapter showed, ‘reception’ is a rich concept. For example, Rush carefully defines nine

³² ‘[I]t is now more appropriate to view the capacity for receptive ecumenical learning *across* traditions as the necessary key for unlocking the potential for transformation *within* traditions.’, Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 7. John O’Brien puts this into theological terms through a reading of UR §4 focussed on ecclesial learning through the other: ‘There are two points here: firstly, we have something to *learn* from the ‘other’, secondly, the Holy Spirit works in the ‘other’ not only for the ‘other’, but also for *our* sake. One could justifiably say that for Catholics, ‘receptive ecumenism’ is part of the teaching of the Church. Re-reading *Unitatis Redintegratio* from this perspective can be illuminating’: John O’Brien, ‘Two-Eyed Vision: A Sufi Perspective on The Both/And Structure of Receptive Ecumenism’ (presented at the 2nd International Receptive Ecumenism Conference, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together’, Durham UK: Unpublished, 2009).

senses in which his work on the *sensus fidei* uses the term as an ‘integrating and investigative principle’.³³ Writing on the reception of ARCIC I and II, Murray distinguishes between ‘initiating reception’ among ecumenists, ‘local reception’ in various formal and informal relationships between communities, and ‘formal reception’ by ecclesial bodies³⁴ but he goes on to contrast RE with this approach, so what kind of reception is envisaged for ‘receptive’ ecumenism? Gerard Kelly argues that the distinction between the object of ‘reception’ and the ‘receptive’ attitude required is significant for RE:

The word ‘receptive’ ... explains the basic characteristic of receptive ecumenism, especially if we are aware of the distinction between ‘reception’ and ‘receptive’. In speaking of ecumenical *reception* we are dealing with a noun. The focus is on something to be received: a new insight into another church; better understanding of the doctrines that have divided us; the possibility of working together on a particular project, etc. In speaking of *receptive* ecumenism we are dealing with an adjective. The focus is on a particular quality of the church, namely its receptivity. In the methodology of receptive ecumenism each church is called to be receptive.³⁵

This is useful insofar as it identifies the attitude—or virtue—which is required for a practitioner of RE, but does not go far enough in appreciating the systematic nature of RE as an ecumenical ‘way’. As Rush has ably demonstrated, ‘reception’ not only refers to an object and *locus*, but signifies a complex process resulting in real change. Presented as a *verb*—‘to receive’—reception is anything but passive in Rush’s account. A similar capacity for *rejuvenating* reception, not simply a virtue of openness, is required for an understanding of RE which is consistent with Murray’s wider theological methodology: not only self-critical openness, but recursive, expansive catholicity.³⁶

³³ Rush considers reception as: 1) a root metaphor in relationships, communication and learning; 2) spiritual; 3) juridical; 4) theological; 5) approbative (relating to the evaluation by the whole church of whether a particular spiritual, theological or juridical reception is faithful to revelation); 6) literary; 7) intra-ecclesial; 8) ecumenical, and ; 9) hermeneutical, involving understanding, interpretation and application. Rush, *Eyes of Faith*, pp. 5–11. A specifically ecumenical perspective is further developed in Rush, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*’.

³⁴ Murray, ‘The Reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and Discerning the Strategy and Agenda for ARCIC III’, *Ecclesiology*, 11.2 (2015), 199–218. On ‘ecumenical reception’, see Rusch. On the hermeneutics of this kind of ecumenical reception, see Gaither.

³⁵ Gerard Kelly, ‘Receptive Ecumenism’, February 2013 <www.bathurst.catholic.org.au/?i=1319&receptive-ecumenism>.

³⁶ On the need for a rich understanding of ‘reception’ in understanding and applying RE, see Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 24 n. 41. Nonetheless, this still emphasises formal acceptance of something originating from outside a given church community. Rush’s concept of rejuvenating reception is richer still and brings the ongoing re-reception of God’s offer of salvation, communicated in revelation, into the field of ‘reception’. This is entirely consistent with the principles of RE and is one of several areas where RE could benefit from a thicker description using the resources of Rush’s sophisticated reception hermeneutics, as I argue later in this chapter.

6.2.4 Affective, Cognitive, and Practical

An emphasis on learning does not mean that RE is primarily an intellectual activity. As Murray explains:

Receptive ecumenical awakening is properly a matter of the heart before it is a matter of the head; a matter of falling in love with the experienced presence and action of God in the people, practices, even structures of another tradition and being impelled thereby to search for ways in which all impediments to closer relationship might be overcome.³⁷

On the basis of this principle, it might be tempting to view RE as primarily affective—as Pizzey does, locating it firmly within the field of Spiritual Ecumenism³⁸. But whilst Murray recognises an affinity between RE and Spiritual Ecumenism, even the above citation about ‘falling in love’ indicates that RE is still also a matter of the head.³⁹ This love goes beyond a personal spirituality: ‘even structures’ might be objects of such affection.

This ‘falling in love’ evokes a response, not to ‘stoic endurance’ but to the fullness of life promised in the gospel, and correspondingly affirmed through the background theory of pragmatist idealism in Murray’s expansive methodological commitments.⁴⁰ In RE, this Spirit-moved evocation inspires two kinds of response ‘at every level of ecclesial life’:⁴¹ 1) a desire for the good experienced in the ecclesial other and 2) an awareness of lack, dysfunction or wounds in one’s own situation or tradition. Which comes first? Murray commonly describes RE as beginning with awareness of wounds, whereas in this intentionally programmatic essay, it is the attraction of beauty which appears to have priority. In reality the experience may move in either direction: not only the beauty of attraction, but the identification of wounds and dysfunctions can be experienced in ‘the presence and action of God in the people’, expressed—as Hinze demonstrates—as lament.⁴²

The key point to make however is that this initial moment of experiencing the other (or indeed the otherness of negative experience in one’s own community) is simply the first, pre-reflective moment in a larger task:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁸ Pizzey, ‘On the Maturation of Receptive Ecumenism: The Connection between Receptive Ecumenism and Spiritual Ecumenism’, *Pacifica*, 28.2 (2015), 108–25.

³⁹ Compare ‘as a lived rather than a purely intellectual commitment the best analogue for the character of faith is in personal relationships, particularly the experience of falling in love with another.’ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 139–40.

⁴⁰ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16; Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 135–38.

⁴² See Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), pp. 73–89; ‘Lamenting at the Limits of Dialogue in Ecclesiology and Hermeneutics’, in *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence*, Bradford E. Hinze and Anthony J. Godzieba (eds.) (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2017), pp. 255–77.

[RE] might be best expressed in terms of: (1) the dreaming of dreams; (2) the testing of such dreams for their viability; and (3) the discerning together of what might either hinder or promote their embodied ecclesial realization. These are the three voices... the poetic, the analytic, and the pragmatic or, alternatively, as the imaginative-constructive, the critical-constructive, and the practical-organizational.⁴³

In Rush's theological appropriation of reception theory, the initial encounter with an object of reception is a pre-reflective *aesthetic* moment which invites us to go deeper into the work, but which leads onto constructive-critical 'reconstructive hermeneutics' and pragmatic-organisational 'applicative hermeneutics'.⁴⁴ I will develop this relationship in 6.4.2, but here it is enough to note that for both Murray and Rush, starting with the heart does not preclude critical and practical activities but invites them. Indeed, RE may be viewed as evidencing affective, cognitive, and pragmatic dimensions not only in the different stages of reception, but in the scope of its concerns and the aims of RE as a 'tactically-informed' strategy.⁴⁵ Alternatively stated, with Murray's image of the theologian as systems engineer in view,⁴⁶ these three dimensions are discernible not only in the *process* outlined above, but also the *data* and the *outputs* of RE.

In terms of 'data'—i.e., the range of matters with which RE is concerned—not only are practical and spiritual issues taken into account but conceptual, structural, and doctrinal concerns are also, indeed predominately, in view. Murray's own work on ministry and on grace, as well as the adoption of RE in ARCIC III as a tool for examining decision-making processes illustrate the doctrinal and cognitive scope of the method.⁴⁷ Practically, RE adopts an empirical approach to data about 'the church', with Healy's warning against 'blueprint ecclesiologies' as the touchstone for an ecumenism which attends to the actual lived experience of concrete communities to determine 'questions that arise'.

⁴³ Murray, 'Preface', in *RECCL*, pp. i–xv, ix–xv (xi).

⁴⁴ Rush, *RD*, pp. 315–25, 362–63. A vital difference in Murray's presentation is that the object of reception is not a work of art but an individual or community. Even ecclesial structures have attraction only insofar as they support persons. As an intersubjective moment of attraction, RE therefore has an *erotic*, as much as an *aesthetic* quality.

⁴⁵ On RE as a tactically-informed strategy, see Benjamin Durheim and David Farina Turnbloom, 'Tactical Ecumenism', *Theological Studies*, 76.2 (2015), 311–29. On the categories of 'strategy and 'tactics', see de Certeau *xix*.

⁴⁶ Murray, 'Engaging with the Contemporary Church', p. 280.

⁴⁷ A creative application of RE to the danger in Catholicism of viewing 'stable structures of grace' as things possessed by the church, rather than gifts needing constant refreshment and reception is developed in Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism'. This theme has been further developed in two currently unpublished presentations: Murray, 'Lutheran Quincentennial'; 'St Thomas Aquinas and the Potential Catholic Integration of a Dynamic Occasionalist Understanding of Grace' (presented at the Reading Paul Today: Grace and Gift for Protestant and Catholic Theology, Ushaw College, Durham, 2018). The fruits of applying RE to the ARCIC dialogue can be seen in ARCIC III.

The goal (or ‘output’) of RE also extends beyond the spiritual or affective. As ‘transformative praxis’,⁴⁸ RE is directed towards real change in the learning church community. Neither the approach to doctrinal questions through the detour of the other nor the commitment to more than tolerant cooperation in a life and works ecumenism should obscure the fact that real change is intended both finally (sacramental and structural unity) and proximately (reweaving the web to provide new configurations which may unlock further progress to unity between traditions, and greater flourishing within traditions). This practical output could be instantiated in a reformulation of doctrine, a change in ecclesial structures, or a renewed local practice, to name just a few possibilities.

Furthermore, the breadth of concerns evidenced in RE applies not just to process but content. Thus, the subject matter for ecclesial learning is not limited to spiritual activities but includes doctrinal matters and the reform of ecclesial structures, as well as the transformative praxis of Christian living. Whilst the dynamics of RE may form a triad reminiscent of Newman, the breadth of concerns resonates with Tracy’s three publics and Murray’s own triad of coherence: internal, extrinsic and pragmatic.⁴⁹ As with Murray’s treatment of pragmatic coherence, which in fact looks for *incoherence* as an indicator of where transformative-constructive theological work is needed, so too, one of the most interesting aspects of the pragmatics of RE has been the attention given to factors which may *inhibit* reception and change in specific Christian traditions and in organisations more generally.⁵⁰

The *fourth* characteristic of Receptive Ecumenism I wish to foreground, then, is that the fundamental orientation towards receptive learning from the ecclesial other is cashed out in diverse activities. Specifically, such learning can both emerge from, and effect change towards, affective-spiritual, cognitive-doctrinal and transformative-practical elements of a particular tradition.

6.2.5 Synodal and Transversal Ecumenism

Turning from attitudes and scope to practices, RE is again suggestive of a broad reflective equilibrium. Murray’s distinctive post-foundational, post-liberal approach entails a rejection

⁴⁸ Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁹ See 4.2.

⁵⁰ See the essays in Part IV of *RECCL*. Also Geoff Moore, ‘The Institutionalisation of the Practice of Faith: Churches as Organisations’ (presented at the 2nd International Receptive Ecumenism Conference, *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together*, Ushaw College, Durham: Unpublished, 2009); Geoff Moore and Gina Grandy, ‘Bringing Morality Back in: Institutional Theory and MacIntyre’, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 26.2 (2017), 146–64.

of entirely external criteria or foundations for theologising, whilst nonetheless maintaining a ‘liberal’ sensibility to ongoing questioning, and openness to the value of different disciplines to provide background theories.⁵¹ As with Fiorenza, whilst these external criteria are not sufficient to determine the integrity of a particular reception of the gospel, they enable a mutually critical correlation to take place between diverse elements, and in particular, they provide perspectives from which a hermeneutic of suspicion against a prevailing status quo may be exercised. In RE this post-liberalism is evident on the one hand in the congruence with Kasper’s foundational principle of Spiritual Ecumenism—that unity will only come through the work of the Spirit—and with the committed pluralist position in which distinctiveness is not only preserved but essential for the present work of ecumenism: learning *across* traditions, rather than resolving differences between them.⁵² On the other hand, the ecclesial other provides a source of insight and dis-enchantment (in Ricoeur’s sense), wounds and dysfunctions are identified, and relevant background theories are actively sought out as auxiliary hypotheses to support and critique the reasonableness and coherence of any proposed ecclesial learning.

RE therefore involves the rejection of any complacency about the ability of human resources, particularly the resources of a single tradition, to bring about unity. This by no means implies quietist inaction, or settling for things the way they are, but embodies an act of Christian hope: neither hubris nor despair.⁵³ Through discerning and learning, a new space is created, from whence things may be possible that are not possible in the present state of affairs:

‘What, in any given situation, can one’s own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?’...the conviction is that if all were asking and pursuing this question, then all would be moving, albeit somewhat unpredictably, but moving nevertheless, to places where more may, in turn, become possible than appears to be the case at present.⁵⁴

Stated more systematically, a methodological aim of RE is therefore the ‘creative expansion of current logic rather than its mere clarification, extrapolation, and repetition.’⁵⁵

⁵¹ See Murray, ‘A Liberal Helping of Postliberalism Please’, in *The Future of Liberal Theology*, Mark D. Chapman (ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 208–20. On post-liberal theology, see *inter alia*, Lindbeck; Tanner, *Theories of Culture*; Adonis Vidu, *Postliberal Theological Method: A Critical Study* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

⁵² Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, pp. 171–72.

⁵³ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Compare Kasper’s description of Vatican II: ‘It has given us light for the way, but not one that illuminates, like floodlights, a whole track into the future. Rather, it has placed into our hands a lantern, which...provides light only for each next step, which then can and must be followed by further steps. Kasper, *The Catholic Church*, p. 346. See also 5.6.1, n.156 here.

⁵⁵ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 14.

In hermeneutical terms, an expansion of horizons is necessary to re-enter the hermeneutical circle to address the ‘hardwood’ questions of unity. In RE this learning is neither the preserve of ecumenical specialists, nor does it downplay the role of experts – ecumenical and otherwise.⁵⁶ The *fifth* characteristic of RE I want to highlight therefore is that it is both ‘synodal’ and ‘transversal’.

