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Review: 'The Catholic Sacraments'

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The value of the book, however, only begins there. Continually the author prods us subtly and gently, but ever so poignantly, toward a critique of our inadequate understanding of the true significance of Jesus and of the meaning of authentic Christianity.

The author states his purpose on page 3. He wishes "to go in search of the heart of this Jewish *hasid*, this saint and son of God the churches revere." The book, he continues, "is interested in the way five different communities of Christians (including the Pauline) believed in him toward the end of the first century."

The first two chapters, "The Story and Its Tellers" and "The Land and Its People" provide an important setting for perceiving Jesus in focus. Sloyan clarifies what a gospel is and what it is not, and highlights briefly the uniqueness of each evangelist's presentation. Then he proceeds to create with graphic strokes the environs of early first century Palestine that constituted the world in which Jesus lived.

The author then probes several aspects of Jesus' identity: wise man, saint who heals, mystic, teacher, proclaimer of an age to come. Each term or title is studied in historical context, and the unique way in which the title applies to Jesus is underscored.

Sloyan brings out the richness of the personality of Jesus. At some length he portrays Jesus as a storyteller and a truth-teller. Some of the special qualities of Jesus are then probed: his compassion for fellow humans, his absolute trust in God, his sharing of meals with anyone who would eat with him, and his respect for women as equals.

In the final part of the book, Sloyan treats of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the development of a theological understanding of Christ as developed in the New Testament and in the early Councils of the church. The last chapter presents an interesting summary of the understanding of Jesus in the Qu'ran.

Sloyan crisply describes the uniqueness of Christ. "There was a man . . . to whom the infinite God was more intensely present than to any other. . . . To know him is to know God in him. . . . This true man is 'true God' . . . because the Father has begotten him from his own being as his only son. An eternal word was spoken to him in time, a word of God that is no less than God himself" (pp. 177f.).

This book can be a helpful companion to a course on the New Testament or on Jesus. It will also be of great value to the wider audience of adult Christians who are in search of a more mature understanding of the significance of Jesus for human life.

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The Catholic Sacraments. By Joseph Martos. *Message of the Sacraments*, 1. 1983. 227 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$7.95).

Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation. By Thomas A. Marsh. *Message of the Sacraments*, 2. 1984. 205 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$7.95).

Blessed and Broken: An Exploration of the Contemporary Experience of God in Eucharistic Celebration. By Ralph A. Keifer. *Message of the Sacraments*, 3. 1982. viii + 148 pages. \$9.95 (paper \$6.95).

Sign of Reconciliation and Conversion: The Sacrament of Penance for Our Times. By Monika K. Hellwig. *Message of the Sacraments*, 4. 1982. x + 152 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$6.95).

Christian Marriage: A Journey Together. By David M. Thomas. *Message of the Sacraments*, 5. 1983. 207 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$7.95).

Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order. By Nathan Mitchell, O.S.B. *Message of the Sacraments*, 6. 1983. 317 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$9.95).

Prophetic Anointing: God's Call to the Sick, the Elderly, and the Dying. By James L. Empereur, S.J. *Message of the Sacraments*, 7. 1983. 275 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$9.95). Wilmington, DE: Glazier. Edited by Monika K. Hellwig.

This ambitious undertaking, edited by Monika Hellwig of Georgetown University, makes a significant contribution to sacramental theology in the eighties. These seven volumes on the sacraments synthesize the principal developments that have taken place in the understanding of the theological, historical, psychological and sociological dimensions of the sacraments. They also challenge us toward further pursuit of the journey.

The introductory volume, by Joseph Martos, sets the tone for the entire series. While sparsity of words is not one of the traits of this author, he provides an excellent overview of the sacraments. In part one of his volume, Martos reviews the major work that has been done in the past few decades in regard to the psychology, sociology, history and theology of the sacraments. His careful documentation throughout is impressive. While this first and by far longer segment of his book is reportive and explanatory, part two is reflective and exploratory. In this latter section the author suggests theological implications of the sacraments for personal, communal, ecclesial and global spirituality. The author's reflections are indeed timely and challenging.

Thomas Marsh, who contributes the volume on Baptism and Confirmation, centers on two major topics. He first treats of the origin and beginnings of these two sacraments in the New Testament. The author makes clear the distinction between the rite of immersion and the rite of the imposition of hands. He then proceeds to provide a succinct summary of St. Paul's baptismal theology. The second major topic of Marsh's book deals with a history of the initiation rite and of the theology of baptism and confirmation. Beginning with the patristic period, Marsh traces the separation of the two rites and gives a clear summary of the developing theology. Marsh sees the new Rite of Initiation of Adults as "quite epoch-making." It manifests once more the unity of baptism and confirmation as sacraments of initiation, and "reverses the disintegration of the rite which history had imposed" (p. 182).

In any multi-volumed series, it is a challenge to preserve some kind of unity in forms and purpose. The book in this series that departs the most from the unity is Ralph Keifer's *Blessed and Broken*. Keifer omits the clear sectional division of material evident in the other volumes. In addition, his essays on diverse ritual aspects of the Eucharist are more liturgical than theological in their nature.

