

and enforcer priests as well. This concern with “churchiness” may be an enduring aspect of clericalism and is probably bound up with the narcissism that is characteristic of clericalism—focus on the self in its more superficial aspects.



Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Whether I am a priest or someone exercising ministry in the service of the church, do I find myself described in one or other of the categories proposed by Krasevac? How would I want to add to or negate some of the qualities? What other major categories would I want to identify?
2. Do people see a kind of "clericalism" in religious life as lived by both women and men? What forms does this "clericalism" take in religious life? How might we live differently if we religious were to be free of such a designation?

Conversations on Eucharist

The Eucharist in its entirety, inclusiveness, and universality is an integral engagement of the worshipping Body of Christ. It constitutes the singular act, par excellence, of the believing community. The lay people, priests, and religious of the Roman Catholic Church understand the Eucharist to be the source and summit of the spiritual life (LG §11, Catechism §1324). The Eucharist, and for many centuries the daily Eucharist, has provided aspirants to holiness with sustenance, moral instruction, corporate bonding, and strengthening of belief.

No Mass today?

On days when there is no Eucharistic celebration accessible, daily communicants might welcome, alone or with others, spiritual engagements that include some of these elements: word and act, thanks and praise, offering and communion. Should such days multiply, daily communicants may need to revisit the grounding of our spirituality.

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As we extrapolate current trends in priestly vocations and the growth of the people of God, we perhaps see a time when Eucharist as we know it today will not be readily accessible to much of the church. Some feel called upon to anticipate such an eventuality by reducing the frequency of their own participation in Eucharist. For some formation directors, that decision is extended to those whom they prepare for future service to the church. Others prefer to engage fully in what is currently available, trustful that either the trends will change or that they will be blessed with the strength to confront such challenges if and when they occur. Age will be a factor in deciding for oneself. Older men and women might see no need to alter a way of life that can safely carry them through their remaining years. Deciding for others calls for serious discernment.

No matter which strategy is chosen, we will do well to review the role of daily Eucharist in the spiritualities that have helped to shape our lives and those of our distant and more recent ancestors. Theologians, canonists, spiritual writers, and spiritual directors have much to contribute to a reexamination of theories and praxes of Eucharistic spiritualities.

Conversations on Eucharist, such as those referred to in what follows, could be useful starting points. For purposes of this article and from the perspective of a psychologist, I will offer some preliminary samplings of the interface of Eucharist and the ongoing processes of belonging and self-definition. Varying perspectives will suggest what might need to be considered before defining new paths to holiness.

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The Eucharist in the lives of daily communicants

Recently I have been inviting some daily communicants to engage in extended conversation about the place

of Eucharist in their lives. The questions I ask and my understanding of responses they evoke are surely conditioned by my experience as a religious and as a psychologist. What I recognize as themes of agency, identity, relationships, belonging, and development have deeper and richer meaning both for those who are speaking of their insights and for their listeners, who bring their own experiential and intellectual perspectives.

The selection of participants is by no means a random sample. Preliminary conversation has indicated that they have been daily communicants for a significant part of their lives and that they are comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings. Those who welcome the invitation need little prompting. They readily attest to the centrality of the Eucharist with respect to most of the other engagements of their day. They describe the Mass as bringing together the sacred and the mundane, the joys and the struggles, the fears and the hopes, the hurts and the healing that shape their day.

As the initial response concludes, I ask if any moments in the ritual have particular significance for them or bring together what they have just described. Some respond immediately, others pause and then report resistance to singling out any part of the entire experience.

One religious, responding to my probing on such aspects of special focus during the Mass, identified the moment of Communion and what he saw as the “all too brief time after Communion.” He went on to note that his ordained friends, on the other hand, tend to place the

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emphasis on the Consecration or the Invocation of the Spirit over the gifts.

I ask myself and others: Who are the protagonists in this sacred event? We begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. How is the Trinity experienced? Who is with me at Eucharist? Who else is present around the altar, in the pews, dispersed about the earth, or in the heavens? Who comes from afar, or from long ago? Who of my sisters and brothers, family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, acquaintances are especially present to me during the Mass? Whom do I make present with my thoughts, memories, and prayers? I understand that part of my role is to gather guests from the highways and the alleys. All are welcome. The Master seeks a full house for the sharing of the banquet.

Levels of belonging

Belonging, as an action and as a consequence of group engagement, contributes to the identification of both the individual and the group. Each member has a creative role in the formation of both the “I” and the “we.” Eucharist ritualizes and celebrates who we are as a people and who we are becoming.