By ‘synodal’, I mean that RE is explicitly aimed at enabling a wide collaboration and participation within the whole pilgrim church at various levels. Not only is there common journeying towards eschatological unity of the different Christian communities, but within a particular denomination or community the principle of receptive learning from the other can be given currency in diverse contexts. With the orientation and commitments set out in RE, all members of a tradition should be in a position to engage certain questions which arise. This is not to suggest that RE works at the level of a lowest common denominator. Rather, what is received is received according to the mode of the receiver (*quidquid recipitur per modum recipientis recipitur*, as the medieval axiom states). For example, insights into doctrinal questions will be received within a systematic-critical mode of RE by theologians as well as having the potential for an instinctive reception by the *sensus fidei* of the wider faith community.

By ‘transversal’,⁵⁷ I refer to the fact that the role of specialists in RE is envisaged to go beyond theologians and to embrace social scientists and experts in other fields.⁵⁸ The inclusion of such background theories not only resonates with Fiorenza’s approach but with Murray’s dynamic post-liberalism in which learning from the world is an opportunity as well as a risk, and requires not a naïve correlation but an ongoing quest for dynamic equilibrium.⁵⁹

6.2.6 A Bold, New Strategy?

Given the characteristics I have outlined above, does RE live up to its billing as a ‘bold, new strategy’⁶⁰ and thus worth investigating further on its own merits, rather than using it as a pretext to revisit precursors in the ecumenical movement? Murray readily acknowledges that

⁵⁶ Murray, ‘Families of Receptive Theological Learning’, pp. 90–91.

⁵⁷ See 5.5.3, n.102.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., the breadth of contributors to the first RE conference, and in the roles assigned to business studies and sociology in applying RE in a local church context. See Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: A Comparative Research Project in the North East of England*, 2016 <<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/theology.religion/ReceptiveEcumenismandtheLocalChurchFinalFullReport.pdf>>.

⁵⁹ See Murray, ‘Liberal Helping’.

⁶⁰ Healy, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning’, p. 480.

the principle of learning from the other is hardly original. In one sense RE is ‘a new name for an old way of thinking’.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the ‘somewhat ad hoc yet nevertheless systematically tested and responsible receptive learning process’ specified in RE constitutes a distinctive way of practicing ecumenism. The brief outline above has demonstrated that RE is conceptually far richer than a simple appropriation of the basic principle ‘ask not what other can learn from us but what we can learn from them’. However, the intellectual commitments of RE which underpin this distinctiveness have rarely been engaged in the literature to date. The contribution I hope to make in the remainder of this chapter is to show how RE is a coherent application of Murray’s aspiration for dynamic integrity in theological practice, and consequently to place RE and reception hermeneutics in a constructive dialogue which serves as a model for Catholic learning.

6.3 Dynamic Integrity as a Methodological Commitment

In a 2012 essay, the Anglican ecclesiologist, Paul Avis, asked ‘Are we Receiving Receptive Ecumenism?’⁶² Whilst arguing that RE is not a threat to existing forms of ecumenical engagements, and indeed builds on what has already been achieved, Avis nonetheless identifies RE as both an ‘idea and an agenda’, which he considers to have ‘revolutionary potential’.⁶³ A close reading of the essay suggests that the significance of RE is particularly associated with a set of attitudes towards interpreting one’s own tradition and praxis, and the ecclesial other, which constitute an authentic ecumenical *ethos*. In contrast, contemporary obstacles to ecumenical progress are associated with a deficiency in these dispositions. Murray himself describes RE as ‘a total ethic that is as simple and all-pervasive as the gospel it represents’.⁶⁴ What then are the core commitments of RE which provide the methodological principles for this ‘idea and agenda with revolutionary potential’ and this ‘total ethic’?

The following sections highlight four key methodological principles from Murray’s work on theological rationality which I brought into conversation with Fiorenza’s hermeneutics in Chapter 4, and which are woven into the fabric of RE. The aim here is to demonstrate that RE is a specific particular instance of this set of commitments, and in so doing, make a case for the necessity of at least having these commitments in view for any serious appropriation of RE. The commitments will be considered under the following

⁶¹ Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs’, p. 38.

⁶² Paul Avis, ‘Are We Receiving “Receptive Ecumenism”?’ , *Ecclesiology*, 8.2 (2012), 223–34.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 224–25.

⁶⁴ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 16.

headings: 1) committed pluralism; 2) recursive fallibilism; 3) expansive catholicity; and, 4) coherence-based testing for dynamic integrity.

6.3.1 Committed Pluralism

In his 2008 programmatic essay setting out the nature and potential of Receptive Ecumenism, Murray draws attention to the nexus of ideas from which RE has emerged.⁶⁵ This includes not only the Catholic reception of ecumenism in Couturier, Congar, Vatican II and *Ut Unum Sint* but also the search for an appropriate theological rationality in a pluralist world. This passage sets out the fundamental orientation of RE in rejecting dogmatism and relativism, and is worth quoting at some length:

The intra-Christian ecumenical context—at least in the manner in which it is being engaged here—poses in a very proximate manner a ...pervasive contemporary cultural question: how are we to take traditioned particularity seriously, and the inevitable plurality of diverse traditioned particularities this suggests, without collapsing into the kind of closed, relativistic tribalism which, for example, Richard Rorty's thought—against his better intentions—leads us? Alternatively stated, what does it mean to seek to proceed reasonably beyond the demise of foundationalist objectivism; beyond the demise of an assumed neutral common ground on the basis of which differing particular perspectives and contrary claims can be independently assessed?⁶⁶

Clearly Murray is situating RE as one constructive outworking of his wider vision of theological rationality here, but what can easily be missed in this important paragraph is the implied risk to fruitful ecumenical endeavour if a relativist or foundationalist attitude is maintained. Thus RE is not only an attempt to get over a roadblock, but is an intentional countermove to any tendency of ecumenism to settle into an easy relativism, or to think that clarification and consensus alone will suffice to realise what a rich unity-in-diversity looks like. Both of these dangers encapsulate a static conception of unity and truth, as something which can simply be asserted in spite of difference, or in which difference can be sublimated to a third term. In contrast RE represents a fundamental commitment to an ongoing dynamic of committed belief (lived out in practice – as in Thiselton's account of 'dispositional

⁶⁵ Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda'. Although many of the essays in this 2008 volume are drawn from the 2006 Durham symposium, Murray's programmatic essay was produced after the conference and initially published as Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 7.4 (2007), 279–301. The paper presented at Durham to introduce RE was published as Murray, 'On Valuing Truth'.

⁶⁶ Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 7. This is still an open question, not only in ecumenical dialogue, but in the ongoing reception of tradition in Catholicism, construed as 'development' or more helpfully and critically as applying an appropriate hermeneutics of doctrine.

belief⁷) and constant provocation from the alterity of the ecclesial other, the world, and the overflowing bounty of God's revelation and love.

It is above all in Rescher's pragmatic idealism that Murray finds both creative resonance with Catholic sensibilities and doctrine, and a challenge as to how theology should be performed in the light of post-foundationalist commitments.⁶⁷ What Murray names the 'committed pluralism' of Rescher's position thus acts as a background theory for RE, capable of accommodating the plurality of the contemporary ecumenical context (not just an apparent plurality of different forms, but genuinely different cultural-linguistic systems) whilst justifying the reasonableness of holding a particular commitment in this context. In this regard, Murray concludes that 'Rescher's instincts are uniquely well-suited to the contemporary Christian ecumenical context and to indicating a constructive way forwards in a difficult phase of the ecumenical journey.'⁶⁸

One way of looking at this pluralism, consistent with another of Rescher's concerns, is to realise that RE is concerned not so much with consensus building but with seeking to bring multiple viewpoints to bear on each other and with strategies for long-term disagreement.⁶⁹ In one of the few pieces of secondary literature which engages directly with the rationality of RE, Nicholas Adams identifies RE—like the practice of 'Scriptural Reasoning' proposed by Peter Ochs—as operating on a 'triadic' model of reasoning.⁷⁰ Triadic, as opposed to binary, reasoning resists a singularising hermeneutics by specifying *who* assigns the value to the variable in statement, leaving room for equivocation which may reveal something of the truth of the matter.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Rescher's philosophy is 'a) idealistic, because it regards the constructive contribution of the enquiring mind as essential to knowledge, and because it regards systematic coherence as the criterion of truth; b) fallibilistic, because it denies that knowledge can provide more than an imperfect approximation of reality; and c) pragmatic, because it maintains that the validity of knowledge claims depends on their utility in furthering human purposes.', John Kekes, 'Nicholas Rescher', *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy (2nd edition)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 814.

⁶⁸ Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 8. Note that Murray does not attempt to claim a universal correctness for Rescher's philosophy and then attempt to build a theological method on it – that is, he does not use Rescher as a foundation – but rather sees a resonance between Rescher's insight and the problems of theology and creatively uses the former to gain perspective on the latter, whilst maintaining a concern for the internal coherence of a particular Christian tradition – in Murray's case, Catholicism. See Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 13–14, 130.

⁶⁹ See Rescher, *Pluralism*.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Adams, 'Long-Term Disagreement: Philosophical Models in Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism', *Modern Theology*, 29.4 (2013), 154–71 (pp. 162–68).

⁷¹ Adams' description of binary reasoning as 'a familiar shape of thinking with a bloody history' resonates strongly with Marquard's description of singularising hermeneutics discussed in Chapter 5, as well as with Murray's reference to 'blood-soaked conflictual difference' between Christians, Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 18. The instinct in RE towards triadic reasoning is anticipated in Congar's acknowledgement that the other's position 'may be right, or at least that they may have reasons for thinking differently from us which are valid from certain points of view', Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, Philip Loretz (tran.), (London:

Above all, Murray's appropriation of Rescher reveals a concern with the same kind of systematic dialectic between coherence and contingency found in Thiselton,⁷² but expressed here in more dynamic Rescherian terms as 'expansive coherentism and recursive fallibilism'.⁷³ These concepts provide the key to understanding the methodological commitments of RE:

Here it is reasonable to hold to what one has as long as it continues to stand up and to show itself to be cogent in the light of a *recursive, expansive, self-critical* engagement with the challenge of fresh understanding.⁷⁴

This fundamental conviction is not simply determined by philosophical commitments but is given a theological warrant through an appreciation that the performance of Christian truth, however well-enacted, falls short of the fullness to which creation is being drawn in the eschaton. Thus,

it is intrinsic to its own particular commitments that Christian faith, theology and ecclesial self-identity should be constantly exposed in an *expansive, recursive, coherence based* fashion to the scrutiny and refreshment of new questions, new problems, and new situations.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, the conviction which is fundamental to RE is that these elements describe the components of a *rejuvenating* reception, offering hope of real progress:

even more than simply being a matter of its critical testing, this process of recursive, expansive, self-critical challenge is envisaged ... as being about the integral

Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p. 57, cited in Murray, 'Expanding Catholicity through Ecumenicity in the Work of Yves Congar: *Ressourcement*, Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Reform', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 13.3 (2011), 272–302 (p. 296).

⁷² 'At the heart of catholicity, then, is no straightforward, undifferentiated universality but a concern for both universality and particularity; for a universality, indeed, that is the holding of the diverse localities, the diverse particular centres of Catholicism in gathered, configured communion.' Murray, 'Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plentitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God', in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.) (Washington, D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, forthcoming 2018), pp. 109–58.

⁷³ Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis added. This recursive, expansive, and fallibilist coherentism is at the heart of Murray's theological appropriation of Rescher: 'as authentically Christian theological rationality will be...marked by a sense for the particularity of truth and the role of coherentist considerations in its discerning; the need for such discerning to have an expansive, recursive dynamic to it and the recognition that rationality stretches beyond knowing in isolation to include evaluation and practice also', Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 135; see also *ibid.*, pp. 98, 113–16, 131–60.

⁷⁵ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 154.

refreshment of *what one/one's community already has* in the light of what can be appropriately received.⁷⁶

6.3.2 Recursive Fallibilism

As *recursive*, RE is committed to an ongoing dynamic of self-examination and renewal. What is settled in one context or time may be unsettled in another. This coheres well with Thiel's 'four senses of tradition', which provide a spectrum of the degree to which an element of tradition is sedimented in a community's whole tradition, and the consequences for how that element is interpreted and located in the overall web of belief. In one sense, recursion involves a recognition of the vital role played by this sedimented tradition – there must be something to go back to, even critically; in this sense, it reflects something of the activity of hermeneutical reconstruction described by Fiorenza. Elsewhere, Murray lists these attributes as *iterative*, expansive and self-critical, which reveals a somewhat extended significance for this attribute: 'iterative' helpfully suggests the *pragmatic* nature of the dynamic at play.⁷⁷ Furthermore, in systems engineering, iteration involves *testing* a particular version of a system or component, followed by applying any necessary corrections followed by more testing, often by observing a pilot programme in the real world rather than a laboratory environment.⁷⁸

Clearly visible in the fundamental principles of RE, the theological response to contemporary plurality is also required to be *self-critical*. Reception requires a self-critical stance in order for the dynamic of question and answer to come into play with regard to the interpreter not just as an individual but as the subject-church whose ongoing interpretations are encoded in tradition. In *RTT*, this methodological commitment is explicitly named as *fallibilist*.⁷⁹ Initially, 'fallible' might sound like the word least likely to be associated with Catholic doctrine, but not only is this a necessary stance from a hermeneutical perspective which excludes any neutral viewpoint, but it is a theological imperative, given the nature of the ultimate object of revelation, the limits of human understanding, the reality of human sinfulness, and the location of the church within an inaugurated but not fully realised eschatology.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 8, emphasis added. On Rush's use of 'rejuvenating reception', see Chapter 5 here.

⁷⁷ Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth', p. 281.

⁷⁸ The importance of *testing* for integrity is emphasised repeatedly by Murray as a corrective to a merely instrumental 'pick and mix' approach to RE.

⁷⁹ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 131–61.

