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Francis J. Buckley

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SACRAMENTS: A NEW UNDERSTANDING FOR A NEW GENERATION

RAY R. NOLL, TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS, 1999.

Reviewed by Francis J. Buckley, S.J.

With this text, Ray R. Noll has made a major contribution to the field of sacramental theology, targeted to college classes and adult discussion groups. The book contains a superb collection of readings by outstanding scholars, such as Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Fink, on a CD-ROM (equivalent to over 450 pages). The electronic format enables speedy word and theme searches. At \$29.95, the book is a steal.

As a teacher, Noll does not try to say everything at once. He circles around several central issues, repeating key themes while adding new insights, deepening understanding and appreciation. Beginning with scripture and Church history, he shows the relevance of sacraments and sacramentals to contemporary life and raises questions for the future.

The chapter on marriage reflects particular sensitivity to the Sacrament of Matrimony based on his own experience as a married deacon. Building on Bernard Cooke, he stresses the comparisons between revelation and marriage and between covenant and contract.

Each chapter concludes with imaginative projects, provocative discussion questions, and useful glossaries. Noll tries to avoid theological jargon whenever possible. When it is unavoidable, he clearly explains and clarifies technical language. His goal is to arouse curiosity, inform, promote critical judgment, and foster appreciation and participation in sacramental life.

Numerous historical, theoretical, and liturgical issues could have been developed differently. Strong as the book is, it could have been improved by presenting Sacraments as effective signs and tying them to the revelation-response process; examining the structure of Ordination as it is set forth in the synoptic Gospels; recognizing the clear temporal distinction made between Baptism and the special, visible charismatic coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; connecting the rituals accompanying public penance with the rituals surrounding the rite of initiation in the early Church; creating a critical bibliography for each chapter, indicating the strengths of some books, and placing footnotes at the end of each chapter.

Notwithstanding these critiques, *Sacraments: A NEW Understanding for a NEW Generation* is a masterly introduction to contemporary sacramental theology, combining solid scholarship with a smooth writing style.

Francis Buckley, S.J., is professor of theology at the University of San Francisco.

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