

DOORS TO THE SACRED

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION
TO SACRAMENTS
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

VATICAN II GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY EDITION
UPDATED AND ENLARGED WITH CHARTS AND GLOSSARY

Joseph Martos



Newly revised and expanded in light of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and with an expanded resource section, *Doors to the Sacred* remains a detailed account of the historical and cultural evolution of the sacraments—and the rituals and practices associated with them. Since its initial publication, the book has garnered widespread critical acclaim:

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CONTENTS

Preface xi

Introduction: History and Sacraments xiv

Regions and Cities of the Ancient World Mentioned in the Text xix

Regions and Cities of the Middle Ages Mentioned in the Text xx

PART ONE

A HISTORY OF SACRAMENTS

I. Sacraments in All Religions 3

1. The Meaning of Sacrament 3

2. Sacramental Rituals 6

3. Sacred Space, Sacred Time, Sacred Meaning 7

4. A Variety of Rituals 13

5. Parallels and Precedents 17

II. The Beginnings of the Christian Sacraments 21

1. Israel and the Roman Empire 22

2. The Early Christian Community 26

3. The Patristic Period 29

4. The Sacramental Seal 34

5. Augustine and Afterward 43

III. The Development of the Catholic Sacraments 51

1. Seven Liturgical Sacraments 52

2. Sign and Reality 56

3. The Sacramental Character 60

4. Aristotle, Aquinas, and the Sacraments 65

5. Legalism, Nominalism, and Magic 70

IV. Catholic and Protestant Sacraments 83

1. Luther and the Protestant Reformation 86
2. Trent and the Catholic Counter-Reformation 95
3. The Modern Centuries 101

V. The Sacraments Today 113

1. Twentieth-Century Developments 114
2. Contemporary Sacramental Theology 120
3. Contemporary Sacramental Practices 142

PART TWO

HISTORIES OF THE SACRAMENTS

VI. Baptism 169

1. Parallels and Precedents 170
2. Baptism and Christian Initiation 170
3. Baptism in the Middle Ages 183
4. Baptism in Modern Times 193
5. Baptism in Contemporary Catholicism 199

VII. Confirmation 211

1. Parallels and Precedents 212
2. Receiving the Holy Spirit 213
3. From Consignation to Confirmation 219
4. Confirmation in Modern Times 226
5. Confirmation in the Contemporary Church 229

VIII. Eucharist 239

1. Parallels and Precedents 240
2. From the Last Supper to the Liturgy 244
3. The Mass and Eucharist in the Middle Ages 263
4. The Lord's Supper and the Modern Mass 280
5. Liturgy and Eucharist in the Twentieth Century 293

FOLDOUT: TIMELINE OF CHURCH HISTORY

IX. Reconciliation 317

1. Parallels and Precedents 319
2. Repentance and Reconciliation in Early Christianity 320
3. Confession and Penance in the Middle Ages 335
4. The Modern Sacrament of Penance 351
5. Sacramental Reconciliation in the Church Today 360

X. Anointing 375

1. Parallels and Precedents 376
2. Healing and Anointing in the Early Church 379
3. From Anointing the Sick to Anointing the Dying 383
4. The Modern Sacrament of Extreme Unction 390
5. Return to Anointing of the Sick 395

XI. Marriage 405

1. Parallels and Precedents 406
2. Early Christian Marriage 409
3. From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage 424
4. Marriage in the Modern Church 437
5. Marriage in Contemporary Catholicism 444

XII. Ordination 463

1. Parallels and Precedents 464
2. Christian Ministries and Sacred Orders 468
3. Holy Orders in the Middle Ages 491
4. The Modern Catholic Priesthood 505
5. Ministries in the Church Today 514

Conclusion: Sacraments and the Future 543

Glossary of Philosophical and Theological Terms
[with Pronunciation Guide to Selected Words] 547

Index of Names and Topics 557

About the Author 567

PREFACE

It has been over thirty years since I began doing the research that led to the writing of the first edition of this book. At that time, I made a decision not to include footnotes to the sources of my information because I was writing the book primarily for students, and I knew that students usually don't take the time to read footnotes. In subsequent editions, I followed the same practice, but readers who are interested in learning where the historical information in these pages comes from can find it in the books listed under the heading, "For Further Study," in the annotated bibliographies, especially under the subheading, "History," if there is one. As a young writer, one of my greatest worries was that critics would find errors of fact and misinterpretations of theology in what I had written, but to my great relief, the initial book reviews were laudatory, as have been the reviews of the subsequent editions. Looking back, I have come to realize that the difference between plagiarism and research is that plagiarism means stealing information from just one source, and that research means stealing from many sources.