⁸⁰ Murray offers some initial pointers as to how a Catholic notion of infallibility might be understood in such a fallibilist frame; within a given community, certain key principles may be held

This self-critical attitude extends not only to doctrinal interpretation and ecclesial structures but also to practices, including the practice of interpretation itself. This is the modern hermeneutical problem, the ‘crisis of hermeneutics’ which impels Fiorenza to seek a broad reflective equilibrium,⁸¹ and Ricoeur to detour through the other in order to ‘disenchant’ the narcissistic interpretative self.⁸² Jauss expresses this in terms of the canons of aesthetic judgment being part of what is received in the aesthetic canon, and Rush applies this insight to the reception of doctrine.⁸³

A concern for revising how tradition is interpreted and applied is also a concern of RE. From the first incipient references to ecumenism in *Reason, Truth and Theology* to the most recent document from ARCIC III, the potential for improved decision-making in Catholicism by learning from the other is emphasised.⁸⁴ Although the focus here is on improving the process (for example by better lay participation), there is no reason why the opportunities for ecclesial learning should not include learning what constitutes good learning (taking into account the systemic cost of reweaving the web of belief and practice). As argued in Chapter 5, I think this can be seen in the intra-ecclesial learning from liberation theology evident in Pope Francis’ inclusion of lived experience as a warrant for doctrinal interpretation.⁸⁵ As Rush makes clear in his use of Jauss, the canons of interpretation themselves—necessary though they are to enter the hermeneutical circle—are not immune to revision in the light of both the alterity of the object of reception and the ethical imperative involved in acts of interpretation (no ‘art for art’s sake’, therefore no ‘doctrine for doctrine’s sake’, and indeed no ecumenical reception solely for the sake of ecumenical reception). It is the provocation of the other which allows horizons to be *expanded*, and which is essential in dethroning narcissistic idols.⁸⁶

to be essential such that to relinquish them would not be to reweave the web of belief and discourse, but to establish and participate in a fundamentally different discourse. *Ibid.*, pp. 116 (n.82), 158. The idea is developed further in Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, pp. 205–20.

⁸¹ Fiorenza, ‘Crisis of Hermeneutics’.

⁸² See 2.4.2. See also Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur Between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010). See also Beate Bengard’s examination of ecumenical dialogue in France through the lens of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, where a parallel between the commitment of RE to revise theological understanding on the basis of lived experience in encounter with the other and Ricoeur’s model of inter-subjectivity is discerned: Beate Bengard, *Rezeption Und Anerkennung: Die Okumenische Hermeneutik Von Paul Ricoeur Im Spiegel Aktueller Dialogprozesse in Frankreich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), pp. 317–18.

⁸³ See Chapter 5 here.

⁸⁴ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 197; ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*.

⁸⁵ See 3.5.2.

⁸⁶ The relationships between idolatry and narcissism in Thiselton (following Ricoeur) and Pope Francis (in *EG*) has already been noted in Chapter 2. In an address given in 1974, the then-Father Bergoglio highlighted the danger for church communities cutting themselves off from one another in precisely those terms. Although he was referring to Jesuit congregations, the principle translates as a

6.3.3 Expansive Catholicity

In what sense then can RE be described not only as recursively fallibilist, but also *expansive*? At one level, certainly, RE has a traditional ecumenical goal of structural and sacramental unity, which represents a certain expanding of horizons. But whilst such unity might be profoundly therapeutic in salving the wounded body of the Christ, it could equally be conceived of as simply reparative rather than expansive. This is where the commitments of RE are distinctive and significant. RE is ‘not about becoming less Catholic (or less Methodist, less Anglican, or whatever)...but more deeply, more richly, more fully Catholic more fully Methodist, more fully Anglican etc.’.⁸⁷ This conviction, that both the personal and ecclesial life of faith is always essentially ‘a matter of becoming more fully, more richly, what we already are, what we are called to be and are destined to be’,⁸⁸ is rooted in the overwhelming generosity of grace which ‘not only opens and fills the available space, it expands current capacity in the very action of filling it’.⁸⁹ As presented in RE, this is not simply a pious affirmation of faith but a commitment to testing for concrete states of flourishing and of diminishment, and of risking change to address the latter and encourage the former.

These convictions are well and good, but how is this cashed out in RE as an ecumenical method? One of the research hypotheses for the RE programme is that further substantial progress in ecumenical dialogue is possible if the approach of humble learning is taken. However, careful reading of the proposal makes it clear that in the practice of RE such ecumenical progress is achieved *indirectly*, by addressing deficiencies in the individual churches and communities, rather than aiming directly at a common statements or common actions. Whilst there may indeed be immediate practical benefits from learning from the other, and intermediate benefits in terms of better understanding one’s own tradition, the longer term goal is achieved not directly through the practice or insight received as a single

salutary warning for division between churches: ‘[When] we no longer say “our God” but “my God”, when the Lord who calls us together is no longer the God of all but the God made to my measure...the only thing left is the cold ritual of a timeless idol. It knows nothing of the past or the future. It has locked itself up in a narcissistic projection’, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, ‘An Institution Living Its Charism: Opening Addresses to Two Provincial Congregations’, in *Writings on Jesuit Spirituality I*, Philip Endean (ed. & tran.), *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 45/3, 2013, pp. 13–37 (p. 35).

⁸⁷ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 17.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Murray, ‘Preface’, *xii*. This expansive catholicity sets RE—and Murray’s theological approach in general—apart from purely critical theologies and ecumenical approaches focussed on ecclesial *kenosis*, see Murray, ‘Growing into the Fullness of Christ: Receptive Ecumenism as an Instrument of Ecclesial Conversion’ (presented at the 68th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Miami, FL, 2013). Compare Irenaeus’ image of a vessel renewed by its contents in Rush’s ‘rejuvenating reception’ in 5.2.

datum, but through the changed instantiations of webs of belief which arise from that reception. ‘Truth’, according to Murray, ‘is something that we can legitimately assume ourselves to be articulating in part but which eludes us *in toto* and toward which, therefore, we need to understand ourselves as being oriented in the mode of aspiration rather than possession.’⁹⁰

If RE (and indeed the wider hermeneutics of tradition) is viewed in this light, a prospective as well as a retrospective orientation is revealed. This means that ecumenism is not focussed on simply understanding how divisions came about, and clearing up any misunderstandings and misrepresentations, important though this activity of the ‘ecumenism of truth’ may be in the history of church-dividing decisions. Whilst valuing the contributions of both faith and order, and life and works ecumenism, RE is positioned to avoid the dangers which an incautious application of these approaches might fall into—of focussing on clarifying past misunderstanding and finding common ground through analysing historic formulations, or on merely getting by in the present—by maintaining a focus on the future in Spirit-filled hope. A prospective orientation means that RE in the Catholic context ‘entails responsibility to the tradition’s present and future as surely as to its past.’⁹¹

Earlier, I showed that Fiorenza and Rush—as also Quash and Tanner—argue for ecclesial identity being something that is discovered and shaped. In Quash’s vocabulary, it is ‘found’ as well as ‘given’.⁹² Thus for the Catholic Church, for example, ecumenism cannot simply be a matter of comparing a doctrinal position from another church or an ecumenical statement with a defined Catholic position, but must allow one to reconstruct one’s own understanding in a new light – with integrity. It follows that at least part of ‘Catholic learning’ might have something to do with learning how to become more authentically catholic, regardless of whether or not one is located in the denomination bold enough to appropriate that term as its own. In other words, the expansive commitment made in RE can

⁹⁰ Murray, ‘Establishing the Agenda’, p. 8. Compare *EG* §223: ‘Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.’ For the justification of applying this principle to ecclesial as well as socio-political realities, one need look no further than *EG* itself: ‘This criterion also applies to evangelization, which calls for attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run’ (§225). The idea can be found as far back as 1974 in the writings of Francis/Bergoglio: ‘Los grandes criterios para conducir los procesos: la unidad es superior al conflicto, el todo es superior a la parte, *el tiempo es superior al espacio*’, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, ‘Una Instrucción Que Vive Su Carisma’, *Boletín de Espiritualidad*, 55 (1978 [1974]), 27–50 (p. 32), emphasis added. An English translation is available: Bergoglio, ‘An Institution Living Its Charism: Opening Addresses to Two Provincial Congregations’, p. 19. Both are available online at <<https://directoriatolico.blogspot.com/>>.

⁹¹ Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 158.

⁹² See 4.4.1 and 5.6.

be expressed as a growth in catholicity. As Murray argues in an essay intended to bridge the research projects of post-foundational theological rationality and ecclesial learning,

‘Catholicity’...invokes images of integrity, authenticity, universality, tradition, communion, unity, diversity and richness. It means all of these things, but in meaning all of them so also it qualifies all of them and means none of them in isolation. It refers not to the rigid narrow uniformity of a sect but to the differentiated unity of a communion that stretches to encompass all of creation in all of its diverse particularity....This is an understanding of Catholicism as a project to be lived and lived into rather than just a bald given to be preserved.⁹³

To draw on the titles of three key essays on the subject, the challenge involves both ‘redeeming’ and ‘expanding’ catholicity, through ‘living catholicity differently’.⁹⁴ My point here is that whilst this may well be described as a ‘catholic’ instinct in RE, it is not a simple confessional bias,⁹⁵ but an uncovering of identity through self-critical, expansive, recursive learning.

The key to understanding how ecumenism, catholicity, and learning come together is to be found in the influence of Yves Congar on Murray’s shaping of RE.⁹⁶ Murray argues for a congruence between Congar’s early work (focussing on catholicity), and later writings (concentrating on diversity) regarding ecumenism and catholicity which is ‘of abiding significance’ and ‘a decisive forerunner of Receptive Ecumenism’.⁹⁷ Thus RE takes up Congar’s axiom that ecumenical endeavour is intrinsic to the church realizing the fullness of her catholicity, and that such endeavour requires both learning from the other and the ability to change: ‘Catholic ecumenical commitment must, if serious, work hand in glove with commitment to Catholic reform’.⁹⁸ The question remains: how to assess any proposed reforms? In other words, how can ecclesial learning be adjudged reasonable and responsible? The model of ‘dynamic integrity’ explored in Chapter 4 assumes a critical role

⁹³ Murray, ‘On Valuing Truth’, pp. 179–80.

⁹⁴ The most developed treatment of this theme is in Murray, ‘Living Catholicity Differently’; see also Murray, ‘Redeeming Catholicity’; ‘Expanding Catholicity’.

⁹⁵ Pizzey argues that RE has a ‘distinctively Catholic character’ in the denominational sense: Pizzey, ‘Heart and Soul’, pp. 88–89.

⁹⁶ ‘[T]ime and again...Congar can be seen to have anticipated and, in many cases to have significantly developed the key principles that come to articulation in Receptive Ecumenism: combing steadfast focus on full structural and sacramental unity as the goal of ecumenism, attentiveness to the lived particularity of the various Christian traditions and their respective areas of giftedness and dysfunction, and the need for each to take responsibility for examining seriously how their respective traditions both can be and need to be renewed, expanded and enriched with dynamic integrity in the light of the other traditions.’ Murray, ‘Expanding Catholicity’, p. 301.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

for testing based on different modes of coherence. These have already been considered in terms of Fiorenza's theological hermeneutics, but how do they apply to ecumenism?

6.3.4 Coherence-Based Testing

In terms of an understanding of theological rationality, and the consequent methodological commitments, the initial presentation of RE is dominated by recursive, expansive, self-critical characteristics, drawn from the appropriation of Rescher in Murray's fundamental theology. From 2012, however, *coherence* increasingly comes to the fore as an organising principle. This is still a notion deeply rooted in Rescher,⁹⁹ but as developed by Murray three modes or dimensions of coherence are presented as essential for dynamic integrity: internal (intrinsic), extrinsic (extensive) and pragmatic.¹⁰⁰ This reflects a turn towards asking by what criteria a proposed development—for RE, receiving from the ecclesial other—can be assessed.

These three types of coherence have already been examined in some detail alongside Fiorenza's model of broad reflective equilibrium in Chapter 4 and, following my line of argument, it would be reasonable to assume that such a coherentist approach would be applicable to RE as a practical application of Murray's theological methodology. In fact, several later essays explicitly situate RE with regard to this coherentist model,¹⁰¹ and Murray's 2017 address at the 4th Receptive Ecumenism Conference is emphatic on the significance of coherence-based testing for theology and RE:

Beyond these three broad sets of coherence-based considerations, I am not sure we have any other conceptual, or specifically reason-based, intellectual resources for the potential conceiving of change in the church. In fact, I am pretty sure we don't have any other such specifically *reason-based* resources available to us for this task.¹⁰²

The key points pertaining to these modes of coherence have already been made in Chapter 4, but it worth noting that the application of all three modes to RE emphasises the

⁹⁹ Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*.

¹⁰⁰ The three modes of coherence are introduced in Murray and Guest. The implications of this approach, and of testing for pragmatic coherence in particular, are further explored in Murray, 'Discerning the Dynamics'.

¹⁰¹ Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism'; 'Searching the Living Truth'; 'Engaging with the Contemporary Church', pp. 472–77.

¹⁰² Murray, 'Discerning the Call of the Spirit', emphasis added. Murray further noted in his presentation that these may be the only 'conceptual, or specifically reason-based, intellectual resources available to us to help with the specifically theological task of testing responsibly for the potential conceiving of change in the church.' In addition to these reason-based resources there are of course such resources – such as the spiritual life and instruments of authority and discernment in the particular churches which also contribute to ecclesial decision-making.

plurality of loci where such coherence may be examined. Thus, maintaining internal coherence—perhaps the most obvious form of receiving ‘with integrity’—is not a matter of repetition, or of privileging one criterion of internal integrity against all others. It is rather a matter of attending to multiple nodes in a dynamic web of belief and practice, even if some elements of tradition are located towards the centre and some toward the periphery of such webs. That a number of the examples given by Murray correspond to certain of Rush’s *loci receptionis* should not be a surprise as both reflect a multi-dimensional approach to assessing integrity. Similarly extensive coherence does not define in advance which background theories must be satisfied, as a foundationalist programme would, but recognises that a range of auxiliary hypotheses are available, which need to be selected with regard to the particular situation and the overall web of understanding and decision-making;

In Chapter 4, I drew a parallel between pragmatic coherence and Fiorenza’s use of retroductive warrants. However, there are further aspects to Murray’s presentation of pragmatic coherence which are particularly relevant to RE. In addition to pragmatic incoherence indicating a need for re-receiving an element of the tradition, and potentially reweaving the web of belief and practice, a distinctive feature of Murray’s method, and thus of RE, is the need to consider the practical consequences of integrating any change into that dynamic web, and the systemic cost of integrating change.¹⁰³ In his 2017 presentation, Murray argues that a genuine act of Receptive Ecumenism would not only demonstrate internal and external coherence required by the receiving tradition, but would also make a constructive contribution to some difficulty experienced in that tradition. This aspect of coherence is the one which has been taken up most enthusiastically in the literature on RE: receptive learning as a means of healing wounds and dysfunctions.

6.3.5 Wounds and Dysfunctions

The literature of RE is full of striking images: the churches are in an ecumenical winter;¹⁰⁴ trying to solve pathologies from within a tradition is like a hamster running round a wheel;¹⁰⁵ ecumenism can seem like getting out the best china tea service;¹⁰⁶ and so on. However, the image which has perhaps become most strongly associated with RE is the notion of RE as a therapy, specifically as a healing for wounds. Now, ecclesial wounded-ness can mean a number of different things. For example, it is a commonplace in ecumenism to refer to the

¹⁰³ Murray, ‘Discerning the Dynamics’, pp. 205–15. See also Orsy, pp. 42–44.

