Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Smyth, eds.

Sacramentum Mundi Online. Karen Kilby, Adviser. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Online, \$2,290. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/sacramentum-mundi>.

Hardly shy about coining and employing odd phrases, Karl Rahner, S.J. used the words “gnoseological concupiscence” as shorthand for the irreducible plurality of ideas, interpretive frameworks, and “sciences” in his day. He spoke of this “gnoseological concupiscence” as he reflected on the context of the Christian theological task in the contemporary world. In contrast to the earlier twentieth century, where so many deemed Catholic theology’s principles and protocols clearly established, the 1960s occasioned widespread recognition among theologians that clarity was no longer forthcoming. The odd phrase “gnoseological concupiscence” and the context to which it referred constituted the milieu out of which emerged *Sacramentum Mundi* (*SM*). This collaborative “theological lexicon for praxis,” as the original German subtitle put it, served as a lengthy yet modest answer to the difficulty of the theological task in the years surrounding Vatican II. It set forth a Rahnerian theological vision of sorts, given Rahner’s general editorship. But this vision was informed by an international panel of theologians, among them numerous Jesuits (including a handful of co-editors), who attempted to capture the pluralism of the current theological-philosophical-sociological-political landscape, unified by the capaciousness of the Catholic ethos.

Originally released roughly simultaneously in six languages (e.g., 1967–69 in German, 1968–70 in English), *SM* has recently been re-released in an online format by Brill under the advisory eye of noted Rahner scholar Karen Kilby. This online publication, in our new age of proliferating encyclopedias and handbooks, is well timed and expertly executed. The online format suits *SM* beautifully, and should be a much-appreciated aid to today’s theologians as we aim to address today’sgnoseological concupiscence.

The home page promises easy navigation, and delivers. The main content, the encyclopedia entries, are accessible alphabetically, through hyperlinked letters, or through a tab labeled “Content,” under which the titles for all entries appear in a running list on the home page. There are three other home-page tabs: “Preface to the print edition,” which includes Rahner’s general preface and the English translation’s preface by Cornelius Ernst, O.P.; “Abbreviations,” which gives abbreviations for frequently referenced sources; and “Background,” which presents a new, lucid introduction by Kilby.

Since *SM* is a massive work, spanning six volumes in English translation (four in German), this new online version provides welcome, less weighty access to

its content. One can now peruse without heavy lifting, for example, the seventy-four entries filed under the letter “S.” There are, though, more important advantages beyond the contrast between physical heft and virtual economy. For readers interested in the relative scale of individual articles, word counts are given as part of the preview for each entry and, once one selects an entry, the word count appears at the top. I took interest in the fact that over 14,700 words are devoted to introducing the Bible; this is by far the lengthiest entry. Cross-references between related entries are hyperlinked at the bottom of each entry, facilitating deeper research into certain topics. I would have relished this feature as a graduate student, when I first read widely in *SM*. My favorite feature is this: one can click on the name of any entry’s author, and a page appears listing all of the articles by that author. This feature adds something substantial to the experience of this text, as one can trace the contributions of noted thinkers like Leo Scheffczyk, Heinrich Fries, Otto Semmelroth, Jörg Splett, (the young) Walter Kasper, along with Rahner himself. The search feature also allows one to look for names and topics that appear in the entries’ bibliographies. While this reviewer remains partial to physical books, some of these navigational features persuade me that computing technology has enhanced *SM* as a tool for research, teaching, and theological learning more generally.

It must be noted, and Kilby suggests as much in her introduction (yet with her characteristic generosity of spirit), that the particular utility of *SM* has changed between 1970 and today. Given when the entries were composed (starting in 1961), much has transpired to alter Christian theology and life, as well as academic discourses more generally. While Rahner and his co-editors aimed for a diverse slate of authors in terms of language and, in a few cases, geographical location, the outlook of *SM* stays parochially European, almost exclusively male, mainly clerical, and its social consciousness remarkably stunted (the entry on poverty provides a palpable example, as does the absence of an entry on capitalism, though communism is represented). Properly oriented readers—that is, readers who expect a snapshot of an exciting, fertile time in Catholic thought and life’s recent past—will be bountifully rewarded with articles on saints, sacraments, Mariology, angels, various matters ecclesiastical, and a bevy of other topics that today could not be written nearly as well as they could in the 1960s.

As Kilby rightly puts it in her new introduction, with this online platform we can “continue to benefit from the freshness, the intellectual power, and the wisdom on display in this most fascinating of encyclopedias, coming from a generation whose theological depth and vision has not been equaled since.” Kilby and all others involved in realizing this project have done theologians old and, I suspect even more, young an essential service by offering a user-friendly

means for engaging with a monument of (Jesuit) theological scholarship. Its coherence in plurality almost five decades after its initial publication shines brilliantly through our concupiscent condition—and, of all places, from a computer screen.

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