

hoped that it will bring back into active study a body of theological analysis which has more recently fallen out of sight.

G. R. EVANS

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY** by Roger W. Nutt, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2017, pp. viii + 206, \$34.95, pbk*

I have taught Catholic sacramental theology both on the undergraduate and graduate level. As, I suspect, is the experience of many professors who have taught Catholic sacramental theology in recent years, I have had trouble choosing course texts. Available options can be archaic, like the old manuals; narrow, considering only certain aspects of sacramental theology but divorced from the whole of Catholic theology and separated from the sacraments' position within the whole Christian life; piecemeal, considering only particular sacraments but not all of them; shallow, being insufficiently grounded in the intellectual tradition of the Church; dubiously ecclesial, relating ambiguously to the Church's magisterium; or reductivist, considering only the sacraments in their sociological significance or in their place among the rituals of the world religions.

There has been no recent text that considers general sacramental theology in its context within the whole Christian life, grounded in the intellectual tradition of the Church, touching on the principles underlying the theology of all the sacraments, organically making use of the Church's teaching on the sacraments. Thankfully, Roger W. Nutt's *General Principles of Sacramental Theology* has now filled the gap. The fruit of Nutt's scholarship and years of teaching sacramental theology, his new offering is eminently usable in the classroom by both professors and students. It is clearly written, well organized, and of a length that works well in a semester class, especially one that might consider general principles of sacramental theology and then move to a consideration of specific sacraments and/or the liturgy.

As Nutt explains it, his book is 'ecclesial' and 'Thomistic'. Nutt develops his presentation of sacramental theology in concert with the various sources for sacramental theology within the Church's magisterium, including Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, decrees of councils, and documents of the papal magisterium. The documents of Vatican II and recent papal teaching, along with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, are especially utilized. Alongside this broad approach to the sacramental teaching of the Church, Nutt also acknowledges the special place the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas has had in the Church's development of sacramental doctrine. St. Thomas's imprint is felt everywhere in the book. Others may prefer a textbook that is not so heavily Thomistic, or

that incorporates non-Thomistic, yet still ecclesial, theologians' thinking more extensively. In my judgment, the preeminence of St. Thomas's thought in the development of Catholic sacramental theology and the need for focus and clarity in a course textbook justify Nutt's choices—while not denying that an approach distinct from Nutt's could also work.

In addition to fine and clear sections on the topics one would expect in a text of this kind (Christ's priestly mediation, sacrifice, sacramental matter and form, the sacraments as signs, sacramental grace and sacramental causality, character, the necessity of the sacraments, etc.), Nutt's book has several distinctive strengths. Among those strengths is that he situates the sacraments in the context of the Christian life, as 'sources of communion among friends' (p. 1). The sacraments, Nutt makes clear, are always at the service of the development of friendship between God and man. Further, the Church's sacramental teaching has often relied on support from metaphysics, which can seem dry, cold, or impersonal to students if handled in the wrong way. Fortunately, Nutt always makes clear that the various precisions needed to understand the Church's faith about the sacraments are at the service of preserving and explication the mystery of friendship with God.

Nutt also succeeds when he explains the ways in which the sacramental doctrine of the Church relies on a 'wisdom' approach to faith and Christian living, which 'is marked by the recognition that eternal life is not something that can be obtained, made, or produced by the mastery of some technique or self-help program; it is sought rather, in a life ordered to friendship with God', (p. 15) and founders when it succumbs to a 'technocratic' mindset, in Pope Francis's terminology, that reduces the sacraments and spirituality to a technique to be mastered in order to produce the desired result of holiness.

Nutt writes with economy, which is a strength, since it is what enables him to write with clarity and focus, both of which are important features for a book meant for advanced undergraduate or lower-level graduate students. Yet Nutt's economy does have a few trade-offs. Many students learn best when the subject matter being taught is contextualized. For sacramental theology, this can be done especially through situating sacramental theology in its historical development and by contrasting the teaching of the Church with various errors related to sacramental theology. Nutt's economy does not allow him to flesh out the history or to devote much space to the various errors opposed to Church teaching. If there is another edition, it may be worth sacrificing some of the book's admirable brevity for a more extended presentation of the history of sacramental doctrinal development and a more fulsome treatment of alternative ways of understanding the sacraments.

Another, minor point to make is that Nutt's opening chapter attempts to clarify some of the problems presented to the Church's sacramental teaching in the modern age. But because there is only a single chapter devoted to this task, the risk is that students may come away with a

dismissive attitude toward modernity without, perhaps, having earned it. Nutt is basically right in his judgments, I think, but it may be less clear that he has come to those judgments through a rigorous and careful juxtaposition of modernity and antiquity, which he is of necessity unable to reproduce in so short a space. Some indication of the process Nutt himself went through to gain his insights regarding modernity and antiquity would go a long way toward inoculating his readers against hastiness.

Professor Nutt has done teachers of sacramental theology a great service in offering his book, *General Principles of Sacramental Theology*. I heartily recommend it, especially for use as a textbook for advanced undergraduates and lower-level Master's students.

THOMAS P. HARMON

**CATHOLIC THEOLOGY** by Tracey Rowland, *Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London, 2017, pp. vi + 208, £16.99, pbk*

T&T Clark's '*Doing Theology*' series, now numbering half a dozen volumes, seeks to identify the animating spirit and foundational principles that characterise various denominational theological traditions. Tracey Rowland's Catholic contribution is a *tour de force* that will open the sometimes labyrinthine discussions of twentieth-century Catholic theologians to a new audience and offer those already familiar with this tradition a new and interesting vantage point. Easily accessible to those without formal theological training, and presumably of particular interest to Catholics, the book will equally be helpful to non-Catholic theology students seeking a roadmap to the characteristic movements of Catholic theology and the distinctive conversations that have dominated its postconciliar expression.

The first chapter isolates the distinctive character of Catholic theology by presenting a fundamental theology in outline. The question is two-fold: what makes Catholic theology *Catholic*, and what makes Catholic theology *theological*? The chapter derives an answer primarily from documents of the International Theological Commission, which are woven into an impressive tapestry of references, with a particular attentiveness to the Papal Magisterium (John Paul II and Benedict XVI feature prominently, but the importance of Pius XII is scarcely concealed) and the documents of the two Vatican Councils. This indicates a key strength of Rowland's work: historical consciousness, coupled with a commitment to resisting narratives of epochal rupture, tracing out and sustaining continuities and complexities that contribute to a legitimate pluralism. The heart of the Catholic imaginary is, it seems, precisely such a capacity to sustain an analogical unity that resists the