

## CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM CONSULTATION

Topic:	Catholic and Jewish Approaches to Sacramentality: a Conversation
Convener:	Mary Doak, University of San Diego
Moderator:	Elizabeth Groppe, Xavier University
Presenters:	Joseph J. Martos, Aquinas Institute of Theology Elena Procaro-Foley, Iona College
Respondent:	Ryan S. Dulkan, Eden Theological Seminary

Sacraments and sacramentality, central to Catholic faith and practice, provide a base from which to explore similarities and differences between Christianity and Judaism, to seek deeper mutual understandings, and to examine how interreligious dialogue is best pursued. Is Judaism properly described as having a sacramental tradition, or does such an approach inappropriately force Jewish faith and practice into a Christian framework? On the other hand, does the claim that the Judaism has no sacramental economy (as stated in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2008 guidelines for high school religious curricula) overlook the Jewish roots of Christian sacramentality and reinforce the common Christian denigration of Judaism as a religion of legalistic ritualism? At stake in these questions is not only the appropriate Christian understanding of Judaism but also the meaning of sacramentality itself.

Joseph J. Martos, in his presentation “Sacramentality in Christianity and Judaism,” turned to historical theology to clarify the understanding of sacrament and of sacramental economy presumed in the USCCB’s 2008 catechetical directives. Though the term “economy” is a relatively recent borrowing from the postindustrial description of the flow of goods and services, the episcopal understanding continues to presume a medieval account of sacraments as rooted in God’s providential plan for the redemption of humanity. Given a view of sacraments as instituted by Christ, the Son incarnate, to provide the supernatural assistance needed for salvation, it makes sense to say that Judaism lacks the sacramental economy that is definitively Christian.

Martos further argued that this understanding of sacraments requires a now untenable, fundamentalist biblical hermeneutic. Developing the distinction between a symbol and its experiential referent, Martos proffered an alternative phenomenological framework wherein sacraments are symbolic rituals that serve as “doors to the sacred,” invitations to experience and to reconnect with important spiritual realities. Insofar as a religion has rituals that facilitate and celebrate contact with the sacred, and certainly this includes Judaism, then that religion has a sacramental tradition.

In her presentation, Elena Procaro-Foley provided an analysis of the treatment of Judaism throughout the USCCB catechetical guidelines in order to contextualize the statement that Judaism lacks a sacramental economy. She noted a consistent failure to encourage consideration of Judaism in any depth or on its own terms (even to the point that a proper self-understanding of Christianity as rooted in Judaism is undermined). Indeed, the tone of the guidelines is triumphalist, without any apparent concern to correct supersessionist thought or to ensure an engagement with Judaism appropriate to the decades of Catholic-Jewish dialogue since Vatican II’s *Nostra aetate*.

Critical of the tendency to interpret Judaism solely in Christian terms (terms by which Judaism necessarily appears deficient), Procaro-Foley identified specific contributions of the ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue that might ground a more complex and appropriately Jewish

understanding of the role of sacramentality within the Jewish tradition. In particular, she noted the Judaism shares with Christianity an emphasis on God's healing activity and on enacting the communal memory of God's relation to the world in creation, revelation, and redemption.

Ryan Dulkan's response highlighted the tautology that Martos and Procaro-Foley uncovered in the USCCB document's account of sacramentality: to say that only Christians have a sacramental economy because they alone accept the fundamental beliefs of Christianity is to say nothing more than that only Christians are Christian. Dulkan also observed that dismissing the sacramentality of other religions implies that these religions lack a relation between their master story and their ritual practices such that they are engaged in meaningless ritualism. Appealing to Martos's functional definition of sacraments and drawing on classic Jewish sources, Dulkan concluded that the multiple rabbinic references to the Torah as a divine gift intended to overcome human fallibility supports an interpretation of Judaism as having a sacramental economy by any worthwhile definition of the term.

Finally, Dulkan echoed Procaro-Foley's concern with the failure to engage Judaism and Jewish sources on their own terms. He warned that this methodological failure prevents Christianity and Judaism from becoming fully intelligible in their historical and theological development.

The lively conversation following these presentations focused on clarifying the nature of sacramentality, as understood historically as well as in contemporary terms, along with further explorations of the methodological issues involved in developing Jewish-Christian dialogue and overcoming centuries of Christian denigration of Judaism.

MARY DOAK  
*University of San Diego*  
*San Diego, California*