

Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*.
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How do you talk about the sacraments in a way in which the conversation partners can recognize their lives in those religious rituals or discover in the sacraments places for re-visioning their lives and finding the motivation and support to risk walking on the path of faith? How does one transform the Churchy discourse of sacraments, which has become stale and alienating from daily experience, to a language that stimulates new questions and fosters deeper inquiry into the transforming potential of the Christian life? Joseph Martos, Catholic scholar and long time student of the sacraments, has authored an excellent introductory text that broadens the Catholic vocabulary for understanding the notion and reality of those religious actions known in the Catholic Church as sacraments. The book can be divided into two sections. The first three chapters break open the discussion, freeing it from the tightly controlled dogmatic language of traditional *catechesis*. Building on the insights of sociology, psychology, and ritual studies, Martos resituates the previous parochial way of sacramental thinking within a wider appreciation of sacred signs and symbols and creates an interpretative space for sacramentality as a human category. The final four chapters explore the sacraments of the Catholic Church from the changing perspectives of history, theology, morality and spirituality, exposing the richness of sacramental action and inviting serious analysis of one's own assumptions about the sacraments, as well as critical discussion of how they are performed.

This book (a reworked and augmented version of Martos' *The Catholic Sacraments* [1983]) makes available a variety of points of view on and approaches to the "religious" in human experience and addresses an audience whose notions of the sacred are formed within a religiously pluralistic world. A credible approach to discussing the Catholic sacraments cannot speak of them in an exclusive language, unaware of the meanings and functions they share with the rites, practices, and thinking of other religions. The interdisciplinary structure of the present work establishes an open and relevant human basis for exploring Church teachings on the sacraments. The encounter with differing perspectives within Catholic thinking about the sacraments opens the reader to a nuanced and fluid conversation that invites one into the dialogue. This invitation is reinforced by several indicators within the text for the reader to stop and mull over some ideas or insight that ought not to be taken for granted, as well as by a website designed for further dialogue.

The book is not an anthology. The views presented reflect the author's construal of the research he cites. In some chapters, the approach of some particular scholar is preferred, for no apparent reason, over those of others. Herein lay both the book's strength and weakness. It brings to the reader's attention a number of points of view that might not otherwise be encountered, without the sometimes burdensome task of dealing with the specialized language of unfamiliar disciplines. At the same time, the reader is limited to a single interpretation of many, at times, disparate voices. Nevertheless, as a text book for

an undergraduate course in the sacraments or as an introduction to religious studies, this book provides clearly written and well organized themes for discussion or debate. It is a pedagogical gem, in that its interactive style allows for the experience and questions of students/readers to count.

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