Observers of human development chart stages of growth. Infancy, childhood, pubescence, adolescence, and young adulthood are seen as steps toward full maturity. So too in groups there are successive levels of belonging.¹ Members move from acceptance to participation, from participation to engagement, and eventually from engagement to proprietorship. Individuals understand themselves increasingly in terms of the group. Eucharist provides a forum for affirming membership. I have been accepted into the people of God. I am a Catholic. I do what Catholics do. I believe. My engagement in the lives

of my brothers and sisters in the church expresses the essence of who I am and who we are. We are the Body of Christ.

While there might be a sense in which we “make belief,” Pope Benedict XVI has urged caution:

Here I think it is very important to stress one essential point: no one believes purely on his own. We always believe in and with the church. The creed is always a shared act: it means letting ourselves be incorporated into a communion of progress, life, words, and thought.

. . . We must let ourselves fall, so to speak, into the communion of faith, of the church. Believing is in itself a Catholic act. It is participation in this great certainty, which is present in the church as a living subject.

. . . Day after day we must deepen our communion with the holy church and thus with the Word of God. . . . Only when we are united in the church do we belong to the church, do we become members of the church, do we live by the word of God which is the life-giving force of the church. And those who live by the word of God can only live it because it is alive and vital in the living church.²

Identity

Those schooled in scholastic philosophy might recall the struggles around the principle of individuation. Prime matter, the amorphous “substance” common to all being, affords no differentiation as such. Form (*anima*) serves to distinguish between levels of being, but is common to all members of the same stratum of being. To arrive at differentiation, attention is directed to the *haecceitas*, the “thisness” of a particular being. Form is imposed on the universal matter in the here and now (see Th.Aq., *De Veritate* 2.6-7). The action yields an individual being. What might also be attributed to the seemingly infinite possibilities of constellations of DNA is explained as deriv-



ing its uniqueness from the moment of incarnation. Word is made flesh and dwells among us. At some moment in time and in a particular place I am, we are.

A series of events earns me a name, a role, and a history. They bond me with clusters of other human beings, groups among whom I have an ever more distinct place as both individual and member. I belong to a family, a group of friends, of associates, a community, a country. I am an alumnus, a professional, a supporter of causes, a member of a party, or perhaps one of the group that shuns such memberships.

These group-forming events may be circumstantial or intentional. I do not choose my family. My first friends tend to be those in the immediate vicinity or at my school. Gradually I become more selective. I go away to a university. I choose a profession, opening new possibilities of bonding. I marry. I am ordained.

I join a religious congregation. Each choice helps to define me and also the others I include when using the first person plural. Participation in daily Eucharist confirms an aspect of self-definition and engages me in a process of ego extension.

Prayer in the first person plural

The Eucharistic ritual may be viewed as an exercise in gathering. Whoever is present joins with the priest and others “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Each successive “Amen” serves to expand and to confirm this bonding among those who

seek mercy, offer praise, listen to the word, and proclaim “Thanks be to God.” Together we express our belief in all that defines us individually and collectively as people of God. We ask God to hear *our* prayers. The celebrant invites us to ask that *our* sacrifice be acceptable. We lift up *our* hearts to the Lord. From the end of the offertory through the Eucharistic Prayer, the first person singular occurs only in the words of Jesus: This in *my* body, *my* blood. Do this in memory of *me*.

We unite in the Memorial Acclamation and begin to acclaim our larger sense of who stands with us in the presence of our God: our ancestors, saints, angels, all who have gone before us, our sisters and brothers, the church throughout the world. Together in the unity of the Holy Spirit we proclaim the great Amen. The Our Father makes repeated use of the first person plural.

The first person singular returns with the Communion. *I am not worthy*, but I will be healed so that I may join with the others in sharing the bread. The ritual concludes in the communal blessing, again in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and with a communal Amen.

In union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world

In the conversations on Eucharist, the daily participants often express the belief that what is happening in their local church or chapel is part of a larger, continuous gathering of the church throughout the world and throughout the ages. They refer to the Last Supper as the initiation of an event that is as much a present reality as it is the deposit of the faith of their ancestors. Several religious have noted that, while religious formation helped shape their understanding of Eucharist, they brought the practice from their families.

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They go on to indicate that the time of the Mass itself is not necessarily when they have the most powerful experience of the presence of the Lord. They speak of centering prayer, *lectio divina*, or moments in ministry or service as the source of a joy that they will later bring to the Eucharist.