¹⁰⁴ See n.20 here.

¹⁰⁵ Murray, ‘Introducing Receptive Ecumenism’, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

separation of the denominations as a wound in the one church of Christ. This sense of loss may be taken as read in RE, but is not the principal idea in play. Rather, the major context for considering wounds in RE combines theological modesty with ecclesial pragmatism:

The principle is that for all the many particular gifts and strengths to be found in each tradition, each also variously falls short of the glory of God; *each has specific characteristic difficulties and limitations, open wounds in need of healing*, that can be highly resistant to resolution from within the tradition's existing resources.¹⁰⁷

In the light of Murray's concern for pragmatic coherence this practical emphasis should not come as a surprise. These wounds are accordingly addressed by a search for suitable healing or therapy.¹⁰⁸ More innovative is the source of healing which is proposed in RE: it is the ecclesial other who may have 'healing gifts for wounded hands'. But still, what kinds of wounds are we talking about? One example is the issue of clericalism in Catholicism, which can be viewed as a wound from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, the various ways in which clericalism is manifested in practice (by the laity as well as by those clergy) can act as a barrier to potential goods, such as a fuller collegiality and synodality where the Catholic Church might learn from Orthodox *sorbonost*, Anglican lay participation in synods and parishes, and Methodist connexionalism.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, however, it may cause positive harm in certain situations; for example as a factor in the abuse crisis, where systemic dysfunction—not just personal failing—has been associated with a deeply embedded clericalism.¹¹⁰

This second aspect of ecclesial woundedness—where real harm has occurred or still occurs—highlights a potential lacuna in the presentation of RE discussed so far. Despite the strong emphasis on identifying pragmatic incoherence, there is an issue with the use of language about wounds and dysfunctions in RE, which is best viewed through Fiorenza's

¹⁰⁷ Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism as a Catholic Calling: Catholic Teaching on Ecumenism from Blessed Pope John Paul II to His Holiness Pope Francis' (International Theological Institute, Catholic School of Theology, Wien, 2014), p. 8 <https://iti.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/user_upload/News-Events/pdfs/Dr-Paul-Murray-Vienna-Receptive-Ecumenism-Lecture.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ Therapeutic language permeates Murray's discussion of Rorty in *Reason, Truth and Theology*, which addresses 'Rorty's diagnosis of the ills in foundationalist objectivism', 'Rorty's cure', and 'Diagnosing the ills in Rorty's cure'. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Thiselton suggests a therapeutic dimension to hermeneutics, which—transposed from the personal to the ecclesial—is applicable to the pragmatics of RE: 'If illness is what impairs a person's [church's] ability to undertake certain "performances", to restore persons [churches] to health is to restore their capacity and competence for appropriate human [ecclesial] activities, including *understanding*', *HD*, pp.92-93. On pragmatism as fundamentally therapeutic, see Ochs, *Peirce Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); 'Reparative Reasoning: From Peirce's Pragmatism to Augustine's Scriptural Semiotic', *Modern Theology*, 25.2 (2009), 187–215.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', p. 4; *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 159; 'On Valuing Truth', p. 182.

¹¹⁰ Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth'.

use of retroductive warrants. In Chapter 4, I drew a substantial parallel between Murray's focus on pragmatic coherence and Fiorenza's inclusion of retroductive warrants within his broad reflective equilibrium. Nonetheless, one of the differences between these is the greater attention Fiorenza gives to the question of *who* provides and evaluates evidence for these empirical warrants.

In short, wounds and dysfunctions are not exactly the same thing. At the very least, they represent two different perspectives. Within a given community, indeed, some may be wounded and others may in fact be complicit in perpetuating those wounds, or at least failing to tend them. Furthermore, the distribution of socio-economic and ecclesial power between dialogue partners is not necessarily even – both within Catholicism and between churches in diverse ecumenical contexts.¹¹¹ To apply the principle of concrete ecclesiology here means getting beyond the helpful metaphor of the wounded body of the church, notwithstanding its Pauline appropriateness, and paying particular attention to the voices of those who suffer the practical consequences of pragmatic dissonance between the gospel and ecclesial practice. Indeed, in ecumenical practice itself, there are particular wounds and dysfunctions which need addressing. For example, given the historical situation of women in the Catholic Church, it is reasonable to argue that a feminist reading of the practice might be beneficial.¹¹² A different kind of wound can be seen in the experience of interchurch families: here it is not so much a question of historical repression but a contemporary case of pragmatic incoherence, where church teaching regarding practice is experienced as incoherent with faithful reflection on the lived reality of relationships, family, and witnessing to fundamental Christian beliefs.¹¹³

If a way for the voices of the wounded to be heard can be included in RE in practice (and there is no methodological reason why this should not be so), then RE is well-situated to offer a distinctive contribution here. Such a contribution would be different to the 'ecumenism of life', working *together* on social justice issues, as it would focus on learning *across* traditions in order to reconfigure ecclesial structures, doctrine and practices, whilst

¹¹¹ The issue is succinctly stated in a feminist context by Christine Firer-Hinze: 'Wherever macro- or micro-relations place agents in positions of power-advantage, reflective solidarity demands practices of humility, listening, repentance, respectful space-giving, making way, giving and receiving. Wherever one's circumstances reflect power-disadvantage, reflective solidarity demands self-esteem, courage, boldness, speaking the truth, resistance, forgiveness, patience. As women and men engage in dialogue from differently-powered positions, the face and voice of the situated third to that dialogue shifts', Christine Firer-Hinze, 'Identity in Feminist Theological Debate', *Concilium*, 2 (2000), 113–20 (p. 118).

¹¹² The point here is that there is no more a neutral reading of ecumenical issues, than is possible for reading Scripture and Tradition, where new reading strategies have been employed. See *inter alia*, Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.

¹¹³ On the potential value of receptive ecumenism and interchurch families, see Paul Hendricks, 'Interchurch Families and Receptive Ecumenism.', *One in Christ*, 46.1 (2012), 2–13.

also privileging the voices of the oppressed in a way consistent with Catholic teaching. The recent initiation of a project on ‘Ecclesial Learning about Women and the English Churches through Receptive Ecumenism’ represents a promising step in this direction.¹¹⁴

6.4 Receptive Ecumenism as a Hermeneutical Endeavour

The preceding sections have argued that the roots of RE’s distinctiveness are to be found in Paul Murray’s work on fundamental ecclesiology and theological method, which can itself be located in a wider field of explicit influences, such as Rescher and Congar, and indirect resonances which have not previously been identified, such as the relationship to Fiorenza and Thiel. On this reading, neither understanding RE purely as an ecumenical spirituality nor reducing it to an instrumental ‘pick and mix’ can be considered adequate. Within the overall perspective of this thesis, however, the nature of RE as an activity can be pushed further. So, despite the absence of an explicit hermeneutical frame of reference in Murray’s early work or on his presentation of RE, the final part of this chapter addresses the question: ‘Is Receptive Ecumenism also a hermeneutical endeavour?’

The answer I am looking for is not a general affirmation of the variety that ‘all theology is in some sense hermeneutical’. This is a useful enough insight if it highlights the nature of theology as interpretative, not simply descriptive, but it is less useful in fine-tuning the strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches.¹¹⁵ Rather the concern here is to ask whether the hermeneutical perspectives brought to the fore in Thiselton, Fiorenza, and especially Rush, as discussed in earlier chapters, are substantially present in the theory and practice of RE. However, it will be useful to begin by locating RE within the field of specifically ecumenical hermeneutics.

6.4.1 Receptive Ecumenism and Ecumenical Hermeneutics

‘The first task of ecumenical dialogue’, according to Paul Avis, ‘is mutual *interpretation* – interpreting your own tradition, especially its ecclesiology, to ecumenical partner churches, and in turn receiving their interpretation of their own traditions.’¹¹⁶ On the basis of a ‘family resemblance’ between Christian churches, mutual understanding is possible without

¹¹⁴ See www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/projects/receptiveecumenism/projects/womenandthechurches/. See also, especially on the issues of asymmetric power relations in the ecumenical practice, including RE, Gabrielle Thomas, ‘A Call for Hospitality: Learning from a Particular Example of Women’s Grass Roots Practice of Receptive Ecumenism in the U.K.’, *Exchange*, (forthcoming, 2018).

¹¹⁵ E.g., Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, pp. 187–211.

¹¹⁶ Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 60, emphasis added.

minimising the genuine otherness that exists. There is a tension ‘between sameness and difference’ which allows us to have a stake in another church without belonging to it.¹¹⁷ Ultimately for Avis, ‘ecumenism is essentially a hermeneutical enterprise. To make progress in Christian unity, we need skills in the art of interpretation’.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately ‘most dialogues...are deficient in methodological consciousness’¹¹⁹ Similarly, Anton Houtepen identifies the responses to the 1982 paper on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry¹²⁰ as a significant indicator of the lack of hermeneutical reflection in the churches.¹²¹ In order to locate RE within this field, it will be useful to briefly discuss some relevant observations from the World Council of Churches (WCC), Avis, and Houtepen.

The significance of hermeneutics for ecumenical dialogue has been increasingly recognised within the WCC, resulting in the publication of *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* in 1988.¹²² Like RE, this WCC Faith and Order paper recognises both the significant gains which have been made and the warning signs of an ecumenical winter. In *TEV*, this imparts a particular urgency to ecumenical hermeneutics:

Reflection about hermeneutics arises with fresh urgency at this moment in the history of the ecumenical movement. A new climate of trust and mutual accountability has been

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71. In this context Avis notes the personal impact, as an Anglican ecumenist, that the first RE conference had on him.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62. See also, on the ecumenical hermeneutics of scripture, Geoffrey Wainwright, ‘Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutic: How Can All Christians Read the Scriptures Together?’, *Gregorianum*, 76.4 (1995), 639–62.

¹¹⁹ Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, p. 40. Avis cites ARCIC as a prime example of this lack of methodological reflection. It is interesting to note in this light that the current round of conversations, ARCIC III explicitly considered its methodology in deciding to adopt Receptive Ecumenism as an approach. On the methodology of the various phases of ARCIC, see Murray, ‘Reception of ARCIC’. See also Adelbert Denaux, ‘The Use of Scripture in the Agreed Statements of ARCIC II’, in *Looking towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky, and Charles Sherlock (eds.) (London: SPCK, 2016), pp. 249–56; Nicholas Sagovsky and Charles Sherlock, ‘The Doctrinal Methods of ARCIC II’, in *Looking towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky, and Charles Sherlock (eds.) (London: SPCK, 2016), pp. 257–65; Adelbert Denaux, ‘Ecclesial Repentance and Conversion: Receptive Ecumenism and the Mandate and Method of ARCIC III’, in *Conversion and Church: The Challenge of Ecclesial Renewal*, Stephan van Erp and Karim Schelkens (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 304–25.

¹²⁰ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

¹²¹ Anton Houtepen, ‘The Faith of the Church through the Ages: Christian Tradition and Postmodernist Challenges’, in *The Living Tradition: Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of the Christian Tradition*, Houtepen (ed.), IIMO Research Publication, 41 (Utrecht: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1995), pp. 35–70 (pp. 49–56).

¹²² Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, ‘A Treasure in Earthen Vessels’ (henceforth *TEV*), published with commentary and supporting discussion papers in *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller (eds.) (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2001). See also Larini, pp. 90–91.

nurtured but at the same time there are hesitations and even retreats because churches are not clear about the meaning of ongoing work toward visible unity.¹²³

TEV gives a short summary of how hermeneutical issues have gained prominence in ecumenical activities and proposes three areas for reflection: 1) common criteria, with an emphasis on historical–critical reading of scripture, whilst acknowledging other critical methods; 2) the relationship of contextuality and catholicity, or the local and the universal, particular in terms of inculturation; and, 3) the role of the church as a hermeneutical community is explored using the dimensions of discernment, authority and reception. Within these proposals, three perspectives are especially relevant in showing how RE not only aligns with some of the principle concerns of ecumenical hermeneutics, but also goes beyond them and has the potential to stimulate a further refinement of hermeneutical principles in ecumenical contexts.

Firstly, ecumenical hermeneutics is intended to be a mode of ‘re-reception’ in which all can participate, although *TEV* surely overstates the case when it declares that ‘hermeneutics, perhaps especially ecumenical hermeneutics is *not* the work of specialists’.¹²⁴ In practice, however, this inclusivity extends principally to the ‘reception’ of agreed statements, whereas RE starts with the far more wide-ranging potential of dysfunctions, and the possibility of not only confirming but learning and healing. Although *TEV* demonstrates a commitment to the synodal discernment found in RE and in Rush’s hermeneutics of reception, there is only limited evidence of the complementary dimension of transversality. Thus whilst a range of hermeneutical practices is valued, these emerge from within the admittedly diverse field of *Christian* interpretation, in contrast to RE’s interdisciplinary approach, employing extrinsic coherence or background theories.¹²⁵

Secondly, both *TEV* and RE utilise *coherence* as a key principle. *TEV* proposes a ‘hermeneutics of coherence’, which is explicitly concerned with unity, apparently to prevent any imbalance arising from the use of the hermeneutics of suspicion which it also endorses.¹²⁶ However, ‘coherence’ here appears largely as an internal affair, orientated towards the inner consistency of the Christian message in contrast to Murray’s inclusion of extrinsic and pragmatic coherence alongside internal coherence as criteria of reasonableness in interpretation.¹²⁷

¹²³ *TEV* §11.

¹²⁴ *TEV* §50 (emphasis added).

¹²⁵ *TEV* §§22-28.

¹²⁶ *TEV* §6.

¹²⁷ However, for a response to *TEV* which prioritises interpreting together with the oppressed and reading the signs of the times in a prospective manner, see Pablo R. Andiñach, ‘Reflections on “A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics”’, in

Thirdly, *TEV* not only maintains a dialectic between coherence and suspicion with regard to the interpreter of tradition, but also identifies a dialectic between a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and a ‘hermeneutic of confidence’. Here ‘suspicion’ indicates a critical attitude to reception, mindful of the inadequacy of simply transplanting from one tradition to another. ‘Confidence’, on the other hand, represents a commitment to the possibility of finding truth in the ecclesial other, a principle predicated upon recognition of the apostolic faith in multiple *loci*. This is an important ecumenical move, but otherness, in this approach, appears only negatively, either as a misunderstanding or an aberration.¹²⁸ In contrast, Thiselton has shown how the positive role played by alterity in modern hermeneutics, particularly Ricoeur and Jaus, can be applied, with integrity, to theological understanding. How the apparently contrasting goals—consensus and difference, catholicity and contextuality, suspicion and confidence—might be achieved in practice is also left unexplored in *TEV*. Bearing in mind that my concern here is to identify the potential contribution of RE, not to criticise the approach of *TEV*, it may be said that the focus in *TEV* is on reconciliation, whereas in RE it is ecclesial transformation that is the proximate goal.