In the subsequent editions, spaced roughly ten years apart, I added information about developments in sacramental practice and theology during the previous decade. The 1991 edition included information about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the permanent diaconate, for example, which were implemented in the United States in the 1980s, and the 2001 edition included what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (published in English in 1994) says about sacraments. On the theological side, postmodern approaches and liturgical theology were not in the first edition but were added when they became part of the academic scene. In this edition, I have paid more attention to the concerns of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in reining in what they perceived as excesses in liturgical creativity and aberrations in sacramental theology. Recent developments such as the introduction of the third edition of *The Roman Missal*

(© 2010 International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation) have been applauded by conservatives and lamented by liberals, but it is still too soon to tell how church rituals and their interpretation will be affected under Pope Francis and subsequent pontiffs.

The initial audience for this book was students who had grown up as Catholics before Vatican II and who were therefore curious to know how the church's sacraments could change so drastically in a few decades after having remained stable for centuries. As one religious educator noted shortly after the council, if a sailor on one of Columbus' ships had gone to confession before leaving land, and if an astronaut in the space program had gone to confession before leaving earth, they both would have used the same rite of penance. The world had changed and so the church was going through some updating, but Catholics at the time needed assurance that change is acceptable because it had happened many times prior to the sacramental stability imposed by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.

The audience for this latest edition, published fifty years after the Second Vatican Council, is still largely students, but now they are mostly people who have grown up in the post-Vatican II church. As a result, they lack some of the background knowledge that an earlier generation of readers brought to the book. Maps of the ancient and medieval worlds were included in the second edition, and this edition goes further to include a historical timeline foldout and a glossary of philosophical and theological terms to make for easier reading and better comprehension of a subject that covers continents and spans millennia. If you are unfamiliar with church history, it would be helpful for you to look over the timeline foldout that appears between pages 316 and 317 to get a sense of the major periods (e.g., patristic era, Middle Ages, modern era) through which the Catholic sacraments and their theology developed. If you are unfamiliar with Catholic theology, you would benefit from looking at the glossary on page 547, not to memorize these terms in advance, but to see which words can be looked up if necessary when you come across them while doing the reading. For an overview of each chapter, you can listen to my lectures at TheSacraments.org (click on "Related works available online") or at Liguori.org/doorstotheshared.

In scholarly publications, the purpose of bibliographies is to document the sources of information presented, but in this book the purpose is educational and suggestive. Because it is now quite easy, using online booksellers and databases such as WorldCat, to find complete biblio-

graphical data about any book, the bibliographies found at the end of each chapter provide titles but not subtitles, and they name the publisher but not the place of publication. When feasible, titles have been grouped under subheadings to help readers pursue further research in specific areas of interest, and the one-sentence description of each book is meant to help them get a sense of what various authors are saying. You will notice that the authors are not listed in alphabetical order, but in one of two ways: either the most important books to read are listed first regardless of date of publication, or the books are listed according to the date of publication to give a sense of how the treatment of topics has evolved over the past five decades. You could say that the annotated bibliographies are meant to be read as a supplement to what is found in the chapters as well as to be a guide For Further Reading and study.

JOSEPH MARTOS
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENTS TODAY

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to worship God. Because they are signs they also belong in the realm of instruction....

With the passage of time, however, certain features have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals which have made their nature and purpose less clear to the people of today. Hence some changes are needed to adapt them to present-day needs.

—SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

For the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. Before the council the Roman mass was the uniform liturgy for Catholics around the world, and it was in Latin; after the council Catholics heard the mass in their own language, and they celebrated it somewhat differently in different countries. Before the council other sacramental rites were almost identical in every country and diocese; after the council Catholics had much greater freedom in designing sacramental rituals to fit their own cultures. Before the council, scholasticism was the dominant theology of the Catholic Church; after the council Catholics developed new ways of thinking and talking about their beliefs.

In other areas not directly related to the sacraments, the change was no less dramatic. In the period before the council the authority structure of the Roman church was assumed to be pyramidal; lay people were subject to their pastors, pastors were subject to their bishops, and all were subject to the pope. During and after the council bishops began to view their authority in terms of collegiality or consensus among church leaders,

priests began to understand their role less in terms of authority and more in terms of ministry, and lay people began to assume responsibilities which had long been reserved to the clergy. Also in the period before the council, Catholics officially regarded Protestants as heretics even if unofficially they respected their freedom of conscience, and they looked upon people of other religions as obstinate or at best unenlightened. But the bishops of the council began to address other Christians as their “separated brothers and sisters,” they affirmed the spiritual ties between Catholics and Jews, and they acknowledged that non-Christian religions contained valid religious insights and practices.