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament

The preservation of the Eucharistic species for purposes of cult is minutely regulated by tradition and decree. Today's priesthood, the ordained and the nonordained participation of the laity, has reset the bounds of the sacred. Devotion takes new forms. The liturgy emphasizes the immolation of the sacrificial Victim and the communal consumption of the divine banquet. Our times are marked by fewer priests, fewer celebrations, multifunctional worship spaces, limited visiting hours—scarcity issues and vagrancy concerns.

Youth leaders attest that silent time before the Blessed Sacrament has a unique attraction for many of today's adolescents.

Ecumenical unease marks practices that others might not distinguish from idolatry or superstition.

And yet churches in retirement areas are reporting that the chapels of the Blessed Sacrament are centers of vibrant and steady worship. Youth leaders attest that silent time before the Blessed Sacrament has a unique attraction for many of today's adolescents. They willingly participate in quiet beholding.

Behold announces some of the more powerful moments of the Scriptures. Adam and Eve have such a moment, and it evokes fear. Jacob experiences the Lord poised over

him and marvels: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know" (Gn 28:17). Mary is shaken by the words of the annunciation and responds, inviting reflection on what she is experiencing. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Generations have waited to behold the Wonder Counselor, the Prince of Peace. John the Baptist identifies Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:35).

And years later a peasant is asked to explain a daily ritual. Coming home from work in the fields, he visits a chapel, slips into a pew, and simply sits for half an hour before the tabernacle. To what end? "I look at Him and He looks at me."

Perception

The beholder and the beheld enter into a moment of profound access to each other. Each delights in the other, the Creator and the created, the Redeemer and the redeemed, the Spirit and the confirmed. Past and future converge in an experience of the divine Presence.

Self-absorption? Me and Jesus? The communicants claim that the Eucharist makes it much more. There under the sign of bread are the lives of those, united in banquet and sacrifice, who do all in memory of the Lord: the priest called from among the people to articulate their hurts and hopes, one with them in uniting their daily lives to that of Jesus, believers and those helped in their unbelief, those commemorated, the living and the dead, a communion of the faithful. This is the Body of Christ, the people of God, the church. Here I am at once at home and in the world, with those I know and love, with those I do not know but seek to love. We forgive and are forgiven.

Agency

Conversations afford an insight into the perceived "agency" of the speaker.³ In describing my actions I



acknowledge aspects of my engagement that come from within. I choose to go, I seek out, I attend, I listen, I pray. I work past distractions, past reservations about the celebrant or my fellow congregants. Yes, I am an agent in the process. Those who accompany me are also agents. We chose to act together. The Lord is, in a similar sense, the principal agent of the Eucharist. Paul teaches that the Lord whose kingdom is among us and whose will is being done on earth and in heaven is transforming us as individuals and as a group. Scriptures reveal a God who is “forming a people particularly his own” (Tt 2:14). We profess that as we engage in Eucharist the Lord is doing great things among us.

In the last analysis my agency is simply one of consenting to what the Lord is doing to me, to us. Here a psychologist invites others to carry forward the conversation.

Choosing to stay the course—the joy of the journey

This brief summary of what I am hearing from a very small set of the faithful brings us back to the conclusion of the first recorded conversation on Eucharist. John had Jesus’ listeners requesting “Give us always this bread.” Jesus indicates that they do not fully understand what they are asking. “This is the bread that has come down from heaven; not as your fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever” (Jn 6:59).

Jesus challenges his listeners. Some depart. Others join Peter, a bit perplexed, but willing to stay the course: “To whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Jn 6:69-70). Peter does not always get it right. Paul calls him to task on the issue of who is invited to the feast (Ga 2:12).

A postresurrection conversation on the way to Emmaus moves two early disciples. They seek out the others and

share with burning hearts what happened along the way and in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:33). That conversation continues and needs to continue in our day.

Notes

¹ P.S. Moffett, “Promoting Agency among Children and Adolescents at the Margins” (Invited Address, American Psychological Association), *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 30 (1995).

² Discourse/speech of Pope Benedict XVI with the Clergy of Rome, 2 March 2006. See the Vatican web page.

³ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993); David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence: Isolation and Communion in Western Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).



Prayer

Lord, do you now therefore, speaking through my lips, pronounce over this earthly travail your twofold efficacious word: the word without which all that our wisdom and our experience have built up must totter and crumble—the word through which all our most far-reaching speculations and our encounter with the universe are come together into a unity. Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: this is my Blood.

Teilhard de Chardin, *The Mass on the World*
from *Hym of the Universe*, p. 23.