Fourthly, the overarching commitment of ecumenical hermeneutics, as set forth in *TEV*, is a hermeneutics *for* unity.¹²⁹ Ulrich Körtner, critically reviewing *TEV* from a Reformed perspective argues that the task of ecumenical hermeneutics must be orientated toward understanding, not to unity as such:

No hermeneutics, including theological hermeneutics, should be tied to a program for unity and made to serve an ecclesiastical purpose. As soon as this happens, any hermeneutics has lost its critical function...Understanding cannot be manufactured or regulated, but always includes the freedom to understand something in another way.¹³⁰

Körtner therefore proposes a ‘hermeneutics of difference’ as the correct one for ecumenism. In this view, hermeneutics is

not a theological instrument for consensus-building and overcoming church divisions (splitting, separation) because the existence of a consensus, or the lack thereof, can only be diagnosed methodologically – and the means hermeneutically – but cannot be manufactured. An ecumenical hermeneutics, understood as a hermeneutics of difference

Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics, Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller (eds.) (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2001), pp. 128–33.

¹²⁸ For example, in *TEV* §29, dialogue is openness to the other, but carries no sense of provocation as is found in Rush’s appropriation of Jaus and, I would argue—despite the focus on healing wounds—in RE.

¹²⁹ *TEV* §6.

¹³⁰ Ulrich H. J. Körtner, ‘Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of Diversity: Some Remarks on the Hermeneutical Challenges of the Ecumenical Movement’, *Theology Today*, 68.4 (2012), 448–66 (p. 453).

and diversity, is therefore not the continuation by other means of consensual ecumenical agreement as we have hitherto known it, but rather a critical corrective to it.¹³¹

The instinct that hermeneutics is not an instrument for consensus building *per se*, is resonant with RE, as is the desire for further development in ecumenical method. On the other hand, an ecumenical hermeneutics which simply negotiates difference without an *expansion* of horizons falls short of the mark. There is a danger that Körtner's proposal could be read as justifying a static understanding of existing confessional identities, in which case the critical function of hermeneutics with regard to the various traditions might be maintained, but the critical function in relation to the 'reader' – the ecclesial communities – is lost.¹³²

Avis also rejects a predetermined notion of what unity would look like but values it rather as a rhetorical device which propels the process of understanding. Christian identity, he argues, is discovered through a narrative quest, not given in advance, and so ecumenical understanding must progress in stages.¹³³ For understanding to be transformative of the ecclesial body, it must be received widely, not just by a few interested parties,¹³⁴ thus reception in multiple ecclesial contexts plays an important role in discerning whether something can be formally received with integrity.¹³⁵ In this reception, form and content cannot be fully separated, partly because of the importance Avis gives to narrative, which cannot be reduced to propositions. There is also a theological reason: if the object of reception is the living Word of God, and the site of reception is the life of the church and individual Christians, then reception, in Avis' model, is more akin to an indwelling, a *perichoresis*, than the unwrapping of a gift.¹³⁶ This is made possible, as Körtner also argues, through a 'family resemblance' across the churches leading to ongoing dialogue,¹³⁷ not a singularizing hermeneutic of uniformity over unity.¹³⁸ The hermeneutical model Avis proposes therefore is a dynamic one, in which horizons are expanded, and identities discovered through returning to the tradition, especially the scriptures, and through the engagement with the committed ecclesial other.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹³² For a typology of approaches to consensus in ecumenical hermeneutics, with Rescher's critique of consensus in view, see Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, pp. 194–215.

¹³³ See Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, pp. 39–59.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91. Compare Rush's 12 loci and especially the role of the *sensus fidelium*: see Chapter 5 here.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The recursive, expansive and self-critical hermeneutical dynamic which is characteristic of RE can be seen even more clearly in Houtepen's specification for ecumenical interpretation. A committed ecumenist, Houtepen has written several essays on hermeneutics and ecumenism, including a discussion paper used in the development of *TEV*.¹³⁹ Houtepen is particularly interesting as he roots ecumenical hermeneutics in fundamental theology,¹⁴⁰ and views the implications for ecumenism of developments in modern hermeneutics as a paradigm shift from a static 'deposit of faith' to a 'dynamic transmission of the gospel'.¹⁴¹ More than Avis, Houtepen stresses that interpretation and reception involves a prospective orientation as well as an ongoing commitment to recursive, retrospective examination of the apostolic tradition. This is evidenced most clearly in his commitment to asking for 'the extent to which your church can recognize the faith of the church through the ages' in a given ecumenical text, rather than simply comparing the text to an existing historical formulation.

This prospective approach requires multiple understandings to be set side by side synchronically and diachronically in the light of a reconstructive hermeneutics of the apostolic faith.¹⁴² In the learning process which this search entails,

the master and the pupils not only repeat what was known already, provided only that all questions are admitted and every doubt estimated and honoured, even new insights might be gained, the unthinkable brought to reflection, the tales of the unexpected come true.¹⁴³

This brief exploration has demonstrated that some of the key concerns and approaches of RE, also fall under the field of *ecumenical* hermeneutics. A further question arises: as *receptive* ecumenism, is there a further hermeneutical dimension to be explored? To answer this I propose an initial reading of RE in the light of Ormond Rush's theological hermeneutics on the basis of Rush's claim that the theological hermeneutics proposed in *RD* 'is a hermeneutics of alterity and a pluralising hermeneutics which meets the demands of an "ecumenical hermeneutic", as proposed by Wainwright, and of the "ecumenical methodology" called for by Tavard and Tillard'.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Houtepen, 'Hermeneutics and Ecumenism'.

¹⁴⁰ Houtepen, 'Faith of the Church through the Ages', p. 36.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁴² In language strikingly reminiscent of Fiorenza and Murray, Houtepen understands the task of ecumenical dialogue to include gaining 'common insight into a coherent and reconstructive "hermeneutics of tradition".' *Ibid.*, p. 56. Compare the distinction between 'defending past differences' and 'discerning a shared future' in Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*, pp. 200–203.

¹⁴³ Houtepen, 'Faith of the Church through the Ages', p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Rush, *RD*, p. 354.

6.4.2 Receptive Ecumenism and Reception Hermeneutics

An apparently obvious question which has only received limited attention in the literature on RE is this: what is the relationship between the notion of ‘reception’ in RE and in hermeneutics? More specifically, does the ‘receptive’ orientation of RE have anything to do with the notion of reception as put forward by Rush in the context of a hermeneutics of doctrine?

Whilst Murray’s programmatic essays on RE neither define the notion of reception nor make explicit reference to hermeneutical principles associated with it, Rush—in an essay derived from his presentation at the 2nd RE Conference—argues that:

There is always...a hermeneutical element involved in the ongoing reception of revelation...The term ‘receptive ecumenism’ highlights a dynamic of ‘reception’ no less involved in ecumenical encounter.¹⁴⁵

In his essay, Rush focusses on the theological category of the *sensus fidelium* and its significance for ecumenism, concluding that among other potential benefits, heuristic possibilities are revealed:

[This] may just open up new perspectives on receptive ecumenism and ecclesial learning through dialogue. For example, framing the debate concerning our remaining differences in terms of differentiated interpretations or senses of the faith, and highlighting the pneumatological origin of that differentiation and diversity may offer a basis for then framing a theology of a differentiated *consensus fidelium*.¹⁴⁶

Valuable though this application of receptive principles to the *sensus fidei* for both Catholic ecclesial understanding and ecumenical prospects is, even Rush’s own contribution here does not fully develop the possibility of reading RE through the lens of reception hermeneutics. However, it demonstrates the heuristic value of bringing RE into conversation with Rush’s work. Whilst Rush has elaborated the theological meaning of reception, and ecumenism, using the category of the *sensus fidei*, my concerns in the present chapter are with the hermeneutical commitments underlying RE and the dynamics which animate the practice of ecclesial learning. Can Rush’s work on reception also throw some light on this? In *RD*, Rush has already completed the groundwork of bringing reception theory into a theological hermeneutics. Using this foundational work, I suggest that RE can indeed be described in terms of a hermeneutics of reception, and that the relationship between reception hermeneutics and RE completes the triangulation of Rush, Fiorenza, and Murray begun in chapter 4 (Fiorenza and Murray); extended (if only implicitly, through Rush’s

¹⁴⁵ Rush, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*’, p. 560.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

building on Fiorenza's introduction of Jauss) in Chapter 5; and completed here in a setting of ecclesial praxis by reading Murray's work on RE in the light of Rush's reception hermeneutics.

There are a number of promising lines of inquiry which could be followed: for example on the commitment to a pluralizing rather than singularizing hermeneutics, and what that might mean for long-term differences in churches; or on reception as a constant reconfiguring of diverse interpretations and practices and how that might be practiced in the decision-making structures of contemporary Catholicism; or on the role of selective remembering, forgetting, and recovering in 'receiving with integrity'. More generally, the whole ethos of RE coheres with Rush's principle that 'fuller understanding in the search for truth requires the readings of others.'¹⁴⁷ However I will limit my initial attempt to demonstrate the heuristic possibilities of relating RE and reception hermeneutics to a consideration of two of the numerous triads which Rush uses to model the dynamics of reception.¹⁴⁸ The most significant of these, in terms of a distinctive contribution, are a 'triad of readings' (pre-reflective, reconstructive, and applicative) and a 'triad of senses' (*poiesis, aesthesis, catharsis*) involved in aesthetic appreciation.

The first triad describes the process of interpretation in terms of three successive 'readings': firstly, a pre-reflective aesthetic moment, reimagined by Rush as the sense of faith; secondly, a reconstructive hermeneutical activity which views the work critically and in historical context; thirdly, an applicative hermeneutics, through which answers for the present horizon and a rejuvenating reception of tradition are possible. If the initial programmatic outline of RE is examined, it shows a remarkable similarity to this triple reading, with pre-reflective, critical and applicative moments. In the preface to the first RE volume, Murray describes the essence of the project as follows:

[RE] might be best expressed in terms of: (1) the dreaming of dreams; (2) the testing of such dreams for their viability; and (3) the discerning together of what might either hinder or promote their embodied ecclesial realization. These are the three voices, the three concerns, in which and in accordance with which the volume infolds. We might refer to them respectively as the poetic, the analytic, and the pragmatic or, alternatively, as the imaginative-constructive, the critical-constructive, and the practical-organizational. They might be held to be the three key voices in which all good ecclesial theology is performed.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Rush, *RD*, p. 325.

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁹ Murray, 'Preface', *ix-xv* (*xi*).

The resonance between these three voices and the three readings of reception hermeneutics is a promising sign in terms of thickening Murray's methodology as far as *structural* similarity goes. The three 'readings' Rush appropriates from Jauss describe a standard concept in hermeneutics: the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation (or explanation) and application.¹⁵⁰ Thus although Murray employs different background theories (coherentism, pragmatism) to Rush or Thiselton (continental hermeneutics, linguistic philosophy), the above account of what RE entails describes a familiar hermeneutical trajectory and one which forms the basis of Rush's hermeneutics of doctrine.¹⁵¹ While Rush is primarily concerned with the *sensus fidei* operative in the creative reception of doctrinal statements, in RE, Murray addresses the conceptual, structural, procedural, and habitual dimensions of ecclesial life through the aesthetic, critical and practical potential of learning through ecumenical engagement. The same pattern of aesthetic experience, critical questioning, and concrete application can be found underpinning RE in Murray's coherentist methodology in distinctly theological mode, with regard to the performance of Christian discipleship, which entails:

faithful attendance to the reality of things as held in being by God the sustaining source of all that is; *hopeful* discerning of creative possibilities in the light of the ever fresh yet constant patterning of God's self-revealing truth and *loving* enactment of certain of these possibilities inspired by the generative and transforming power of God.¹⁵²

What, then, of the *dynamics* of performing interpretation in receptive mode? Rush has drawn attention to three senses involved in reception: *poiesis*, *aesthesis* and *catharsis*. Can these also be found in RE? Some care is needed here. Whilst neither the three 'voices' of RE nor the three 'readings' in Rush are strictly linear, *poiesis*, *aesthesis* and *catharsis* are even less suited to being imagined as distinct *phases* of the act of reception, and are best thought of as 'senses' operating together throughout the process, with different ones foregrounded as required (much as a cook will use different physical senses in preparing a meal, but will not strictly separate taste, sight and smell in the process).

Both RE and reception hermeneutics begin with an aesthetic activity in which the creative, active mode of *poiesis* is given particular emphasis. 'Aesthetic' here is not limited to *objects d'art*, such as music and liturgy, but includes moral beauty, intellectual beauty and so on. This aesthetic appreciation begins not 'seeking some manner of deeper communion

¹⁵⁰ See 2.3.2, n.23.

¹⁵¹ 'An initial faith reading which brings the receiver's *sensus fidei* to the fore, a second reconstructive reading of a doctrinal statement's primary context, and a third applicative reading in its secondary context to allow the alterity of God to break through in a differentiation of horizons.' Rush, *RD*, pp. 315–25.

¹⁵² Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, pp. 135–37., Murray, *ibid.*, p. 135.

with [other churches] ...but from appreciating some already actual Christian excellence in them. Anglican evensong and Anglican holy lives, for example, evoke admiration.¹⁵³ Whilst fully acknowledging the essential role of disciplined theological and scientific analysis, it is the aesthetic activity, the ‘dreaming of dreams’ which is given a certain priority in RE. This decision to lead with the aesthetic moment is paralleled in Rush’s appropriation of Jauss. Can the senses of *poiesis*, *aesthesis* and *catharsis* involved in this activity also help to uncover the hermeneutical dynamics in RE?

A starting point is Murray’s description of RE as an act of ‘ecclesial *poiesis*’, constructive ecclesial theology ‘poised between given circumstances and accumulated understanding, on the one hand, and necessary accountability, refinement, and anticipated actualization, on the other’.¹⁵⁴ So too for Rush, ‘there is a creativity at the core of a believer’s on-going act of faith which is a reconstructive and reinterpetative imagining... It is here that the rejuvenating reception of doctrine begins.’¹⁵⁵ *Poiesis* represents a creative, productive sense, allowing a dynamic of ‘Christian newness’ in the act of reception and enabling the production of a ‘new work’.¹⁵⁶ In an ecumenical context, the new work might be a formal text such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, or key documents emerging from ARCIC—the kind of documents which Houtepen sees as belonging to a ‘future-oriented Christian tradition’¹⁵⁷—but the broad reach of RE emphasises that we may also receive more informally, and more locally, from many aspects of another tradition: for example, devotional, practical, doctrinal, or organisational.

