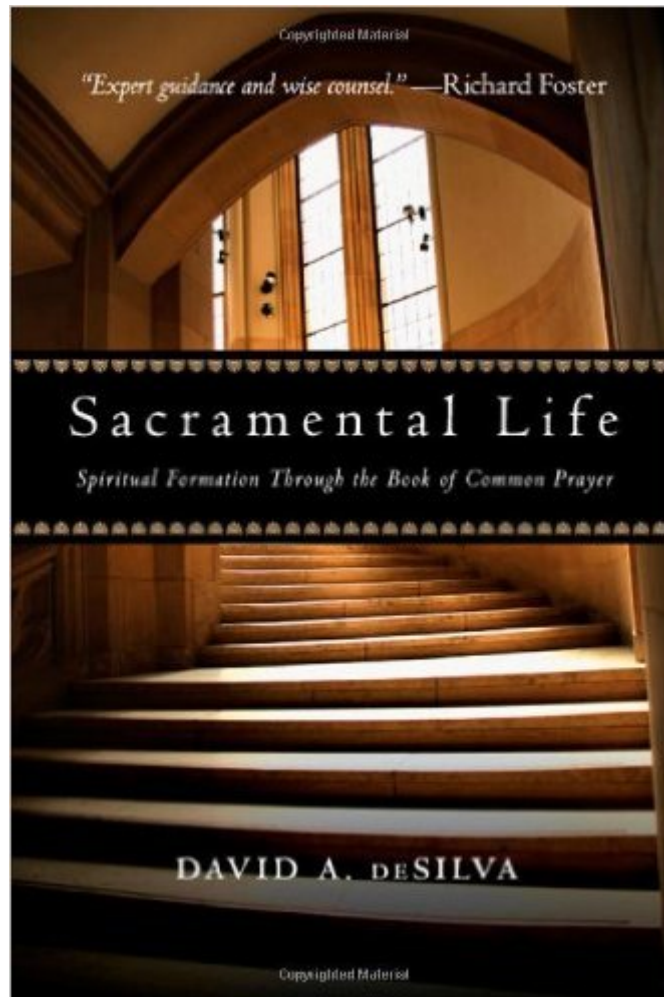


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# Sacramental Life: Spiritual Formation Through The Book Of Common Prayer



## Synopsis

What happens when old meets new? As David deSilva has experienced the ancient wisdom of the Book of Common Prayer, he's been formed spiritually in deep and lasting ways. In these pages, he offers you a brand new way to use the Book of Common Prayer, that you too might experience new growth, new intimacy with God and a new lens through which to view the world. Focusing on the four sacramental rites of baptism, Eucharist, marriage and burial, deSilva explores each one in depth through the prayers, liturgies and Scripture readings of the Book of Common Prayer, and then adds his own devotional exercises that help you immediately apply what you've reflected on. As you read and contemplate the material, you may notice old habits, wrong beliefs and negative patterns being replaced with new desires and perspectives that help you draw ever closer to God. In this innovative and engaging resource David deSilva invites you in to a new way of being spiritually formed through an old book that has shaped thousands of disciples through the years. "I hope that, as you read and pray through this guide," he writes, "you will discover afresh the ways in which the rites contained in the Book of Common Prayer facilitate a genuine encounter with God, and a transforming experience of grace."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Professor David deSilva is Trustees' Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio. He is the author of over fifteen books. Ashland Theological Seminary is part of Ashland University. It is the largest seminary in Ohio and the 12th

largest seminary in the United States and Canada. DeSilva was a member of the Episcopal Church for twenty-four years. He is ordained as a pastor in the United Methodist Church, which he describes as a daughter denomination of the Anglican Communion. He and his wife, Donna Jean, are also both on the staff of Christ United Methodist Church. His academic and pastoral experience clearly combines in this book. DeSilva commences his book by describing the many who assume that he left the Episcopal Church in rebellion against the sterility of its liturgical tradition. "Nothing could be further from the truth", he says. "I am a person of faith today precisely because the liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer gave me a language and a context for encountering God in my youth that continues to be the essential vehicles for my own spiritual formation". His book focuses on four liturgical rites: baptism, Eucharist, marriage and burial. Each section explores the prayers, liturgies and Scripture readings of the Book of Common Prayer. Each chapter concludes with "putting it into practice" - applying the ideas through spiritual practice. I have often explored the increasing interest in liturgy growing in protestant and evangelical contexts that, not so long ago, held the presuppositions of liturgy being sterile as described above. DeSilva is here offering a rich resource for exploring liturgy in a way that gets beyond the rubrical fundamentalism that so often, unfortunately, is assumed to be the essence of liturgical study. Here liturgy, rightly in my opinion, is directly connected to our spiritual vitality, individually and communally. I can imagine this book not only being profitable for individual spiritual growth, but any one of its four parts would form a useful resource for a study and reflection group.