Yet what happened at the council and what happened as a result of it did not occur instantaneously. The council took two years of preparation and another four years (1962–65) of official and unofficial meetings. The bishops in 1963 called for changes in the sacraments, but the worldwide implementation of those changes took more than a dozen years. After the council changes in the authority structure of the church occurred at different speeds in different dioceses and parishes, in some places changes never took place, and in other places changes were implemented only to be later undone. And although there have been some fundamental changes in the attitude of Catholics toward non-Catholics, ecumenical dialogue at the institutional level has not progressed much beyond the point of acknowledging similarities and respecting differences.

What happened at the council was also a long time in coming. As suggested at the end of the last chapter, developments both inside and outside the church were already forcing a reexamination of Catholic beliefs and practices. Some of those internal developments had a direct bearing on the sacraments.

1. Twentieth-Century Developments

Until the end of the nineteenth century the Catholic understanding of theology, worship, and scripture was fundamentally nonhistorical. The hierarchy and laity were largely unaware that Catholic theology had a history, or that their doctrines had not always been expressed in scholastic terms. They did not know that the mass and sacraments had been developing for centuries before their forms were frozen in time by the Council of Trent. They knew, of course, that some books of the Bible had been written before others, but they were ignorant of the actual history of their composition. At the same time, however, Christianity regarded itself as a historical religion based on

factual events, and Catholicism in particular prided itself on its centuries of continuous tradition. Thus it was somewhat logical that, in attempting to meet modern challenges to the Christian faith, Catholics would turn to the study of history to support their beliefs and practices. Yet in the long run it was precisely that investigation of history which led to deep changes in those same beliefs and practices. The discovery that things had not always been the same in the past opened the possibility for things to be different in the future.

NEOSCHOLASTICISM

In the modern world Catholicism was intellectually challenged by modern philosophies and ideologies. Empiricism and idealism, pragmatism and positivism, naturalism and materialism, were philosophical movements that seemed to attack the very foundation of Catholic theology. Nationalism and liberalism, socialism and democracy, were ideas that seemed incompatible with Catholic views about how society should be ordered. Utilitarianism, romanticism, and pragmatism proposed ethical norms that ran counter to traditional Catholic morality. Medieval scholasticism seemed incapable of meeting these modern challenges and most European intellectuals dismissed it as unworthy of serious consideration. Then in the 1800s some Catholic scholars began a sustained attempt to revitalize scholasticism, purge it of antiquated ideas that had been disproven by modern science, and form it into an intellectual system as coherent and comprehensive as any other. This neoscholastic movement gained papal approval in 1879 when Leo XIII called for a restoration of Christian philosophy based on the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, and in 1914 Pius X ordered all Catholic seminaries to use the *Summa Theologica* as a major source book in theology.

Before the new Catholic philosophy could be constructed, however, the old philosophy had to be recovered. Critical editions of the works of the major medieval theologians were published, translations were made, articles about them appeared in scholarly journals, and new books compared and commented on them. At first it seemed that Pope Leo's hope for a unified Christian philosophy would be realized, but as the century progressed it became apparent that medieval philosophy was not the single body of thought it had been assumed to be. Historical studies showed that there were some profound differences among the medieval scholastics, and the new scholastics seemed incapable of reconciling them. Moreover, Catholic thinkers in attempting to deal honestly with modern philosophies began to discover that these approaches raised questions that traditional

scholasticism could not answer, and so they began to fit new philosophical ideas into a general scholastic framework. By the 1950s Catholic philosophers and theologians were incorporating insights from existentialism and phenomenology, as well as ideas from sociology, psychology, and other disciplines into their work. Then, when the Second Vatican Council chose to speak in pastoral rather than scholastic terms, many Catholic writers abandoned scholasticism entirely in favor of more contemporary ways of looking at the world. So although today it is still possible to distinguish between Catholic thinkers who were educated in the scholastic tradition and other currents of Catholic thought, and although scholastic thinking has enjoyed a certain resurgence among conservative theologians, it is fair to say that scholasticism is no longer the unifying force in Catholic theology that it once was.

THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT

The bishops at the Vatican council were more concerned with pastoral and practical matters than with the doctrinal ones, and one of the developments within the church that had aroused this concern was the liturgical movement. Like the neoscholastic movement it began in the nineteenth century out of a dissatisfaction with the way things were, it progressed through a period of research into historical origins, and it culminated in a shift away from Tridentine Catholicism. Initially the movement affected only the monks of Europe who were trying to improve their eucharistic liturgies by studying the historical background of the mass. In the 1880s, however, desire for liturgical reform began to spread beyond the monasteries, and during the first half of the twentieth century historical research by Catholic scholars steadily increased. Archives were explored, influences on the liturgy were traced, and the evolution of the Roman liturgy began to become clearer. It became apparent that the Tridentine mass was actually a composite of prayers, readings, and gestures that had become part of the church's worship at different times and that did not always agree with one another. Research into the other sacraments showed that they too did not always have the forms given them in modern times and that they had been understood differently in different periods of the church's history.

In coming to grips with this new historical information, theologians began to look for new ways to understand the liturgical sacraments. Odo Casel in Germany, for example, did extensive research into early Christian worship and developed an explanation of the sacraments which was more patristic than scholastic. He returned to the Greek fathers' practice of re-

ferring to the sacraments as mysteries, and he interpreted them as rites in which the saving activity of the risen Christ became present to those who participated in them. For Casel, genuine participation in the sacraments meant an experiential participation in the Christian mysteries rather than a reverent attention to the rituals. He argued that through the sacraments and the yearly cycle of sacred feasts, Catholics relived the mysteries of Christ and made contact with his redeeming presence. His ideas seemed unorthodox at the time, but they began a movement toward a more experiential interpretation of the sacraments in Catholic theology.

Besides these theological developments, the period between the two world wars also saw a growing concern on the part of bishops and pastors to make the Sunday liturgy more intelligible and meaningful for Catholics. Then in the late forties and into the fifties the liturgical movement gained noticeable momentum. Liturgical journals were started, institutes and courses of study were founded, national and international conferences were held on such themes as modern culture and the liturgy, liturgy and piety, and the Bible and liturgy. In 1947 Pius XII issued the first papal encyclical devoted exclusively to the liturgy, and during the next ten years Rome authorized a number of changes in Catholic worship and granted permission for modern languages to be used in some of the sacramental rituals. From there it was a short step to the Second Vatican Council's call for a thorough reexamination of the church's liturgy and an updating of its sacramental practices.

THE BIBLICAL RENEWAL

The council could not have succeeded and possibly would not have attempted such broad reforms, however, were it not for a third important development known as the scriptural movement or the biblical renewal. Until the twentieth century the Catholic Church interpreted the Bible quite literally, and it used scriptural quotations to support its doctrines with little concern that the biblical authors did not have later Catholic doctrines in mind when they wrote. Nor was Catholicism alone in this practice; most other churches took the Bible literally and used proof texts to support their doctrines as well. But in the nineteenth century some Protestant scholars began to question this approach to the scriptures, and through the first decades of the twentieth century they developed more scientific and impartial methods of interpreting the Bible.

The new methods employed language analysis, literary criticism, and archaeology to determine when and where the books of the Bible were written, whether they were in their original form or had been subsequently

edited, whether their allusions to historical facts were accurate, and so on. For a long time Rome was reluctant to admit the value of these methods or permit their use in biblical studies since the hierarchy considered itself responsible for guarding the faith and properly interpreting the scriptures. But Catholic theologians repeatedly requested that they be allowed to use these methods in studying the Bible, which were already being used successfully in studying patristic and medieval texts. Finally in 1943 Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical that recognized the importance of these methods for scriptural research and granted Catholic scholars permission to use them with prudence and discretion.

During the next ten years Catholic biblical studies increased enormously, enabling theologians to reexamine the scriptural basis of Catholic beliefs and practices. This research gave additional impetus to the liturgical movement by suggesting better usage of scripture in worship, and it provided another alternative to scholasticism by suggesting biblical rather than philosophical categories for theology. By the mid-1950s most Catholic theologians had abandoned the earlier dogmatic use of the Bible and recognized a distinction between biblical statements and doctrinal statements. They agreed that statements in the Bible had to be understood in the context in which they were written, and so it was a mistake to ascribe to biblical authors the views and doctrines that developed later in Christianity. In the area of the sacraments this meant that scripture scholars no longer had to assume that modern sacramental practices were to be found in the New Testament. It also meant that sacramental theologians could approach the scriptural data more openly in attempting to understand the meaning and purpose of the sacraments.

THE HUMAN SCIENCES

The social sciences of psychology and sociology, as well as other scientific inquiries into human nature and behavior, supported the developments in philosophy, liturgy, and scripture that preceded the Second Vatican Council. During the decades following the council, however, and especially in the years following the revisions of the sacraments authorized by the council, insights drawn from the human sciences increasingly influenced Catholic attempts to understand the sacraments and their role in Christian life.

