Michael M. Canaris

Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. and Ecclesiological Hermeneutics: An Exercise in Faithful Creativity. Leiden: Brill, 2017. Pp. x + 214. Hb, \$124.

Francis A. Sullivan is surely one of the most underappreciated theologians of the post-Vatican II era. This monograph, a revision of the author's dissertation (Fordham, 2013), therefore makes a much-needed contribution to contemporary Catholic theology by highlighting Sullivan's considerable contributions.

In 1989, the International Theological Commission promulgated an important text entitled *On the Interpretation of Dogma*. This text provided a much more historically conscious and hermeneutically sophisticated understanding of the role of doctrine and dogma in the church. It also called for the recovery and further development of the now forgotten tradition of theological notes common to neo-Scholastic dogmatic manuals. These "notes" were theological terms attached to particular doctrinal propositions, declaring the proposition's precise degree of binding authority. Canaris's fine study suggests that Sullivan's entire career, even prior to that document's publication, can be read as an effort to respond to the commission's challenge. Sullivan offered a sophisticated hermeneutic of magisterial statements and a perceptive theological re-imagination of the theological notes tradition purged of its earlier "rigorist, integralist, and propositionalist approach to Church dogma" (100). According to Canaris, Sullivan advanced the theological notes tradition by drawing on two important contemporary resources: the field of modern hermeneutics and the theology of the Jesuit Karl Rahner.

Chapter One begins with a summary of the principal developments in the history of modern hermeneutics. Canaris groups this material around three distinct hermeneutical approaches: (1) a hermeneutics of authors; (2) a hermeneutics of texts; and (3) a hermeneutics of audience/reception. Canaris associates the hermeneutics of authors with the contributions of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. Text-centered approaches draw more from the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and for audience/reception theories, Canaris turns to the work of Robert Jauss and its theological appropriation by the Australian theologian, Ormond Rush. Canaris will hold that Sullivan's own attention to magisterial pronouncements gives evidence of all three approaches, thereby improving on the hermeneutically unsophisticated stance of the dogmatic manuals.

In Chapters Two and Three Canaris demonstrates Sullivan's considerable dependence on the theological contributions of Karl Rahner. He identifies profound continuities between the two figures around four topics: revelation, the magisterium, dogmatic statements, and the development of doctrine (41).

Both affirm a non-propositional theology of revelation that is universal in scope; both insist on the necessity of the magisterium for the life of the church but raise concerns about the need to honor the magisterium's proper limits. Rahner and Sullivan share the conviction that dogmatic statements, "display all the characteristics of ordinary human propositions, including their limited scope and function as symbols and liminal points of reference for realities to which they relate or describe, but with which they do not coincide" (56). This emphasis on the human articulation of dogma helps explain, finally, why both are convinced that authentic dogma must, by its nature, be open to change and development. In the concluding section of Chapter Three Canaris demonstrates how Sullivan proceeds from these shared foundations to develop creatively his five-fold method for the interpretation of a doctrinal text: (1) attend to the historical context out of which a doctrinal statement first emerged; (2) undertake a careful exegetical analysis of the text itself, considering especially its inner coherence and intention; (3) consider the doctrinal statement in the light of the biblical tradition; (4) consider the doctrinal statement in light of post-biblical developments in the tradition; (5) attend to how best to render the meaning of the doctrinal statement intelligible within the horizon of contemporary Christian faith. This third chapter concludes with a penetrating exploration of Sullivan's five-fold method in action as Canaris considers Sullivan's treatment of three practical cases of doctrinal interpretation: the infallibility of the magisterium; the doctrinal authority of official church teaching on artificial contraception; and the doctrinal authority of official church teaching on the ordination of women.

The perceptive analysis of the three practical cases that concludes Chapter Three is followed by a fourth, more extended, case study that opens Chapter Four, namely the case of Catholicism's attitude toward the saving action of God outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. The author leads the reader through Sullivan's richly textured considerations of the history of the interpretation of Cyprian's axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, and the council's teaching of the relationship between the Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church reflected in the famous *subsistit in* passage in *Lumen gentium*, 8. The chapter concludes with a detailed analysis of Sullivan's theological engagement with his critics. Throughout this analysis Canaris consistently draws attention to the richly hermeneutical character of Sullivan's work, emphasizing the employment of author-centered, text-centered, and reception-centered modes of interpretation.

The monograph concludes with a brief but helpful critical assessment of Sullivan's work. While chapters three and four offered the reader an expert guide through Sullivan's corpus, Canaris's insistence on seeing Sullivan's work

through the lens of the threefold hermeneutic at times felt a little heavy-handed. Thus, it was good to read Canaris's own admission that Sullivan's work relied far more on author and text-centered approaches. He also acknowledges that Sullivan dealt little, if at all, with feminist and liberationist hermeneutics of suspicion that have raised far more sweeping challenges to the reliability of the received tradition. Finally, Canaris draws on the perceptive observations of Anthony Godzieba that Sullivan's five-fold interpretive method has been significantly problematized by contemporary communication technologies.

This fine volume suffers from a few minor shortcomings common to lightly revised dissertations. The chapters that survey contemporary hermeneutics and Rahner's theology are dense and perhaps unnecessary to readers primarily interested in learning more about Sullivan's work. Moreover, while Sullivan's dependence on Rahner was well established, some readers may be less persuaded that Sullivan was as directly influenced by contemporary hermeneutical theory as the author suggests. In spite of these minor quibbles, Canaris writes clearly and demonstrates an impressive mastery of Sullivan's corpus and the complex interpretive issues he engaged. As a representative of a younger generation of scholars, Canaris gives hope that the important work of expanding and creatively applying the theological notes tradition to the needs of the church today will not end with the contributions of Francis Sullivan.

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