When the ‘dreaming of dreams’ is seen in this light, it is clear that such a starting point is not opposed to the disciplined theological work required for structural and sacramental unity, but rather the exercise of a particular hermeneutical sense which is essential in interpreting a tradition afresh. Through imaginative engagement, in faith, with the lived experience of the other, the creative activity of *poiesis* is allowed full play without prematurely applying analytical or pragmatic constraints. The language of ‘ad hoc strategy’, and ‘virtuous virus’, and the non-linear reasoning Murray employs, does not indicate a lack of method; rather the creative employment of *poiesis* is a reconstructive, hermeneutical act. Transposed to an ecumenical and theological key, this leaves room for the symbolic, the prophetic and the narrative, as well as for the pneumatic surprises of the unpredictable Spirit.

¹⁵³ Thomas Hughson, ‘Beyond Ecumenical Dialogue’, *One in Christ*, 46.1 (2012), 24–37.

¹⁵⁴ Murray, ‘Preface’, xi.

¹⁵⁵ Rush, *RD*, p. 218.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁷ Houtepen, ‘Hermeneutics and Ecumenism’.

What about the other two senses—*aesthesis* and *catharsis*? Are these also discernible in the literature and practice of RE? In Rush’s hermeneutics, following Jauss, these terms have a subtly different meaning to their everyday sense. *Aesthesis* complements the productive imagination of *poiesis* with a receptive sense of recognition. It is concerned with identity in relation to a wider set of reference points in order to create a meaningful whole.¹⁵⁸ As such it has a particular affinity with the ecumenical goal of unity (not uniformity). As Kasper has noted, any possibility of creative appropriation through reception requires creative *integration*,¹⁵⁹ and for Murray’s post-foundationalist approach it is above all the metaphor of reweaving which encapsulates this striving for dynamic coherence. Similarly for RE, *aesthesis* involves reweaving—with integrity—the web of doctrinal and pastoral relationships between *and within* churches, and between the church and the world. One desired outcome of such reweaving in RE is for churches to be able to look anew at problems which seem insoluble with current resources, perspectives, structures, and habits. This is the goal of *aesthesis*: ‘a new way of seeing for eyes that do not see’.¹⁶⁰

The final element of Jauss’ aesthetic triad is *catharsis*. Against any notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, *catharsis* involves an ethical orientation in the production and reception of a work and as such may involve changes even to deeply held traditions, such as an established canon of works or interpretative methods. In RE, the sense of *catharsis* is made concrete in a *therapeutic* mode. In the recognition of wounds and dysfunctions, a distance is recognised between the church as actually experienced and what it is called to be in the fullness of Christ. One of the ways in which Jauss considers *catharsis* is in terms of how a reader identifies with the hero in a story. Whilst some modes of identification stress the continuity between reader and hero through association, imitation and sympathy, others—*catharsis* and irony—require a distancing from the hero, undergoing trials and suffering in order to make judgments.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Rush, *RD*, pp. 73.76, 229–32.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Reception does not mean an automatic, merely passive, acceptance, but a lively and creative evolution of appropriation and integration.’, Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, p. 140.

¹⁶⁰ Rush, *RD*, p. 231.

¹⁶¹ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, pp. 177–81. A danger which Jauss identifies is that an aesthetic experience may not result in transformation. This may also be applied with considerable force to the ways in which a Christian tradition identifies with an idealised image of the church: ‘The process of identification with an ideal model which one wishes to become does not always attain a personal synthesis. It can also slip back into the fantasy the daydreamer has always entertained about himself’. He names the dangers as ‘the shifts from upward-looking admiration to mere marvelling at the extraordinary, from free emulation to unfree imitation, from a compassion that will act to the sentimental enjoyment of pain’. These dangers not only apply to the kind of ‘blueprint ecclesiology’ which RE seeks to avoid, but could equally apply to the danger of ‘receiving with integrity’ from the other being replaced by mere admiration for them in their difference or sentimentally feeling the pain of separation.

This can be seen in RE when the interpreter *imaginatively* creates distance in order to acknowledge, and critically examine, an ecclesial wound or a dysfunction. This is combined with an attraction to what is found elsewhere, triggering imaginative possibilities ('dreaming of dreams') whilst still being able to remain a member of the church and indeed with the intention of a Catholic becoming more Catholic and so on.¹⁶² Both in following the existing tradition within a given church community, and in potential learning from another church, it is 'free learning comprehension by example' not 'unfree imitation' that is necessary.¹⁶³

By understanding the dynamic of RE in terms of reception hermeneutics it is clear that RE is 'receptive' not simply insofar as its practitioners maintain an attitude of receptivity but rather insofar as RE is an application of the complex, challenging process of receiving the Gospel with integrity. This requires not only an openness to learning from the other but to doing so creatively (*poiesis*), integrating learning with the relevant areas of the webs of belief and praxis, reweaving the web where required (*aesthesis*), and applying the learning (i.e. the renewed understanding of the gospel) in transformative praxis (*catharsis*). Using the resources of Rush's hermeneutics to read RE reveals, not so much a gap as two underdeveloped themes in the understanding of reception in RE.

Firstly, whilst RE emphatically shifts the mode of ecumenism from 'tolerance and understanding' to 'learning from', it lacks the sense of *provocation* evident in reception hermeneutics as a necessary element in dethroning the idol of narcissism. Secondly, classifying RE primarily as a type of ecumenism runs the risk that the partial nature of RE be lost. Referencing Murray's work more widely it is clear that RE is but one of several projects which arise from his vision of 'Catholicism Transfigured'¹⁶⁴ and that the principles of RE are those of his underlying theology. Setting RE in the context of Rush's hermeneutics provides this wider context with a systematic presentation or framework. Accordingly I propose therefore that RE is best seen in this wider horizon as a highly-developed realization of the relevant site in Rush's twelve *loci receptionis*. Rush himself has developed a substantial theology addressing the sites related to the *sensus fidei* and the relations of the sense of faith to the roles of theologians and the magisterium.¹⁶⁵ Taken together with appropriate resources which similarly realize the other *loci* as theologies and

¹⁶² Murray, 'Establishing the Agenda', p. 16. Rush uses the recitation of the creed to illustrate how catharsis 'challenges the community to become what it is called to be', Rush, *RD*, p. 233. The same dynamic is not only evident in the principle of RE that Catholics become more Catholic through receiving from others, but in the appropriation of Rescher's 'recursively expansive, determinately fallibilist and avowedly post-foundationalist account of human rationality [which]...should act as a resource to enable the practice of Christian theology to be *more authentically itself*.' Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 157, emphasis added.

¹⁶³ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁴ Murray, 'On Valuing Truth', p. 165.

¹⁶⁵ Rush, *Eyes of Faith*.

practical strategies would provide a rich systematic, collaboratively developed account of what receiving with integrity means in contemporary Catholicism.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced Receptive Ecumenism as a distinctive ecumenical strategy with strong methodical commitments that are nonetheless underdeveloped in much of the relevant literature. I showed how these commitments are rooted in Murray's understanding of dynamic integrity and can thus also be viewed in terms of Fiorenza's model of broad reflective equilibrium, based on the correlation developed in Chapter 4. Rush's hermeneutics of doctrine already builds on Fiorenza, thus the present chapter completes the triangulation between Rush, Fiorenza, and Murray by reading the process of RE from the perspective of Rush's reception hermeneutics.

Although the primary literature on RE insists on 'receiving with integrity', unpacking this phrase requires the kind of conceptual resources which I have brought to the fore in the present work under the title of 'receptive integrity'. By returning to the fundamental commitments of RE and by offering a new reading of these commitments in terms of renewing reception, this chapter makes a twofold contribution. On the one hand, it provides a more substantive specification for how 'receiving with integrity' is realised in RE than simply presenting it as a readiness to learn from another church. On the other hand, it provides arguments for understanding one of Rush's twelve sites of reception as concretely and richly worked out in RE, thus fleshing out Rush's hermeneutics of doctrine with a substantive ecumenical perspective. If this identification is sound, then the practical value demonstrated in RE can reasonably be seen as an indirect warrant for the correctness of Rush's hermeneutics of doctrine. Conversely, Rush's sophisticated adoption of reception hermeneutics can reasonably be employed to thicken the theoretical underpinning of dynamic reception and learning in RE.

Nonetheless, conceived of in this way, RE remains but one site of reception out of twelve, and this wider picture is also significant for an adequate understanding of RE, and for envisioning the future direction which this strategy might take.¹⁶⁶ Stated bluntly, it is a mistake to view RE exclusively in terms of it being an ecumenical strategy. By this I mean

¹⁶⁶ In Murray's own research, RE resides in a wider project, 'Catholicism Transfigured', as both an expression of that concept and as a core component of it. Murray conceives 'Catholicism Transfigured' as a specific *ecclesial* realisation of the wider task of Christian theology understood as the critical-constructive analysis of the practices and understanding of faith. At all three levels, the concern is with questions which arise, experience of problems, and felt difficulties, with a view to identifying tactics and strategies for enhancing quality of practice and understanding. Interview with the author, Durham, 19th July 2018; see also Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology*, p. 197; 'On Valuing Truth', p. 165.

that it is essential to keep in view that ecumenism itself does not provide the principal warrant for pursuing RE. In terms of its own coherence-based tests, RE is not only warranted by its pragmatic coherence in virtue of offering a way forward in an ecumenical context defined by long-term disagreement and the legacy of an ‘ecumenical winter’. Its significance is also defined by having intrinsic coherence with an understanding of the task of theology, and indeed for the church, as being shaped by self-critical, recursive, expansive catholicity, and as involving three voices: imaginative-constructive; critical-constructive; and pragmatic-constructive.¹⁶⁷ Through correlating these three voices with the different readings and senses of Rush’s hermeneutics of doctrine, external coherence with reception hermeneutics as a relevant background theory is also evident.

Rather than being primarily viewed as another ecumenical strategy, therefore, RE is more accurately understood as an application of fundamental commitments to ecclesial renewal and conformance to the gospel through learning from diverse sites, as seen in Rush’s twelve *loci receptionis*, Murray’s three modes of coherence, and Fiorenza’s diverse criteria involved in reflective equilibrium. In other words, RE is an exemplar of what receptive integrity looks like in practice.

There is a simple but far-reaching implication from this reading. If, as I have argued, RE is principally a particular mode or application of ‘receptive integrity’, situated systematically in a wider field of theological and hermeneutical reception at least as much as in a wider field of ecumenical dialogue, then the notion of ecclesial learning, as anticipated in the title of the 2nd RE Conference and reflected more recently in the adoption of ‘receptive learning’ in *Walking Together on the Way*, needs to come to the fore. The motivation for RE is thus seen as arising less from ecumenism *per se*, and more from essential ecclesial learning, facilitated through ecumenism as one site of receptive learning. In the context of ecumenism, RE was shown not to be restricted to *specialists*, whilst acknowledging that specialists in theology and other disciplines have a unique contribution to make. In the light of situating RE in its wider ecclesiological and hermeneutical horizons, it should be apparent that neither should it be restricted only to *ecumenists*, but ought to be considered as paradigmatic of a much wider theological and ecclesial concern with the renewing praxis of ‘receiving with integrity’. Practically this may mean presenting RE to ecclesial bodies interested in renewal, mission and discipleship,¹⁶⁸ for which ecumenism will be a means to

¹⁶⁷ Murray, ‘Preface’, *xi*.

¹⁶⁸ This is not to suggest that RE be seen as having a purely practical concern with mission, and indeed such a reading would be against the entire approach of this chapter which has emphasised the cognitive, doctrinal and structural aspects of RE. Rather, it is to situate mission as a theological and ecclesiological matter, the full understanding of which—doctrinally and pastorally—is not a given to any one ecclesial community. Moreover, it is as a matter in which Catholicism might justifiably learn from—and be provoked by—the understandings of other Christian communities and traditions. For

ecclesial learning, as well as to ecumenical gatherings where ecumenism itself is the (proximate) end.

example, in the relationship of personal discipleship to ecclesial mission, or in the dialectic of serving and nurturing existing communities to reaching out widely to the un-churched and de-churched.

7 CONCLUSION: RECEIVING WITH DYNAMIC INTEGRITY

7.1 Retrospect

This thesis began not with a text of philosophical hermeneutics, but with a present concern for the church, voiced by Pope Francis in his critique of ‘the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed’.¹ In response, I have attempted to identify and apply resources which address two questions to which Francis’ challenge gives rise: (1) if the presentation of doctrine is not to be *disjointed*, how then can its *integrity* be ensured and demonstrated; and (2), rather than being insistently *imposed*, how can the tradition which is handed-on in doctrine (and elsewhere) be *received* so as to be new every day? In short, *what does it mean for the church to receive with integrity?* And, closely related, *what does it mean for the church to live with integrity?*

The approach I have pursued in this work has been to view ‘receptive integrity’ as an issue requiring the identification and application of appropriate *hermeneutical* strategies to address both the quality of integrity in the reception of doctrine, *and* the need for receptive openness in ecclesial systems of interpretation. My initial warrant for pursuing this strategy was the work of the Anglican theologian, Anthony Thiselton, whose *Hermeneutics of Doctrine* provides a comprehensive treatment of material linking modern hermeneutical theories with specifically doctrinal concerns. It can be difficult to penetrate Thiselton’s style in order to get beyond his *precis* of other authors and obtain a systematic understanding of his main ideas, thus my analysis of Thiselton abstracts his presentation to a high level in order to give an overall orientation for addressing the research question. I presented these as:

¹ EG §35

a hermeneutics of belonging; a hermeneutics of alterity; and the dynamics of a lived doctrinal system. I have followed Thiselton in treating hermeneutics not simply as a set of techniques or rules, but as a practice which requires particular attitudes and commitments – both critical and receptive. Such attitudes are deployed in an interpretative activity concerned not only with the text but with the horizons of the original composition and contemporary readers, as well as diverse diachronic and synchronic receptions.