The scientific study of history, especially liturgical history, supplied the bishops at the council with the essential information needed to support the thesis that since the sacraments had changed in the past, they could be revised in the present, and they could again be allowed to evolve in the future. Even more practically, the growing knowledge of how the liturgy

had been practiced in the past, especially during the patristic period when many of the sacraments grew to their initial maturity, gave the liturgical commissions established after the council historical examples of how the sacraments might be revised in accordance with the ancient practices of the church. Although much of the fundamental history was known to experts before the council, theologians and liturgists have continued to mine the historical data for new insights into how sacraments can and should function in the church.

The sciences of psychology and sociology, when applied to religious experience and religious ritual, enabled Catholic thinkers both during and after the Vatican council to see that there were many fundamental similarities between the ways that sacraments operate in Catholicism and the roles that parallel rituals play in other religions. Initially, this discovery provided an incentive to ecumenical dialogue and increased mutual understanding not only among Christians but also between Christians and members of other faiths. Increasingly, however, findings in psychology and sociology are being used to penetrate the individual and social dynamics of the Catholic sacraments themselves, revealing how they function in their actual performance, disclosing why they do not always have the effects that they are supposed to have, and suggesting ways to increase their spiritual and communal effectiveness.

Along these same lines, Catholic intellectuals today are using insights gleaned from linguistics and communications theory, anthropological and cultural studies, as well as interdisciplinary inquiries into symbol and myth, in their attempts to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of their own sacraments. They are discovering that in our pluralistic world it is difficult to confine the meaning that a sacrament has for people to its deliberately intended significance, that people in different places may interpret the same rituals differently, and that even people in the same location might, because of their differences in background and personality, experience a sacrament in a variety of ways. They are also learning that symbolic story and ritual are unavoidably polyvalent, that is, they inherently contain a rich variety of meanings and values, some of which are deliberately intended and some of which are unconsciously communicated. On the one hand, these discoveries pose a discouraging challenge to any attempt to see a sacrament as having only one essential meaning. But on the other hand, they simultaneously present an encouraging opportunity to allow the sacraments to speak for themselves, as it were, permitting them to reveal the Christian mysteries in increasing richness and depth.

2. Contemporary Sacramental Theology

Catholic theology underwent more change in the four decades from 1960 to 2000 than it did in the four centuries from the Council of Trent to Vatican II. In the middle of the twentieth century, Catholic theologians found themselves faced with the task of rethinking the meaning of Christianity in the contemporary world, and during the Second Vatican Council the Catholic hierarchy implicitly acknowledged the need to do so. The first stage in this theological enterprise was to recover the past. The second stage has been to redefine the religious significance of Christian doctrines for Catholics today. It is a process which is still going on, and it is affecting all the areas of Catholic theology, not just the sacraments. Theologians today are taking another look at the nature of the church, the meaning of the Trinitarian doctrines, the role of scripture and tradition, and the norms of Christian morality.

In taking this step toward redefining the religious significance of the sacraments, Catholic theologians have been unburdening themselves of the mechanistic and legalistic attitudes that dominated the modern treatment of the sacraments. They have been questioning the notion that the sacraments operate automatically on the soul, and they have been insisting that the sacraments have to be treated in a wider context than canon law. At the same time, though, in their desire to remain faithful to the Catholic tradition, they have been asking what the traditional doctrines meant, why the sacraments were said to cause grace, why Christ was said to have instituted the sacraments, and so on. In a sense, theologians today have been trying to get behind the traditional words used to explain the sacraments and to recapture the experiences that gave rise to those explanations. They have been trying to get beneath the verbal meaning of the sacraments to their experiential meaning, and then trying to put that meaning into new words.

What, then, *are* sacraments according to contemporary Catholic theology? There is no simple answer to that question. In theology books and journals, in sermons and in religion classes, Catholics find their sacraments talked about as signs of grace, as acts of Christ, as expressions of the nature of the church, as symbolic actions, as encounters with God, as celebrations of life, as participations in Jesus' worship of the Father. The list, although not endless, is extremely diverse.

Still, amidst the diversity there is a recurrent theme and a definite trend. The theme underlying all the others is that sacraments are doors to the

experience of the sacred, and the basic trend is toward more experiential accounts of the sacraments.

