

THE RECEPTION OF VATICAN II edited by Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp. xiii + 468, £26.49, pbk*

This collection of essays on how the documents of the Second Vatican Council fared in the post-Conciliar period covers all the texts: in descending order of formal importance, the Constitutions, Decrees, and Declarations.

The first document chosen, the Liturgy Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is well analysed in terms of three chief themes (the Paschal Mystery, the continuation of the work of our Redemption, and engaged participation). Yet aside from following up philological features of the reformed liturgy that reflect the Constitution's emphases, and occasional references to the 'General Instructions' devised by the post-Conciliar '*Consilium*', this piece could have been written while the Council was still in session. There is no reference here to the abundant literature on the disparity between the Constitution, the *de jure* reform, and the *de facto* reform (not all of this by any means is 'Traditionalist' in character), or to the interventions by the post-Conciliar popes to correct abuses in the *ars celebrandi* or to restore a proper concern for sacred beauty. Yet 'reception' implies what is subsequent (and consequent).

This cannot be because the editors were unaware of the meaning of the term 'reception' which made its way, in the course of the twentieth century, from studies of the history of law into the realm of ecclesiology, and above all in the matter of reaction to Church Councils. The Introduction to this volume, though largely concerned to situate the editors and contributors on the present Roman Catholic spectrum, shows that thought was given to the notion of 'ongoing reception', even if there is no *ex professo* discussion of the reception idea.

The essays on the two remaining Dogmatic Constitutions and the single 'Pastoral' Constitution of the Council fit the bill rather better. *Lumen gentium* is discussed in terms of post-Conciliar magisterial responses to the most disputed elements in its text (especially the notions of the subsistence of the Mystical Body in the [Roman] Catholic Church, the relation between particular churches and the Church universal, and the Church as universal instrument of salvation). This is followed by a focussed, if demanding, account of the way the Constitution has been reflected in some major writers of ecclesiology from the 1960s onwards. *Dei Verbum* is also well-served in terms of the title of this book, but the contributor's exclusive concentration on theories of Scripture-use in official documents and commentators on exegetical method limits his range. Pity the poor fellow who had to deal with *Gaudium et spes*, that unwieldy omnium-gatherum of human affairs. He makes a good stab at it, arguing that the central theme is an understanding of the human being in the light of Christ. Once again, as with the treatment of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the emphasis lies on what the original text might mean, but

this time reception history is also in view – not in terms of subsequent comment, whether magisterial or by individual theologians, but through reference to the social trends that in part annul the Constitution's pertinence but in part also indicate its continuing importance. The cultural optimism of *Gaudium et spes* has turned out to be unjustified, but not so its optimism of grace.

A short review cannot do justice to the highly diversified contents of this book, any more than the book itself can consider every aspect of reception history vis-à-vis the hundreds of paragraphs of text produced by the Council fathers and officials. So it must suffice in conclusion to catalogue treatment of the 'Decrees' and 'Declarations' of the Council in a summary way.

As to the Decrees, the later story of *Christus Dominus* is depressingly concentrated on the issue of the power of bishops, rather than their holiness and preaching. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, on ministerial priests, proves to have been little taken up by subsequent Church documents – though a 1995 Curial symposium, its papers almost unknown since published 'in house', constitutes, we are told, a significant exception. The implementation of *Optatam totius* benefited from John Paul's II Thomistically-inspired emphasis on the 'human formation' of the clergy whose education it outlined (while, ironically, coinciding with the paedophile scandal). The reception of *Perfectae caritatis*, on religious life, amounts to attempts by the papacy to prevent the turning of religious into unmarried layfolk. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, on re-energising the apostolic activity of the laity, was stymied by not envisaging the chief threat to its own viability – the increasing secularization of the median Church-goer in our age. *Ad Gentes*, on mission, was followed by a dramatic shrinking of classical missionary activity, in which a complacent eschatology played a large role. *Unitatis redintegratio*, on ecumenism, which receives a carefully crafted treatment of 'key figures, literature and events', launched a raft of bilateral dialogues, but except in regard to the Orthodox (and Oriental Orthodox) not much is noted here about difficulties, such as internal objections to the 'agreed statements' within the non-Catholic ecclesial communities. *Orientalium ecclesiarum* raised the question of reversing Latinisation, a work in slow progress; the issue of redefining the role of the pope vis-à-vis the patriarchs remains to be properly addressed, as the Eastern Orthodox are not slow to note. *Inter mirifica*, on the means of social communication, is described wryly as 'a document with room to grow'.

As to the 'Declarations', *Dignitatis humanae* occasioned the Traditionalist schism which followed Vatican II, and attempts to read it in continuity with the earlier magisterium are here ably explained. Discussion of the reception of *Gravissimum educationis* is restricted to American Catholic universities – admittedly an important case. The contributor writing on *Nostra aetate*, the Declaration on the Non-Christian Religions, believing it innovative in pastoral strategy but not in doctrine,

offers a thorough account of the often heated debate over its implications, especially in regard to the salvific value of these religions and, in the case of Judaism, the perpetuity and adequacy of the earlier covenant(s). He also points out how thinking through the status of the Qur'an and of Muhammad as an individual – if only on the basis of their place in *natural* religion – has barely begun.

Overall this collection reflects a Church that is not afraid to face big questions, yet is also fractious and possibly inclined to too much talk.

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THE PERSECUTION AND GENOCIDE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PREVENTION, PROHIBITION, & PROSECUTION edited by Ronald J. Rychlak and Jane F. Adolphe, *Angelico Press*, Kettering, OH, 2017, pp. xii + 393, \$21.95, pbk

On 25 November 2014, Pope Francis addressed the European Parliament and drew attention to the severe persecution of Christians and other religious minorities around the world:

Here I cannot fail to recall the many instances of injustice and persecution which daily afflict religious minorities and Christians in particular, in various parts of the world. Communities and individuals today find themselves subjected to barbaric acts of violence: they are evicted from their homes and native lands, sold as slaves, killed, beheaded, crucified or burned alive, under the shameful and complicit silence of so many.

In the reporting of the speech in the mainstream media which followed, little was said about these particular comments, which sadly illustrates the point that was being made.

This era is probably the most violent for Christians in modern history. As has been patiently documented by the organizations who support them and advocate on their behalf, innumerable Christian communities are subject to rampant forms of intolerance, both religious and secular. The problem has got much worse since the turn of the millennium and Christians are more often under severe threat than any other faith group (see, for example, the data in Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: a faith under attack* (2013)). Therefore, one might expect this to have been for some time a major foreign policy concern for governments in many parts of the world. The fact that it has not been, helps reveal a persistent, powerful and rarely acknowledged hierarchy of victimhood.

As painfully detailed in this book, persecution of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East has risen to levels approaching religio-ethnic cleansing. Although it is hoped that the dismantling of the Islamic State will offer some respite and the possibility of return to Iraq