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# The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist

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from our borrowed theology of colonizers and turn toward the "small collectivities of hope" within Canadian life which are the well-springs for our own theological reflections.

Further, this *Festschrift* is pluralistically rich. In this sense, it reflects the wide range of Gregory Baum's circle of friends and influence. His is a truly ecumenical theology in terms of both his thought and his life. He has mentored many of these people, and they are his friends. They are Protestants (like Douglas Hall and Robert McAfee Brown); they are Catholics (like Mary Jo Leddy and Matthew L. Lamb); they are Jews (like Rabbi Dow Marmor). Some are feminist liberationists, such as Rosemary Ruether and Dorothee Sölle, while others are steeped in the interface of psychology and theology like Philip McKenna. Such a wide range of thought and experience is an appropriate tribute to a man who embodies this ecumenical reality in his own life pilgrimage.

The chronological bibliography at the end of the book not only is a useful research tool for those who would steep themselves in Baum's theology but also is a vivid portrayal of the broad scholarship of the man himself.

Finally, the personal reflections of Gregory Baum are worth the price of the book. He takes us through the pilgrimage of his religious journey so that the scholar we have admired so much emerges now as the warm and engaging human being that has touched so many lives. He has described his life as one who has received the touch of God's grace in surprising and wonderful ways. No wonder then, for those who know his life and thought, he has emerged as a surprising and wonderful man.

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## **The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist**

Kenan B. Osborne  
New York: Paulist Press, 1987  
249 pp.

"From the earliest period of the Christian era," claims Father Osborne, "the Church has celebrated the initiation of converts and neophytes into the community by a sacramental process which is seen as baptism—(confirmation)—eucharist."

The author notes further: "If the approach to the initiation into the Church is seen not merely as baptism, but also as baptism—eucharist, the implications for the ecumenical movement become somewhat acute, since there is often a recognition of one Church's baptism, but a refusal to welcome such baptized Christians to the eucharistic table."

This timely and scholarly text discusses questions which are demanding much current denominational and ecumenical attention. What is the place and purpose of confirmation within the spiritual journey of a Christian? What is the meaning of baptism biblically, theologically, liturgically and for Christian living within the world? How should we and how do we regard the eucharist? That is, should the emphasis be on the eucharist as God's gift of grace to us or on our human response to that grace? Should there be frequent celebration of the eucharist? If so, on what grounds biblically and theologically? What is the relationship between baptism and holy communion (and this is more than simply an age eligibility question)? And where does confirmation fit into that relationship?

Osborne addresses these timely questions. I say "timely" because a number of denominations within the Christian church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada included, have either committees or task forces exploring theological foundations and liturgical practices pertinent to sacramental ministries. Likewise, many churches are studying the World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*. On the ecumenical scene, there are also a number of inter-church dialogues inclusive of discussions on the sacraments. Indeed, a timely text!

But also a scholarly text! The book is divided into three sections: Holy Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Each section includes within it the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, an exploration of pertinent biblical texts, a discussion of church history data on the subject and a dialogue with contemporary issues incorporating both theological and practical concerns. Each section is prefaced with a selected bibliography and each chapter contains helpful questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion.

The central thesis of the text is that Jesus is the primordial sacrament and the church is the fundamental sacramental expression in which all individual sacraments find their basis. For example, Osborne argues that "the New Testament clearly indicates that baptism is much more than a rite. In the life of Jesus himself, it is presented as an extremely significant event, revelatory of who Jesus himself is. In the entire New Testament the central aspect of baptism is its relationship to Jesus, and in Paul this becomes even a mystic relationship into the life, death and resurrection which grounds the current theological interest in Jesus as the primordial sacrament."

The intrinsic challenges both denominationally and ecumenically within this text may be seen in statements like the following: "The New Testament has absolutely no indication of another stage in Christian initiation which would come between baptism on the one hand and eucharist on the other. Baptism opens the door to the eucharistic banquet. This lack of any intermediary situation indicates... a strong connection between baptism and eucharist, and second, a theological anomaly to the contemporary practice of a Church recognizing another Christian community's baptism but refusing eucharistic hospitality."

Osborne candidly admits that there is at present "disquiet among Catholic theologians on the entire issue of confirmation." He cites fourteen particular issues facing this sacrament among Catholic theologians.

He could also have included Lutheran theologians in that sense of disquiet! My one disappointment in the text came in this section; I would have desired a more comprehensive dialogue with each of these issues. As it is, the author remains true to his central thesis and lets the reader wonder about practical and liturgical application.

Although writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Osborne is sensitive to Protestant struggles with these sacraments; he cites materials from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the *Book of Common Prayer* and in the last chapter "The Eucharist, An Integral Part of Christian Initiation," he engages, in a constructive and provocative manner, Krister Stendahl at length in his view that "baptism in the NT and in the early church is always an act of *initiation*, and that this in fact should be the point of departure." His contention with Stendahl is that Jesus as primordial sacrament must be taken as the point of departure.

I found it a pleasure to read this book. It's an engaging document, written in easily understood language, which will be of value to many people—to those involved in studies on sacramental theology and practice it will be a helpful reference; to those involved in seminary course studies, it will be a stimulating text or an exciting recommended reading; to pastors and church leaders participating in ministerial associations or local councils of churches, it could be a resourceful study guide; to persons engaged in inter-church dialogues, it will serve as a clarifying partner in dialogue.

"The theology of both baptism and eucharist [and confirmation] is intimately conjoined to ecclesiology and even more fundamentally to christology."

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## Civil Religion and Political Theology

Leroy S. Rouner, editor

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986

240 pp., U.S. \$24.95 cloth

"Civil Religion" and "Political Theology" are terms which have become common parlance for many of us ever since the American Robert Bellah published his by now famous 1967 essay "Civil Religion in America" and the German Catholic theologian Johannes Baptist Metz began developing a new Political Theology at about the same time. Seldom, however, do we think of these together. Here for the first time a group of distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines, including Bellah and Metz, discuss these two concepts in relation to each other.

All assume that religion and theology have an important role to play in public political and social life. They disagree, however, on what form that