SACRAMENTS AS SIGNS OF GRACE

The Baltimore *Catechism* definition of the sacraments called them “outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace.” Catholic theology had always spoken of the sacraments as signs, but this doctrine had not been challenged by the reformers and so the Council of Trent did not insist on it. Instead, counter-reformation theology stressed the effectiveness of the sacraments, and modern Catholicism regarded them more as causes than as signs of grace. But historical research showed that the fathers and the medievals had also spoken of sacraments as sacred signs, and contemporary writers have tended to emphasize this idea, speaking of the sacraments as signs of grace, signs of Christ, signs of God’s love, signs of life, signs of faith, signs of the church, and signs of spiritual transformation.

Regarding the sacraments as signs has enabled Catholic theologians to clarify the idea behind the phrase *ex opere operato*: that as a sign of what was happening, a sacramental ritual was independent of the holiness of the minister. This clarification also helped Catholics begin to overcome the notion that sacraments mechanically or magically cause something in the soul of the recipient. Still, even in speaking of the sacraments as signs, the initial tendency was to regard them as signs of unexperienced metaphysical occurrences: that baptism was a sign that a person was washed clean of original sin, that penance was a sign that God forgave the sins confessed, that the marriage ceremony was a sign of an unbreakable spiritual bond between the husband and wife. It was a step, but only a first step, toward rethinking the meaning of the Catholic sacraments.

SACRAMENTS AS ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

A second and more important step was taken by Edward Schillebeeckx, a Dutch theologian who wrote extensively on the sacraments during the 1950s and 1960s. More than any other person Schillebeeckx was instrumental in showing that Catholicism could develop a theology of the sacraments that was both faithful to the insights of Thomas Aquinas and free of the minimalistic tendency of late scholasticism. Like Aquinas he attempted to recapture the religious experience within the sacramental ritual and then to speak about that experience in philosophical terms, but the basic terms he chose came not from Aristotelian philosophy but from contemporary existentialism.

Schillebeeckx suggests that the closest equivalent to what happens in a sacramental experience is an existential encounter between persons. When two persons deeply encounter each other—in contrast to simply meeting each other—they discover something of the mystery that the other person is. Those who fall in love, for example, see beyond the physical appearance of the other person to a beauty and a value in that person that others cannot see. In the encounter of love they see the same outward signs that others see, but to them the words and gestures of the other person reveal a depth of reality that is ordinarily hidden from view.

For Schillebeeckx the sacraments are outward signs that reveal a transcendent, divine reality. They open up, so to speak, the possibility of falling in love with God. Jesus himself when he lived in Palestine was that same kind of sacramental sign to many of those who knew him. When they encountered him they found themselves in the presence of a mystery, but the mystery that was revealed to them was more than a human love, more than a human understanding, more than a human power. For them Jesus was a sacrament through whom they encountered the mystery of God.

Even after he died Christ remained a sacrament to those who accepted his message and believed in him. In his resurrection appearances he revealed to his first followers that the mystery they saw in him and the mystery of the God they believed in were one and the same. After he was gone from their sight they continued to sense the presence of that mystery, and they came to recognize that Jesus was now glorified as the messiah, the Christ, united with God but still active in the world.

In their turn the community of those whom Christ had called together were a sacrament to others. They preached his message and in their words God was present, touching people's hearts and transforming their lives. Through their actions Christ himself acted, healing the sick and bestowing his spirit. They were, as Christ had been, a sign of the mystery of God, and those who responded in faith to what they said and did encountered Christ as their Lord and acknowledged the gift, the grace, of God's redemptive power.

In time this church came to see itself as making the divine mystery present in the world primarily in seven ways, corresponding to seven ways that Christ himself was a sacrament of God to others: in introducing others to new life, in sharing the power of his spirit with them, in healing their illness and forgiving their sinfulness, in ministering to their religious needs, in being faithful to his Father and his church, ultimately in the action of sacrificing himself out of love. The church could have chosen other

ways to collectively sacramentalize the redeeming presence and power of Christ—and indeed all Christians are called to be sacraments in the world—but as a matter of historical fact these seven were chosen as the ecclesial sacraments, the official sacraments of the church. In these seven the Christian community recognized that the redemptive mystery of Christ was present, and that those who participated in these ritual actions could encounter the source of all salvation.

In this way Schillebeeckx traces the seven traditional sacraments to the church, which is the sacrament of Christ, and to Christ himself, who is the sacrament of God. As official signs and acts of the church they are also signs and acts of Christ. They signify the redemptive action of Christ in the world, and it is the power of God's grace that is effectively communicated through them.

