

The challenge of Eucharistic coherence

The word “crisis” is vastly overused today. But not when the issue is the reception of holy communion.

February 3, 2021 George Weigel The Dispatch 21

[Print](#)



A priest elevates the host during a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City in 2020. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope St. John Paul II invited Catholics to “rekindle” our sense of “**Eucharistic amazement**,” for “the Church draws her life from the Eucharist,” which “recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church” – Christ’s glorified, abiding presence with, in, and through his people, fulfilling his promise to remain with us “to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:20). In the Eucharist, the Church meets her Lord “with unique intensity.” Thus the celebration of the Eucharist is not just something the Church *does*; the celebration of the Eucharist singularly embodies what the Church *is*.

That profound sense of Eucharistic amazement is why the Latin American bishops, in their 2007 Aparecida Document, insisted on

“Eucharistic coherence” in their Catholic communities. And according to those bishops (whose number included the man who would become pope six years later), **the Church’s Eucharistic coherence required that holy communion not be distributed to those Catholics in politics and medical practice who were not in full communion with the Church because they were facilitating or participating in such grave moral evils as abortion and euthanasia.**

The question of Eucharistic coherence has been sharpened in America since the inauguration of a brother Catholic, Joseph R. Biden, Jr., as president of the United States. **Less than 48 hours after Mr. Biden took the presidential oath of office, the White House issued a statement celebrating the 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*,** the 1973 Supreme Court decision that summarily mandated today’s American abortion license – one of the most radical in the world. The White House statement also pledged that the administration would codify *Roe’s* abortion license in federal law. **What is the challenge to Eucharistic coherence here?**

From a Catholic moral perspective, *Roe v. Wade* was the worst Supreme Court decision since *Dred Scott v. Sanford* in 1857 – and for the same reason. As *Dred Scott* declared black people outside the community of legal protection, ***Roe* declared indisputably human beings, the unborn, beyond the boundaries of the law’s protection.** Both *Dred Scott* and *Roe* thus violated the bedrock Catholic social justice principle of the inalienable dignity of every human life; both decisions rested on the claim – biologically false and morally unsustainable – that the lives in question were not really human. **It is impossible to be a coherent Catholic and to affirm the degradation of human dignity that underwrites *Roe v. Wade*.**

And incoherent Catholics receiving holy communion make for a Eucharistically incoherent and thus evangelically diminished Church.

This incoherence is the sad by-product of many factors: inadequate catechesis and Catholic formation; theological dissent from settled Catholic convictions; vulgarized liturgy that undercuts the majesty of the Eucharist; a weakened sense of what it means to live in the “state of grace” and thus be worthy to receive holy communion; pressures to conform to distorted notions of empowering women; the failures of bishops to challenge those in their pastoral care to deeper conversion to Christ; lay Catholics’ failures to follow the Lord’s injunction in Matthew 18:15-16 and fraternally correct incoherent fellow-Catholics.

The word “crisis” is vastly overused today. But if Eucharistic incoherence in a Church that “draws her life from the Eucharist” isn’t a crisis, what is?

*If you value the news and views Catholic World Report provides, **please consider donating** to support our efforts. Your contribution will help us continue to make CWR available to all readers worldwide for free, without a subscription. Thank you for your generosity!*