In fact, a great deal of the book is more a critique of general liturgical practice, than a coherent presentation of the many theological aspects of

Eucharist. While it is true that one cannot treat of the Eucharist—or, for that matter, any sacrament—in total isolation from the other sacraments, Keifer's book seems to slip too often and too widely from concentration on the Eucharist to a discussion of ritual in general. Some of the chapter subtitles, compared to their titles, are indicative of this shift: Chapter V ("One Bread, One Body"), subtitled "Liturgical Needs Today and Tomorrow"; Chapter VI ("To Remember the Lord") subtitled "Toward An Authentic Recovery of Liturgical Tradition"; Chapter VIII ("To Pray the Eucharist") subtitled "The Problem of Piety in Contemporary Religious Consciousness."

These essays have many good insights, and, though sometimes tedious and repetitious, make for pleasant enough reading. Yet, disappointingly, in the context of this series and its overall purpose, this book seems out of place.

In the volume on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Monika Hellwig manifests her customary skill at presenting scholarly material in a readable way. She first presents a detailed and dense summary of the complex history of the development of the practice of this sacrament and its underlying theology. The last four chapters probe several theological dimensions in order to help the reader find ways in which the sacramental rites can be experienced as authentically mediating the grace of conversion and reconciliation.

David Thomas' *Christian Marriage* is one of several valuable contributions made by diverse authors in the past few years toward a contemporary theology of marriage. While sometimes verbose and repetitious, Thomas' treatment gives a number of worthwhile insights into the central importance that sexuality, love and intimate relationship have in a marriage. In that context the author elaborates in a significant way on the sacramentality and spirituality of marriage for Christians.

The Benedictine Nathan Mitchell has produced a very detailed historical and theological study of the Sacrament of Order. In the first part of his volume, *Mission and Ministry*, Mitchell presents an enlightening overview of the evolution of Jewish priesthood from the patriarchal period to the destruction of the temple in 70 B.C.E. He then traces the patterns of Christian ministry from the Jesus movement to the end of the New Testament period. In the final two chapters, the author explores the meaning of Christian priesthood, and a theology of Holy Orders. Mitchell's writing is unusually clear and well organized. Concise summaries throughout the work are extremely helpful. To this reviewer, Mitchell's book is by far the most valuable contribution of this series.

In his volume, *Prophetic Anointing*, James Empereur treats of God's call to the sick, the elderly, and the dying. Empereur first outlines the historical development of the Sacrament of Anointing from the beginning of Christianity to modern times. The author then summarizes the theological understanding of this Sacrament as found in the Council of Trent, and the shift in understanding represented in the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps the most innovative section of the book is the chapter on Anointing as a sacrament of vocation. Empereur's pastoral perspectives on the rite of the sick and elderly and on the rites of the dying will be helpful for those who are involved in ministry to the infirm and aged.

No Catholic theology teacher can afford to ignore this series. For those who teach sacraments these volumes will serve as an important resource. They not

only contain an amazing amount of information and insight; they also provide excellent leads for further scholarly exploration.

The usefulness of this series as a required text in a classroom seems more problematic. The volume of material and the hefty price prohibit its use in a general, undergraduate course on the seven sacraments. Selected volumes could, with value, be incorporated in a graduate or advanced upper division course on a particular sacrament.

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Jesus, the Compassion of God: New Perspectives on the Tradition of Christianity. By Monika K. Hellwig. Theology and Life Series, 9. Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983. 159 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$6.95).

The intent of this volume, as expressed by Professor Hellwig, is to present the meaning of Jesus from questions raised by liberation theology. Her representation of Jesus as the compassion of God aims at a balanced approach to the kind of response which redemption entails, for compassion is essentially nonviolent, tending to communion and community, and yet is also essentially active, tending to redress injuries and injustices. In embodying these two aspects of compassion, Jesus provides a model for contemporary Christians which mediates between two diverse perceptions; namely, seeing liberation of the oppressed in concrete historical dimensions as central to the redemption and envisaging the redemption as primarily a matter of communion and surrender to God in individual lives.

This book is divided into three parts, each consisting of four chapters. Part I presents the task of Christology today, arguing that our understanding of Jesus' identity must be approached through soteriology, that is, through an interpretation of the Christian experience of salvation arising from the impact of Jesus within the community of faith and in the world at large. Using Christian experience as a source for constructing Christology, Hellwig proceeds to examine this in three dimensions: the experience of conversion, the experience of community, and the experience of death, conflict and peace. For a proper reading of the biblical testimony concerning the content and intent of Jesus' teaching, she urges the use of the social and political perspective of Third World theologians to offset our prevailing assumption of the essentially private nature of religious faith and commitment.

Part II is the heart of the book with its interpretation of the preaching ministry of Jesus, his death, the resurrection, and Jesus' relation to God. The author sees that the vision of God's rule which Jesus proclaimed came out of his own experience of "living as though God now reigned and there were no consequences to fear." This focus of Jesus' life combined two perspectives—that of total trust in God and that of radical criticism of what caused human suffering. By conveying a sense of God's presence and caring, Jesus invited people to trust in God and thus to transform their lives from fear to a sense of security in face of anything that might happen and from suspicion and struggle for self-preservation to community concern. But Jesus also called for actions which, if carried out, would have social consequences. Hellwig contends that Jesus