Moreover, by adopting the existential encounter as a philosophical model for interpreting what happens in a sacramental experience, Schillebeeckx is able to safeguard the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church about the sacraments. When they are occasions for spiritual encounters with Christ, the sacraments communicate God's grace and change people's lives. Yet even if they are not fruitful they are still valid as signs of Christ, just as the signs that can reveal the mystery of a person in fact do not when others are not open to encountering and responding to that mystery.

All deeply interpersonal encounters change a person inwardly and call for an outward response, and in the same way some sacramental encounters have a permanent effect on those who fully participate in the church's rituals. The sacramental characters of baptism, confirmation, and orders, then, are these permanent effects of the encounter with Christ, calling Christians to live a life of faith, of witness, and of service. These three sacraments signify that Christ's call for a response is real and permanent even if people do not immediately recognize who it is that is speaking to them in and through these rituals. This is particularly true of infants who, when they are baptized, are not yet capable of fully encountering Christ or responding to his call.

Schillebeeckx's success in translating the ideas of scholastic sacramental theology into more contemporary philosophical language was one of the major reasons why the bishops of Vatican II felt secure in allowing Catholic theologians to reexamine the traditional teachings of the church and to restate them in nontraditional ways. And Schillebeeckx must also be credited with an important contribution to liturgical as well as theological reform. For according to his model the essence of any sacrament is the

encounter with Christ, made available to Catholics through ecclesial rites that admittedly had changed through the centuries. If, then, the outward rites had changed without their essence being lost, they could certainly be changed again. In fact it could be argued—as it was—that the hierarchy now had the responsibility to authorize a new change in the rites in order for the sacraments to be more effective signs of the encounter with Christ.

SACRAMENTS AS SYMBOLIC ACTIONS OF THE CHURCH

In some respects the sacramental theology of Karl Rahner resembles that of Schillebeeckx, but his overall treatment is different. Writing in Germany about the same time as Schillebeeckx but continuing to refine his ideas on the sacraments well into the 1970s, Rahner was one of the most prolific of Catholicism's contemporary theologians and undoubtedly the most systematic. He attempted to rethink the entire range of Catholic doctrines using philosophical insights introduced by existentialism and phenomenology for the framework of his theological system.

One of the goals of phenomenology has been to describe the fundamental phenomena of human existence, the fundamental facts that no human being can escape, the fundamental ways that human life is lived. And the phenomenon that Rahner chose as the model for his sacramental theory was the fact that human existence is a symbolic activity.

What this means is that in every action human beings symbolize what they are. A carpenter symbolizes what he is when he works with wood, for example, and an honest person symbolizes what she is in telling the truth. Each human action embodies, so to speak, one of the many things that each human being is. But human actions sometimes do more than this. Sometimes people do things they have not done before, or that they have not done as well before. When a girl learns to swim she does something new, and becomes a swimmer; the more a boy practices juggling the better he becomes at it. In actions like these people go beyond or transcend what they were before, and in performing them they symbolize or embody something new that they are becoming.

According to Rahner this phenomenon of self-transcendence is the basic fact of human existence that traditional Catholic theologians were referring to when they talked about grace. In their view the nature of anything was simply to be what it was, and so to go beyond that nature was always gratuitous. In a way they recognized that life was full of gifts from God; any growth or development and even life itself was a gift of grace in a broad sense. But in their writings about the Christian life and

For Further Reading

Sacraments

Richard McBrien, *Inside Catholicism: Rituals and Symbols Revealed* (Harper Collins, 1995) is a picture book of traditional and contemporary images.

Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments* (Pastoral Press, 1987) is an engagingly personal description of experiences of sacramentality, mostly outside church but within the realm of the sacred.

Monika Hellwig, *The Meaning of the Sacraments* (Pflaum/Standard, 1972) explains the significance of the sacraments through an analysis of their symbolism.

Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Paulist Press, 1981) discusses the process of celebrating lived experience by entering into symbolic rituals.

Sandra DeGidio, *Sacraments Alive* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1991) uses a broadened concept of sacramentality to review the seven sacraments.

William Bausch, *A New Look at the Sacraments* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1983) presents a historical and pastoral approach to understanding and practicing the sacraments.

Ray Noll, *Sacraments: A New Understanding for a New Generation* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1999) is a college text that reviews contemporary approaches to sacramentality and the seven sacraments.

James White, *Sacraments as God's Self-Giving* (Abingdon Press, 1983) reinterprets the meaning of grace through the experience of self-giving, pointing out the social justice implications of the sacraments.