I demonstrated that Thiselton makes three important arguments, each supported by a range of hermeneutical resources and theological applications. Firstly, interpretation occurs from within the faith community and addresses genuine ‘questions which arise’, not abstract ‘problems to be solved’. This underlines not only the importance of a ‘hermeneutics of belonging’, but also reveals the interpreting subject to be intimately involved with the object of interpretation. Whether the subject is the individual theologian or the (hypostatized) church, there is no neutral position from which to make judgements of interpretation and application. This second major theme in *HD* thus addresses a ‘hermeneutics of alterity’, where the provocation of otherness provokes a ‘disenchantment’ of the narcissistic subject. Finally, I showed that not only is there a fundamental dialectic of belonging and alterity in Thiselton’s hermeneutics, but a whole set of contraries which need to be co-ordinated, including that of coherence and contingency. An important step in understanding how the church may receive with integrity, therefore, is that receptive integrity is more than an acknowledgement of a potentially fruitful tension between continuity and change—or fidelity and creativity. Rather it involves engaging with diverse criteria which need to be dynamically brought into a meaningful relationship. Neither premature consensus, nor dogmatic singularity, nor disengaged relativism can replace the ongoing need to interpret, and to interpret again. It is a mode of reception ‘beyond dogmatism and innocence’.² Reading Thiselton in this way reveals parallels with some of the concerns evidenced in *Evangelii Gaudium* pertaining to the interpretation of Catholic tradition (Chapter 2).

Supplementing this initial overview of doctrinal hermeneutics with an analysis of a key paragraph in John XXIII’s speech at the opening of Vatican II reveals not only a distinction between the substance and presentation of doctrine, but also hermeneutical significance assigned to the pastorality of doctrine. Rather than try and separate form and content to account for continuity and change in the church, as has frequently been done, I argued that there are other resources in the Catholic tradition which allow the elements named by John XXIII to be considered more holistically (Chapter 3).

² This phrase is borrowed from Hinze and Godzieba (eds.), *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence, op.cit.*. The notion of ‘innocence’ here is in the context of Ricoeur’s ‘naïveté’ (‘Introduction’, xviii-xix); compare Gillian Rose’s rejection of innocence, as well as secular and religious dogmatism, in favour of the ‘broken middle’, see Shanks, *Against Innocence, op.cit.*.

As exemplars of such contemporary Catholic approaches, I selected Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of *broad reflective equilibrium* (Chapter 4), and Ormond Rush's work on *rejuvenating reception* (Chapter 5). Both use reception hermeneutics to offer an alternative to a model of doctrinal development based on a simple form-content distinction; both envisage interpretation occurring in a number of sites and communities, using diverse intra- and extra- ecclesial resources; both recognise that interpreting a tradition requires attending to, on the one hand, lived experience as well as the isolated text, and, on the other hand, the disenchanting provocation of otherness; finally, both give theological interpretation a future-looking ethical orientation.

The work of Fiorenza and Rush can usefully be related to the concept of 'dynamic integrity' alluded to but not fully specified in Paul D. Murray's writings, and which undergirds Receptive Ecumenism (Chapter 6). Thus one aspect of the original contribution of this thesis has been to make such conceptual relationships explicit and to show their potential, re-woven into a notion of 'receptive integrity'.³ From the outset, I had intended to use RE as an example of how the provocation of the other could be integrated into an interpretative-transformative praxis, but in the course of research and writing, it became apparent that the commitments and roots from which RE emerges—namely Murray's pragmatist approach to theological rationality—are strongly consonant with the theological hermeneutics developed by Fiorenza and Rush. Whilst Fiorenza's influence on Rush has already been acknowledged, and a constructive application of Rush's reception hermeneutics to 'Receptive' Ecumenism might reasonably be expected, the affinity of Murray's fundamental theology with Fiorenza's broad reflective equilibrium has not been previously identified. The resultant contribution triangulates key ideas from Fiorenza, Rush, and Murray and constructively brings together, in the notion of receptive integrity, a range of resources which had hitherto largely been considered independently. If the thesis has been successful in this regard, all three sources have been conceptually enriched by this critical conversation and their potential for effective impact has been enhanced.

Through a close reading of Fiorenza, Rush and Murray, and referencing additional sources such as Thiel's *Senses of Tradition*, a distinct current in contemporary Catholic theology can be discerned which is marked by *intentionality* in asking what it means to

³ 'Conceptual relations' does not imply a direct influence between the interlocutors. In the case of Murray and Fiorenza, four essays (but not Fiorenza's major monograph, *Foundational Theology*) are listed under 'works consulted but not cited' in Murray's *Reason, Truth and Theology*. However, a 2016 paper by Murray for a Rome symposium names Fiorenza as making a major contribution to theological hermeneutics with *Foundational Theology*: Murray, 'From the Development of Doctrine to the Hermeneutics of Catholic Tradition: Taking Stock after John H. Newman and after John E. Thiel' (unpublished paper presented at 'Conceiving Change in the Church: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Catholic Tradition', Rome, 2016). Rush was a contributor to the 2nd RE Conference but his contribution developed the relationship of RE to a theology of the *sensus fidelium*, rather than directly engaging with *RD*.

receive with integrity. Using Fiorenza's categories as a framework, the characteristics of such an approach can be summarised as follows:

(1) In this thesis I have presented 'integrity' as both a criterion and a goal in the responsible interpretation of doctrine. Catholic approaches have historically been strong on requirement to emphasise continuity of tradition and it is important to note that—suitably interpreted—this remains a key element in the understanding of integrity presented here. A first characteristic of receptive integrity, therefore, is *integrity with the tradition*. This is expressed in Fiorenza's reconstructive hermeneutics, Murray's internal coherence, and Rush's reception history. However, as Fiorenza's qualifying term 'reconstructive' is intended to show, this is not a static deposit. So also Pope Francis:

Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the 'deposit of faith' as something static.⁴

(2) Since the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic interpretation has also come to terms with a historical-critical dimension to interpretation, thus the use of *background theories* or extensive coherence in interpretation is relatively uncontroversial in principle. There are however significant challenges in practice regarding which background theories are appropriate to a particular context and how significant they are as auxiliary theories in support of the theological hard-core of a web of belief. As I have maintained throughout this thesis, the set of background theories includes theories regarding what constitutes a reasonable and theologically appropriate mode of reasoning. Although this may be stable, it is not immune to challenge and reconfiguration, for example through reassessing the value of lived experience in understanding doctrine.

(3) Awarding a potentially positive role *to lived experience* is less mature in Catholic teaching, although Pope Francis appears to have incorporated the principle into his magisterium. In Fiorenza's retroductive warrants, Murray's pragmatic coherence, and the concept of the pastorality of doctrine lived experience is represented as an essential source of data and one indicator (but only one) of the adequacy of a doctrinal formulation or ecclesial practice. Here, experience is incorporated into dynamic equilibrium with other factors not as a simple correlation, whereby doctrine must conform to the standard of the world, but as one of a number of *mutually* correcting criteria.

(4) Fiorenza's fourth criterion, *communities of discourse and interpretation*, has both a general and special application in the schema of dynamic integrity I have outlined. Generally, it provides a place for synchronic diversity, complementing the diachronic diversity recognised in reception history. There are a number of special communities which

⁴ Francis, 'Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization'.

could be considered – the breadth of possibilities is indicated in Rush’s twelve *loci receptionis* – but I have highlighted two: (i) the role of the *sensus fidei*, particularly as it interacts with theologians and the episcopal magisterium, which has been comprehensively developed by Rush; and (ii) the dynamics of learning from another ecclesial tradition in Receptive Ecumenism, to which this thesis has contributed a fresh understanding.

With regards to the role of the *sensus fidei* in doctrinal interpretation, a dramatic example can be seen in the recent address by Pope Francis on the immoral nature of the death penalty. In a significant move for Catholic understanding and practice regarding the development of doctrine, Francis repudiates arguments which rely solely on reconstructive hermeneutics to show that the church has in the past condoned and even supported capital punishment, and he does so partly by appealing to the *sensus fidelium*. In terms of Fiorenza’s model, the experience and interpretation of the wider community of discourse has corrected the criterion of retrospective hermeneutical reconstruction alone:

This issue cannot be reduced to a mere résumé of traditional teaching without taking into account not only the doctrine as it has developed in the teaching of recent Popes, but also the change in the awareness of the Christian people which rejects an attitude of complacency before a punishment deeply injurious of human dignity...Here we are not in any way contradicting past teaching, for the defence of the dignity of human life from the first moment of conception to natural death has been taught by the Church consistently and authoritatively. Yet the harmonious development of doctrine demands that we cease to defend arguments that now appear clearly contrary to the new understanding of Christian truth.⁵

Fiorenza’s criterion of attending to diverse communities of discourse and interpretation can also be understood in terms of a participative synodality and an expansive Catholicity. One result of this is that the criticism levelled against Fiorenza’s broad reflective equilibrium—that it is so complex as to be like ‘shooting a jack rabbit from a moving car’—carries less force if the need for widely diverse skillsets is seen as an opportunity for collaboration, as is the intention with RE.⁶

(5) In considering these four criteria, it is essential to keep in mind that as they form elements in a dynamic equilibrium, each exists in a mutually interpretative relationship with the others. The result is thus neither a fixed system, nor a simple correlation to the world but an ongoing activity of discernment within a flexible but coherent web. Prior to this current study, the implications of this web-like nature of belief and practice have not previously been fully explicated and explored at length in the literature on RE.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The ‘explicitly collaborative nature’ of RE and ecclesial learning is stated in Murray, ‘Preface’, *xiv*.

The dynamic character of such webs is driven by questions that arise, formation in the tradition, a critical hermeneutics of suspicion – balanced by a constructive hermeneutics of charity, and by attending to the disenchanting provocation of the other. Expressed in Murray’s Rescher-influenced terms, the dynamics can be named as recursive fallibilism and expansive catholicity. Both the plurality of criteria and the inherent dynamism of the process in this model are resonant with Rush’s theological appropriation of reception hermeneutics.

(6) If the preceding paragraphs summarise the significance of dynamic integrity against the dangers of ‘disjointed doctrine’, what then can be said about doctrine received as rejuvenation rather than ‘insistently imposed’? Alternatively stated, if Fiorenza and Murray show something of how *integrity* might be assessed in the reception of doctrine, how might the *receptive* quality of such systematic integrity be understood and protected?

Reception has been, and continues to be, a significant category in contemporary Catholic theology, but bearing in mind Thiselton’s critique that some reception history can simply be descriptive and retrospective it is important to understand reception as a critical, hermeneutical activity orientated towards transformation as well as understanding. On the one hand, reception is part of the process of understanding anew, not simply more data to feed into that process (therefore, not just reception *history*). On the other hand, reception is not something which happens apart from the particular set of data, sources, and context (thus, reception is not just following a method but requires discernment in each specific context). Nor is Rush’s rich concept of reception—which, I argue, can also be found in RE—exhausted by a receptive *attitude* alone; it also involves *transformative praxis*.

This hermeneutical perspective on reception is presented in theological mode by Ormond Rush, whose twelve *loci receptionis*, four objects of reception, three senses (*poiesis*, *aesthesis* and *catharsis*), and three readings provide a comprehensive and systematic reception hermeneutics of doctrine, but it is also a distinguishing element of Fiorenza’s initial non-foundational approach, even if it is not explicitly developed in his later work. The contribution of the present work in regard to reception hermeneutics has been: firstly, to demonstrate that the activity of reception in Receptive Ecumenism can be appropriately viewed in terms of Rush’s theological hermeneutics, and furthermore that this is consistent with Murray’s extended work on theological rationality; and secondly, to read the context, production, and afterlife of *Amoris Laetitia* as, in part, an exercise in the kind of theological receptivity under discussion.

(7) Finally, and importantly, receptive integrity is orientated toward the future as well as drawing on the past and asking questions from the present context.⁷ Murray characterises RE

⁷ ‘Receptive Ecumenism seeks to take ... seriously that we are responsible not only for the tradition’s past but for its present and future also. The integrity of Christian tradition is not a static, fixed integrity simply awaiting retrieval but a dynamic integrity awaiting discernment. Receptive

as a movement towards flourishing not diminishment, and the same is true for the wider application of ‘rejuvenating reception’. As Pope Francis makes clear,

It is in the very nature of the Church to ‘guard’ the deposit of faith and to ‘pursue’ the Church’s path, so that the truth present in Jesus’ preaching of the Gospel *may grow in fullness until the end of time*.⁸

Both Fiorenza and Rush take what Thiel terms a ‘retrospective’ stance towards revelation, looking from where we are at the series of receptions of the original deposit, viewed as an unfolding of revelation in diverse historical and cultural contexts. Such a retrospective approach to tradition has in fact also a prospective orientation in regard to ecclesial life in that it looks forward to what changes—in teaching, structures and practice—may be desirable, necessary and possible. Without such an orientation, which recognises that new receptions (or ‘re-receptions’) are continually needed, the church may find itself lacking in a capacity or competency for change, even when change is desired or needed, for example in stalled ecumenical progress. The struggle to overcome the domination of previous interpretations, rather than seeing reconstructive hermeneutics as one element of a dynamic equilibrium of interpretative factors is a major challenge in Catholicism today. But as Odo Marquard argues, hermeneutics allows us to change where change seems impossible, and to hold fast where it seems we must let go.⁹ A contribution of the present work has been to demonstrate the potential of Fiorenza, Rush, and Murray in this regard.

7.2 Prospect

Marquard’s valuation of hermeneutics indicates that the significance and potential impact of seeking dynamic integrity lies in its potential to provide an alternative to apparently irreconcilable binaries. This is not only true of the multi-dimensional models of Fiorenza, Rush, and Murray (recalling that Fiorenza’s justification for a *broad* reflective equilibrium is precisely to overcome the choice of two poles in narrow equilibrium or correlation), but can

Ecumenism seeks to serve this discerning and this future-oriented understanding of Christian tradition by asking not simply how the other is to be properly understood but what can be properly learned from the other in a manner that can help one’s own tradition.’ Murray, ‘Reception of ARCIC’, pp. 211–12.

⁸ Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization’.

⁹ Against inescapable human ‘derivativeness’, ‘hermeneutics is a way of changing where no change is possible’; in reply to the world’s equally inescapable ‘transitoriness’, ‘hermeneutics is a way of holding fast where one cannot hold fast’, Marquard, ‘To What Question?’, pp. 116–20.

also be discerned in Thiselton's broad spectrum of hermeneutical resources, in Catholic attempts to go beyond a simple form-content distinction, and in understanding the pastoral context as a locus for *interpreting*, not just applying, doctrine. The contested reception of *AL* and other elements of Francis' papacy highlights both the potential and the obstacles of such an approach. None of which is to underestimate the problems that remain or to suggest that dialogue will lead to an agreed consensus: long-term differences and issues are at stake.

In addition to providing resources which may help with challenging ecclesial issues, such as the church's response to same-sex couples,¹⁰ or the ordination of women,¹¹ a model of receptive integrity may provide an interpretative horizon for some pressing practical challenges. For example, several Catholic dioceses in England and Wales are responding to the shortage of priests and declining numbers of worshippers by closing churches and creating large parishes or partnerships. How are such changes decided? If such decisions are to be different to, say, a business deciding to rationalise branches, then there is a need for appropriate theological reasoning to be employed. Using Fiorenza's model as a starting point, one might ask a series of questions.

