

THE EUCHARISTIC REVIVAL AND  
SOCIAL SALVATION – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: The Eucharistic Revival and Social Salvation  
 Convener: Brian P. Flanagan, New Ways Ministry  
 Moderator: Grace Agolia, Boston College  
 Presenters: Lucas Briola, Saint Vincent College  
 Brian P. Flanagan, New Ways Ministry  
 Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University

This session addressed the ongoing Eucharistic Revival in North America, leading to a spirited discussion of the actual or potential role of Eucharistic piety in relation to social salvation, and the particular presences and absences of Christ in the Eucharist proposed in the revival and other practices.

Lucas Briola's paper, entitled "Deepening the Eucharistic Revival, Deepening Social Salvation: Eucharistic Processions in Rural Communities," lifted up rural Eucharistic processions as a particularly rich locus for reflection on social salvation that includes care for creation. Briola first outlined three reasons for careful attention to these practices: the location of rural communities at the margins and peripheries of the church, where Pope Francis has directed our attention; the materiality, and particularly agricultural materiality, of rural life; and the embodied social and public character of processions as a form of Eucharistic piety. Briola drew upon the work William T. Cavanaugh on Eucharistic processions as actions in which Christ goes out from the church and returns to the church, and upon the motto of the Catholic Rural Life Conference in the United States, "Christ to the Country, the Country to Christ," in order to outline how these processions bring Christ out to the country, and then bring that rural country into deeper relationship with Christ. For the former, Briola argued that processions reveal and display the "doxological potential of all creation," showing the potential of all created reality, especially material rural ecologies, to become Eucharistic. Briola then explored how attention to rural material reality helps unveil the alienating and technocratic relation that characterize our food supply chains, suggesting that rural Eucharistic processions provide one way of contributing to an idea of social salvation that includes all of material creation.

In remarks entitled "The Eucharist, the Church, and Real Presence," Brian Flanagan investigated how the rhetoric, marketing materials, and proposed program of both the Indianapolis Eucharistic Revival and the associated National Eucharistic Pilgrimages constructed and revealed an understanding of the relationship between the fourfold Eucharistic presences of Christ taught by the Second Vatican Council, namely in the Eucharistic species, in the Word of God preached, in the presider, and in the assembly of the faithful. Rather than an initial assessment of the Eucharistic revival as only promoting the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species to the neglect of the other three presences, Flanagan's paper argued that the Revival instead more interestingly placed those presences in a hierarchy of relations to the Eucharistic species. If, as taught in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Christ is supremely present in the Eucharistic species, the imagery and rhetoric of the Eucharistic revival place the presence of Christ in the clergy next, followed by the presence of Christ in the gathered

assembly, and without more than cursory attention to the presence of Christ in the Word. Such an ordering, Flanagan suggested, leads towards a vision of the Eucharist as the particular responsibility and purview of the clergy in ways that reflect a pre-conciliar clericalist theology rooted in the sacrament of ordination rather than a theology of the people of God rooted in the sacrament of baptism.

Elyse Raby's presentation, "Contested Bodies: 'Gender Ideology' and the Eucharistic Revival," explored the connections between the Eucharistic revival and the condemnations by US bishops of so-called "gender ideology." She argued that attention to discussions of Eucharistic bodies and presences in relation to the revival parallel discussions of individual, sexed and gendered human bodies in revealing ways. Her paper first outlined the official USCCB understanding of Christ's Eucharistic presence in the Eucharistic species, particularly focusing on its nature as a "gift" of real presence to be welcomed or rejected. Next, drawing upon over forty policy statements about gender and sexuality issued by US dioceses in recent years, Raby noted the structurally similar recurring language of "gift" and response in discussions of sexual and gender identities and in the potential of bodies to express a deep interior reality. Analyzing these two rhetorical structures in tandem, she argued, suggests that US bishops' concerns about non-binary identity, trans identity, and any sorts of medical or social transitioning are not rooted only in theological anthropology, but are linked with the questions of gift and response, interiority and expression, at the heart of the bishops' Eucharistic theology. Raby then concluded with a constructive proposal rooted in the same recognition of the potentiality of bodies as gift and sacrament, but in a form that would allow for both a more nuanced theology attentive to the mysterious complexity of Eucharistic presence as well as a more nuanced theology of gendered and sexed embodiment open to the mysterious complexity of human bodies.

BRIAN P. FLANAGAN  
*New Ways Ministry*  
*Mt. Rainier, Maryland*