- John Maxwell, *Worship in Action* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1981) tells the story of an inner-city parish's renewal of community life and sacramental life.
- Mark Searle, *Liturgy Made Simple* (Liturgical Press, 1981) is an excellent introduction to the revised mass.
- Patrick Collins, *More than Meets the Eye* (Paulist Press, 1983) proposes that when done well, liturgy, like art, opens depth dimensions to experience.
- William Freberger, *Liturgy: Work of the People* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1984) stresses the importance of full congregational participation in worship.
- Lawrence Mick, *To Live as We Worship* (Liturgical Press, 1984) tries to bridge the gap between liturgy and life.
- Austin Fleming, *Preparing for Liturgy* (Pastoral Press, 1985) is a fundamental book of theology and spirituality for liturgical planners.
- Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Sacred Drama* (Fortress Press, 1999) presents a basic yet comprehensive understanding of the contemporary experience of worship.
- Regis Duffy, *An American Emmaus* (Crossroad, 1995) wrestles with issues concerning the interaction between contemporary culture and Christian liturgy.
- Eugene Weil, *Gathered to Pray* (Cowley Publications, 1986) is an introduction to liturgical prayer written from an Episcopalian perspective.
- Susan White, *The Spirit of Worship* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999) discusses liturgical spirituality from an ecumenical perspective.
- Charles Miller, *Liturgy for the People of God* (Alba House, 2001) is a trilogy that describes and explains the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council.
- Michael Prendergast, ed., *Full, Conscious and Active Participation* (Pastoral Press, 2003) collects 25 articles written to help liturgists and musicians encourage and facilitate increased congregational worship.
- Yves Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship* (Liturgical Press, 2010) is a collection of articles by a theologian who was very influential during the Second Vatican Council.
- Anscar Chupungco, *What, Then, Is Liturgy?* (Liturgical Press, 2010) offers reflections and a memoir by a leader of the reforms after Vatican II.

For Further Study

Sacramental Theology

- Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (Sheed and Ward, 1963) is the major presentation of his early contribution to sacramental theology.
- Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Seabury Press, 1978) contains a concise presentation of his sacramental theology in Chapter 8.
- Herbert McCabe, *The New Creation* (Continuum, 2010) originally published in 1964, develops Vatican II ideas such as the People of God and the sacramentality of the world to explain the Catholic sacraments.
- Michael Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament* (Creighton University Press, 1995) weaves traditional Catholic teachings with insights from phenomenology, biblical studies, and contemporary experience.
- Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1983) systematically explores how the sacraments influence Christians' interpretation of their experience.

GLOSSARY OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL TERMS

[with Pronunciation Guide to Selected Words]

abbott: the head of a monastery of men; from the Aramaic word for “father” or “daddy.” The head of a female monastery is called an abbess.

absolution: originally, a release from the obligation to perform additional works of public penance; later, a release from the eternal punishment of hell, hence another way to speak about forgiveness of sins.

abstinence: the penitential practice of refraining from sexual activity or from certain foods such as meat, wine, and other items regarded as luxuries. Compare with fasting, which is abstaining from all solid and/or liquid nourishment for a certain period of time.

accident: in Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics, a quality of an individual substance, giving it a certain appearance, for example, color, size, shape, smell, or movement; from a Latin word meaning to happen.

act: in Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics, the activation of a potency, or in plainer English, the doing of something that can be done.

alb [AWLB]: a clerical vestment; a plain, long, white garment worn under other vestments during a liturgical service.

annulment: a judgment by a civil or religious court that an apparent marriage contract is null and void because of some serious defect that was present from the beginning, for example, one of the partners was already married.

anoint: to pour or smear oil on some part of the body during a religious ritual.

apostate [uh-PAW·stayt or uh-PAW·stet]: someone who renounces their faith; from Greek words meaning to stand apart.

archbishop: the head of an archdiocese.

archdiocese: the major diocese in a given region, usually centered around a large city.

Aristotle: ancient Greek philosopher whose works influenced the medieval schoolmen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Joseph Martos is a retired professor of philosophy, theology and religious studies who currently resides in Louisville, Kentucky. He taught primarily in smaller Catholic colleges and universities, and the original edition of this book was written with his students in mind. He has also been a visiting professor in many seminaries, colleges, and universities in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

In addition to *Doors to the Sacred*, Martos has written *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*, he has contributed scholarly articles to theological dictionaries and journals, and he has written and coauthored numerous popular books and articles on the sacraments and other subjects. At various times in his career, he has been active in the American Philosophical Association, the American Catholic Philosophical Association, the American Academy of Religion, the Religious Education Association, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the College Theology Society.

His work is interdisciplinary, accessible, and takes a balanced approach. His website, www.TheSacraments.org, contains biographical and contact information, as well as significant material on these and related topics.