

TRANSFORMING THE BODY OF CHRIST: IMAGINING ECCLESIOLOGY IN  
LIGHT OF INTRA-CHURCH VIOLENCE – SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: Transforming the Body of Christ: Imagining Ecclesiology in Light of  
Intra-Church Violence
- Convener: B. Kevin Brown, Gonzaga University  
Brianna Jacobs, Emmanuel College
- Moderator: Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Manhattan College
- Presenters: B. Kevin Brown, Gonzaga University  
Brianna Jacobs, Emmanuel College
- Respondent: Bradford Hinze, Fordham University

In his paper, “Resisting Ecclesial Violence: Transforming Ordered Relationality in the Catholic Tradition,” Kevin Brown addressed the structural violence revealed in the systemic cover-up of clergy sexual abuse and the theologies that enabled it. He identified clericalism—a bias maintaining that the ordained hold a more dominant and vital role in the church than the non-ordained—as the principal enabler of that cover-up. Brown argued that, if the church is going to resist the violent dynamics of clericalism, it must abandon theologies that suggest persons ordained to the ministerial priesthood undergo an ontological change. He maintained that the Johannine image of the church as the risen body of Jesus suggests both that any theology of ordained ministry holding that the person ordained undergoes an ontological change cannot represent an authentic development of the Gospel and that the church must confront its woundedness if it is going to live as the Body of Christ. Brown noted that theologies of relational ontological change offered by Richard Gaillardetz, Edward Hahnenberg, and Susan Wood represent important developments in Catholic theologies of ministry. However, their argument that an ontological change is still affected in ordination—albeit at a relational rather than substantial level—remains at risk of being coopted to suggest a superior status of the ordained. Therefore, he proposed speaking of ministry in terms of ordered evangelical relationality. This theology of ministry builds on the contributions of Gaillardetz, Hahnenberg, and Wood, but rejects the notion that any ontological change is affected by ordination. Instead it maintains that the friendship—a relationship that can only exist in situations of equality between persons—which Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection revealed to be typical of God’s triune life, ought to characterize Catholic understandings of ministry, even as ordered ministries are exercised through particular charismatic gifts of leadership and oversight.

In her paper, “Sacraments and Sexing the Church,” Brianna Jacobs explored how the sexed way we have constructed the church functions to produce and construct how we understand our bodies as sexed. Defining patriarchy as the production of an essentialist gender binary inscribed on bodies in order to create power for those deemed male, she maintained that the way the sacraments have been practiced produces this binary, in which men are men by exerting power and women are women by receiving it. To illustrate this, she demonstrated how the ecclesial image of the church as the Body of Christ has been tied to Aristotelian and homunculus theories of reproduction, suggesting that the “mystical union” of “One body” is formed as the male provides the logos to the female material, just as the head animates the body with spirit and reason.

*Selected Session: Transforming the Body of Christ*

Christ is the head and the husband as the one who gives us—the wife, the laity, the body—life. Jacobs argued that, in this line of thought, the consecration of the Eucharist, in which the priest functions as the active head, Christ, and the laity as the passive body, enacts not just the body of Christ; it enacts and divides masculinity and femininity, men and women. This theology creates masculinity and gives power to those who perform it. She argued that, until we deal with a theology that tells men that they image God as an inseminating and animating head to a passive body, we won't really be dealing with the heart of the sin of sexual abuse in the church or in society. Rather, Jacobs argued, the function of the Eucharist is to create a context in which we are not divided up and accounted for as powerful or receptive with sex. The Eucharist should create a church in which all bodies are loved and accepted as they are, across the biological spectrum of sex, and across the multitudes of ways in which we are fruitful. What is fundamental to the celebration of the Eucharist is not the power the priest exerts over the Eucharist, but the intimacy and recognition of sacredness in the bodies of all those at consecration. What made Christ able to communicate God's grace was not his ability to inseminate. To be Christ is to love intimately, understood as the thoroughgoing recognition of the sacredness, the *imago Dei*, of another's physical existence, another's body.

Bradford Hinze responded to the two papers. He first recognized the comparable methods and objectives of both papers and commended what he found to be clear and defensible methods leading to their respective critiques. Addressing Brown's paper, Hinze noted that he agreed with Brown's concern that theologies of relational ontological change risked being coopted to suggest a superior status of the ordained. But Hinze noted that Brown needed to "make more explicit certain hermeneutical justifications for apprehension and his search for a different approach, in terms of the plausible and likely receptions, history of effects, and retroductive warrants provided by such a relational ontology of priesthood." He pointed to Edward Schillebeeckx, Johann Baptist Metz, and Ignacio Ellacuria as resources in this area. Turning to Jacobs, Hinze suggested that Jacobs specify how she was using the word "function" when describing how certain theologies functioned to form the church and its practice and asked if it was analogous to Elizabeth Johnson's use of the word when she explores how religious symbols function to malform people. He also engaged Jacobs on her use of sources, asking whether Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, and their views on the power of discourse, are at work in her thinking. Additionally, he noted that Schillebeeckx's work on the table fellowship of Jesus might complement her argument as to how the Eucharist might make the church a community marked by intimacy.

Following the papers, Natalia Imperatori-Lee moderated a robust discussion among the participants that touched on questions of liturgical reform, Eucharistic theology, the meaning of intimacy, liturgical presidency, theologies of ordination and ministry, and theologies and discourses of power.

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