First, what background theories are operative? For example: 'the centrality of the mass'; the implicit image of the size and nature of an ideal worshipping community; a desire to reinforce Catholic self-identity in a Protestant country versus a need to emphasise the core kerygma in a post-Christian culture; a priority of serving the Catholic community or a commitment to be a missional outpost? Non-theological and theological factors are involved in competing background assumptions such as the right of numerically and financially viable communities to the eucharist versus the reluctance of priests to move from a model of 'one-priest-one community', compounded by a wider hierarchical reluctance to liberalise criteria for admission to ordained priesthood.

Moving onto Fiorenza's other criteria, what is the actual lived experience of the church community, and does that raise retroductive warrants to re-examine both implicit background theories and explicit principles – for example, regarding restrictions on services of word and communion, or limitations on who can preach? More radically, are there retroductive warrants for rethinking the shape of the mass, the size of a congregation, the nature of a priest, the need for uniform liturgies, theologies of the Eucharist? Are the church communities understood as communities of interpretation, capable of contributing distinctive creative receptions as expressions of their *sensus fidei*, not just as recipients of

¹⁰ See Murray, 'Living Catholicity Differently'.

¹¹ As noted in Chapter 4 with regard to the possible ordination of women as deacons in the Catholic Church. As well as the elements of broad reflective equilibrium examined earlier, 'receiving with integrity' on this issue would involve reception from multiple *loci receptionis*, including finding a way to receive with integrity from Anglican and Methodist experience of women in the diaconate.

sacramental and pastoral provision from above? Can attempts at hermeneutical reconstruction, asking what the parish is for or what the mission of the church is, seek to learn from the Anglican experience in addressing these issues, or by looking at Catholic base-community models in Latin America and elsewhere? Are all twelve of Rush's *loci receptionis* considered, with the resultant provocation arising from encountering alterity – e.g. in inter-ecclesial contexts such as RE, and in the intra-ecclesial alterity encountered when the magisterium, theologians, and communities articulating their *sensus fidei* encounter one another? These are simply initial questions, but they illustrate that this model may have applicability to particular local challenges as well as systematic conceptualisation. As this brief example shows, such practical contexts generate questions of systematic significance.

The thesis also opens some avenues for further research. Firstly, there is interest in viewing RE in terms of virtues, notably the work of Antonia Pizzey in Australia, and Gabrielle Thomas in the UK. Thus a potentially fruitful extension of the hermeneutical perspective of this thesis would be to examine RE in the light of *hermeneutical* virtues.

Secondly, more work could be done on the significance of structural and procedural change alongside the need for practical and doctrinal change. Murray's recent work indicates the breadth of possible *loci* of ecclesial learning and transformation:

The resources...bearing on the fruitful living of this *intra*-Catholic pluralism range across the conceptual-doctrinal and ecclesiological, through the structural and procedural, to the spiritual, habitual, and dispositional.¹²

This is an important principle in RE, and shows some resonance with elements of *EG*, where Francis expresses a desire for:

a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.¹³

Methodologically, structures, procedures, and dispositions might be understood in this model as special types of auxiliary hypothesis, with often unnoticed effects. They are one way in which background theories are encoded and made concrete in a community, thereby exerting an influence on subsequent action and interpretation and such structural influence is not necessarily neutral and beneficial. Structures of sin exist in the church, as in wider society, as Jacques Dupuis argues in a passage which illustrates not only the notion of

¹² Murray, 'Living Catholicity Differently'. 'Structural' refers to the institutional proper; 'procedural' to the processes and practices adopted (i.e. how the institution is realised); 'habitual' refers to the assumed culture and ethos., Murray, personal communication (19th July, 2018).

¹³ *EG* §27.

retroductive warrants but also pragmatic coherence as plausibility and the dangers of an idealistic application of form-content distinctions:

I did not hold the simple—too simple—distinction made by some official teaching: the church is all holy even though her members are sinful. This distinction is an implausible way of escaping from reality. I had experience that the church itself is sinful, that some of its structures, including some of its central authority, are sinful. That is why not only the members but also the church itself is *semper reformanda*.¹⁴

Thirdly, this thesis has shown that a major influence on the distinctive nature of RE is Murray's appropriation of Rescher. When *Reason, Truth and Theology* was published in 2004, Murray was able to describe his engagement with the 'mature' Rescher. Nonetheless, Rescher has been an extraordinarily prolific writer, and has continued to add to his *corpus* since Murray's monograph. Despite the significance of a Rescherian dynamic to Murray's methodology, no further substantial direct engagement with Rescher has been published by Murray, and only a limited amount of engagement with Rescher is evident in recent theological literature.¹⁵ One possible topic for further research is, therefore, to see if Murray's theological account of Rescher can be further developed by considering more recent publications by the philosopher and by such theological appropriations as have been made. A possible starting point would be an examination of Rescher's critique of consensus in the context of ecumenical dialogue.

Fourthly, there is an obvious but underdeveloped potential for bringing RE into conversation with interfaith relations. Some initial forays in this direction have been made,¹⁶ particularly in the 3rd RE Conference, but a sustained attempt to see how ecclesial learning might apply in the twelfth of Rush's *loci receptionis* remains to be done.

Finally, a possible topic which might fruitfully be examined in the light of the pasteurality of doctrine and the model of receiving with integrity advanced in this thesis is the contested notion of interpreting the signs of the times in the light of the gospel.¹⁷ At an expert seminar on the subject in 2004, M. Elsebernd and R. Bieringer proposed that a one-sided focus on looking to authoritative texts as historical artefacts could be complemented by paying

¹⁴ Gerard O'Connell, *Do Not Stifle the Spirit: Conversations with Jacques Dupuis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), pp. 151–52.

¹⁵ Two engagements with Rescher from an ecumenical or interfaith perspective are: S. Mark Heim, 'Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis', *Modern Theology*, 10 (1994), 341–60; also Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), pp. 131–45; and, Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), pp. 406–47. See also, on Rescher and Christian identity, including reference to Murray's work, Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 129–59.

¹⁶ E.g., Murray, 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning'.

¹⁷ GS §4.

attention to ethical and eschatological demands of the future, as envisaged in Vatican II.¹⁸ The approach proposed a ‘future-orientated reading strategy’ to read authoritative texts in the light of a ‘normativity of the future’. Like dynamic integrity, ‘normativity of the future’ carries an inherent tension whereby,

‘normativity’ gains a dynamic dimension from ‘future’ and the future is reined in by the concreteness of ‘normativity’.¹⁹

In Elsebernd and Bieringer’s reading strategy, the claim of the future is both ethical and pneumatological, and is put into practice through the virtue of Christian hope, dialogue and a hermeneutic of suspicion.²⁰ Space precludes detailed engagement with this proposal, but it is worth noting an initial resonance with the line of approach taken by Fiorenza, Thiel, and others. Elsebernd and Bieringer describe their stance as ‘one of reception, participation and creating a space for the in-breaking of the eschatological future’ which also suggests an affinity with the ethic of Receptive Ecumenism. A comprehensive examination of ‘interpreting the signs of the times’ in relation to the concept and exemplars of receptive integrity I have proposed in this work is therefore an area of potential future research. In particular, interpreting the signs of the times gives an ecclesial and theological locus for treating the role of retroductive warrants. The fact that ecumenism itself is described as a sign of the times may also be significant in this regard.²¹

7.3 Doctrinal Hermeneutics in a Franciscan Key

Throughout the work I have used the writings and speeches of Pope Francis as a reference point to moor the potentially abstract discussion of hermeneutics and theological method in concrete issues of contemporary Catholicism. A starting point for the research was the identification of parallels between *Evangelii Gaudium* and some major concerns in Thiselton’s hermeneutics of doctrine. Similarly, the hermeneutical role afforded to experience, including negative experience, by Pope Francis has greater consonance with the treatment of pragmatic warrants in Fiorenza and Murray than with the limited horizon of, for example, *ME* and *ID*. The principle ‘realities are more important than ideas’ underlines

¹⁸ Mary Elsbernd and Reimund Bieringer, ‘Interpreting the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel: Vision and Normativity of the Future’, in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, Johan Verstraeten (ed.), Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, CCVIII (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 43–97 (pp. 44–45).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–60.

²¹ *UR* §4. See also Kasper: ‘Current Problems in Ecumenical Theology’, (27 February 2003), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20030227_ecumenical-theology_en.html>.

the concern for questions which arise and concrete, not blueprint ecclesiology, while ‘Time is greater than space’ encapsulates the notion of an open system²² and expanding catholicity in which ‘initiating processes is more important than occupying positions’.²³ As well as these marks of dynamic integrity, a rich understanding and practice of what is required of a genuine process of reception can be seen in the 2014-15 synods, the text of *Amoris Laetitia*, and the afterlife of that document, as it is actively received in diverse communities and diverse interpretations.

Taken together, this indicates Pope Francis takes a different approach to doctrine not only to his predecessors but to the horizon in which Catholic theology has often worked. This is of course not to say that he ignores, arbitrarily changes, or devalues doctrine, but that the way he uses it is different. He starts from a different *horizon of interpretation*, and employs a method which goes beyond hermeneutical reconstruction, beyond a view which locates fullness only in the original deposit.²⁴ Such an approach is not simply a type of correlational theology giving priority to *praxis*, but is a *recontextualisation* of diverse elements which bear upon each other in a dynamic, open system best described by Fiorenza’s model of broad reflective equilibrium.²⁵ This is seen most clearly in the very deliberate statements made by Francis in a formal address on the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by John Paul II, but also referencing Pope John XXIII’s opening speech to the second Vatican Council 30 years before that. From Francis’ short address, a number of significant principles can be drawn:²⁶

(1) Tradition is a living thing, and the deposit of faith is not something static, because ‘(t)he word of God is a dynamic living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfilment that none can halt.’ This amounts to a rejection of the ‘prospective’ view of doctrine which Thiel criticises in earlier Catholic thought.

²² ‘Christian doctrine is not a closed system, incapable of raising questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living, is able to unsettle, is able to enliven.’, Pope Francis, ‘Address of the Holy Father, Cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore, Florence’ (10 November 2015), <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html>.

²³ *EG* §§222-237

²⁴ See, for example his 2015 message to theologians: ‘Doctrine is not a closed system, void of the dynamic capacity to questions, doubts, inquiries...The meeting of doctrine and pastoral concern if not optional, it is constitutive of a theology that intends to be ecclesial. The question of our people, their suffering, their battles, their dreams, their worries possess an interpretational value that we cannot ignore.’ Pope Francis, ‘Video Message to Participants in an International Theological Congress Held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, Buenos Aires’, (3 September 2015), <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150903_videomessaggio-teologia-buenos-aires.html>.

²⁵ On interpretation as recontextualisation, see Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*.

²⁶ Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization’,.

(2) Not only the magisterium but the ‘People of God’ have been granted the grace ‘to “guard” the deposit of faith and to “pursue” the Church’s path’ and the mission of ‘proclaiming to our contemporaries in a *new and fuller way* the perennial Good News’. The warrants for revisiting the doctrinal presentation regarding the death penalty come not only from only the teaching of recent popes but ‘the change in awareness of the Christian people’.²⁷

(3) Interpretation in a new context is more than simply re-clothing in new language:

it is not enough to find a new language in which to articulate our perennial faith: it is also urgent, in the light of new challenges and prospects facing humanity, that the Church be able to express the ‘new things’ of Christ, Gospel, that, albeit present in the word of God, have not yet come to light.²⁸

As well as representing a rejection of the form-content model as an adequate solution, this principle underlines the significance of ‘questions that arise’ not only in determining morality but in the articulation of faith in doctrine.

(4) Interpretation also involves more than hermeneutical reconstruction: ‘[t]he issue cannot be reduced to a mere résumé of traditional teaching’ but must take into account other factors including the *sensus fidelium* (as above) and warrants from experience (‘were we to remain neutral before the new demands of upholding personal dignity, we would be even more guilty’). Here Francis comes close to Fiorenza’s model of broad reflective equilibrium. This is related to a further principle regarding the nature of integrity in interpretation: ‘the harmonious development of doctrine demands that we cease to defend arguments that now appear clearly contrary to the new understanding of Christian truth’. This almost exactly echoes Fiorenza’s distinction between a foundation (e.g. slavery, or here, capital punishment, which appears to be condoned in foundational scriptural texts) and a principle (we now see slavery—and capital punishment—as incoherent with Christian understanding).²⁹ The methodological significance of these principles being explicitly adopted by the Pope is considerable.

(5) Applying this principle of dynamic integrity not only has implications for future development of doctrine, but requires a new reception of the church’s own history:

²⁷ This resonates with Rush’s argument for the role of the *sensus laicorum* in discerning the signs of the times, see Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, p. 83.

²⁸ Compare Rush who links the Holy Spirit with rejuvenating reception: ‘There is no essence no mechanically intervening God, no perfect exemplars, no ideal age, that allow us to avoid the responsibility of struggling to understand, interpret, and apply the Gospel anew in a thousand new situations. However, although it is our responsibility, it is not our work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is our communal memory, preventing ecclesial amnesia and igniting our creativity.’ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁹ Fiorenza, ‘ST’, p.56.

‘Let us take responsibility for the past and recognize that the imposition of the death penalty was dictated by a mentality more legalistic than Christian. Concern for preserving power and material wealth led to an over-estimation of the value of the law and prevented a deeper understanding of the Gospel’.

(6) A dynamic perspective on doctrine is necessary because doctrine must develop in order to be preserved. A ‘rigid and immutable’ doctrinal interpretation – significantly distinguished here from doctrine itself, to which the interpretation is ‘tied’ is not only inadequate because doctrine must develop to preserve, but actually risks ‘demeaning the working of the Holy Spirit’. In *EG*, Francis suggested that in failing to develop the presentation of doctrine the church risks idolatry;³⁰ in his 2017 address the implication is that clinging to such dogmatic foundations instead of discerning Christian principles and responding with necessary changes is akin to refusing the Holy Spirit, the unpardonable sin.³¹

These principles indicate that Francis’ pastoral magisterium is not simply about putting the Gospel into practice, but has implications both for interpreting specific doctrines and for the way in which the nature, development, and interpretation of doctrine are understood. If this is the case, then receptive integrity, as I have set it out in the present work, can perhaps be recognised as an appropriately ‘Franciscan’ approach to the hermeneutics of doctrine for questions arising in the contemporary church.

³⁰ *EG* §41.

³¹ See Mk. 3:28-30; Matt. 12:31-32; Acts 7:51. The gospel accounts locate this teaching after a series of Sabbath disputes; in Acts, it is at the climax of Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin. Francis is, at least indirectly, identifying rigorous dogmatism with the stubbornness of heart attributed in these texts to the implacable opponents of the Gospel.

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