David A. deSilva, *Sacramental Life: Spiritual Formation Through the Book of Common Prayer*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008. Reviewed by Mark Eckel, Director, Mahseh Center, Lake Bruce, IN. From time to time during my professorial days at Moody Bible Institute, I would attend an Episcopalian church close by my house. I did this because I felt like such a sinner taking communion there. In that denomination partaking of the bread and wine is a very kinesthetic experience (e.g. physical movement is required). One had to stand and walk down the middle aisle in front of everyone. Kneeling at the altar, the sacraments were given to you by another without your help. Returning to my seat, the thought repetitiously came to my mind, "I am a sinner saved by grace. I am a sinner saved by grace. I am a sinner..." Often I would stop after the first four words. Physical activity dictated that I be physically, visibly reminded of my status before God. Most Evangelicals have an autonomous, individualistic approach to communion: we take the elements ourselves as they are passed. I need the bodily movement to remind me that I do nothing of myself without His aid. And so deSilva, "We might like to think of ourselves as our own masters, which is

prized among our cultural ideals . . . we seek to preserve the illusion of running our own show" (53). What is so profound about *Sacramental Life* is just that kind of direct application. deSilva hits me where I live with words from *The Book of Common Prayer* impacting every movement of life. Relevance to daily living is consistently tactile, including touch (37), taste (82), and smell (47). Christians have been making themselves aware of their devotion to God through liturgies found in *The Book of Common Prayer* for years. The four major sections of *Sacramental Life* force the reader back to contemplate and practice these prayers. Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, and Burial relate to aspects of life with which believers consistently interact. Each small chapter (there are forty-five) could function itself as a daily guide for individuals or groups. At the conclusion of every few pages a section entitled "putting it into practice" gives the reader livable guidelines, implementing physically what she has just read verbally. The chapters consistently offer new threads of connection to the Christian life. During communion, for instance, the necessity of remembering (82), confronting conflicts (88), and transparency (97-98) are explained. deSilva summarizes, "We cannot be right with God when we are at odds with one another" (110). Our confession of sin (100-108) with the emphasis on self-examination impacts our humble patience with others. Genuine sorrow is indicative of genuine intention. Life application is constant. "Giving gifts" (156) indicates the depth of our relation to God making adoration "a lifestyle" (144). *Sacramental Life* minces no words in skewering consumerism (113) or in referencing the problems associated with spontaneous prayers versus those already written (124-134). Marriage counselors would do well to visit pages 195-224 often as they guide young couples toward their vows. Vignettes and anecdotes from years of pastoral counseling breathe life into each biblical injunction. I was pleasantly surprised to read deSilva's reference to keeping a human skull visible through portrait, reminding us all that life does come to an end, teaching us to number our days (239). A similar picture in my office is a visible prompt to live each day for Christ, knowing life is a vapor. deSilva makes many astute theological comments. Whether biblical words are being defined ("temptation" as "trial" in *The Lord's Prayer*, 140), an exposition of a passage is elucidated (135-141), denominational terms are described ("collect" as the gathered petitions from assembled members, 118), or the intersection of New Testament backgrounds to explain the problem of idolatry (152) is detailed, new insights can be gained in each chapter. deSilva's penchant for architecture (146, 151) reflects my own as I spent half my time walking to the train in downtown Chicago looking up at the beautiful buildings! A few doctrinal differences will raise eyebrows with some: prayers for the dead (130-133) or apocryphal books as guides (144). However, what is most impressive are the constant, full references to Scripture from where *Sacramental Life* gains its foundation. Taking weekly communion where a

church body practices the physical, visible process of remembering Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is surely helpful to believers. deSilva's fine book should be available to all who want to embody their beliefs. Penitence to praise enlivens every page. Yet beyond the obvious connections to life, it is important for Christians to renew both their examination of and excitement for their belief. deSilva might be pleased to know I ordered my first Book of Common Prayer. Even at fifty, it is not too late to begin a more ordered Sacramental Life. Mark Eckel is director of Mahseh Center ([...]) for retreat and study located on Lake Bruce, Indiana.

David deSilva has written a superb book that enables people to experience the spiritual treasures of the Book of Common Prayer. As someone from outside of the Anglican tradition (and deSilva himself is a United Methodist!), deSilva has helped me to discover how the BCP can be a further spiritual resource in my own devotional life and that of my family too. I found his series of devotions on baptism, eucharist, marriage, and burial to be biblically sound and spiritually uplifting. I heartily recommend it for anyone with a desire to grow in their knowledge and love of God and his church! Two thumbs up!!

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