

## SPIRITUALITY

- Topic: The Experience of Eucharist as Consolation and Desolation  
Convener: Elizabeth E. Carr, Smith College  
Moderator: Brian O. McDermott, Weston Jesuit School of Theology  
Presenters: Arthur B. Chappell, Villanova University  
Robert Lassalle-Klein, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley  
Joan M. Nuth, John Carroll University

How do people experience the Eucharist in contemporary Roman Catholicism? Is the Eucharist for them an experience of consolation? Or of desolation? These questions undergirded the presentations of this session.

Chappell spoke of a symbolic dilemma in contemporary eucharistic worship which affects the young adult (18-35) generation. Theologians need to question how well eucharistic symbols and ritual speak to the experiences and thought world of this generation, who do not possess the same unique, collective paradigm of reality as those who knew the pre-Vatican II Church. Chappell outlined several characteristics of this generation, based upon sociological research on their values and religious consciousness. (1) They are prone to individualism, subjectivism, relativism and privatism in their attitude toward religion. (2) Yet they are engaged in a search for community, especially for adult role models able to teach and give testimony to Christian values. (3) This generation is characterized by religious illiteracy; they have neither the vocabulary nor the concepts to articulate what it means to be Roman Catholic. (4) They have a strong orientation to voluntary service, though they are unable to express the connection between service and Catholic identity, Eucharist or spirituality. The challenge for the pastors and teachers of young people is to guide them into translating primary eucharistic symbols into something more relevant to their experience.

Lassalle-Klein attempted to establish the claim of the historical reality of the crucified people of El Salvador on the theology, spirituality and ethics done in the United States. He recounted the horrific story of the village of El Mozote, where more than 200 people, many of them children, were deliberately and systematically executed by the Atlacatl Battalion with American M-16 rifles, firing ammunition manufactured at Lake City, Missouri. Following Ellacuria and Sobrino, Lassalle-Klein identified these crucified people, and many others like them, as the "symbol par excellence of the historical reality of the Kingdom of God." As such, he asked how they affect what we in North America understand by and experience as eucharist.

Nuth distributed the results of a survey conducted in the Cleveland diocese exploring Roman Catholic women's experience of Eucharist. Survey questions elicited the meaning of Eucharist for these women, aspects of their experience that were beneficial or unbeneficial, whether or not they thought their being a woman affected their experience significantly, and suggestions for changes that would make their experience more fruitful. Despite some emotion-filled descriptions of experiences of desolation over various aspects of their eucharistic experience, few women described their experience as fundamentally meaningless or negative. In fact, for a large number of women, the Eucharist is a special experience of union with God/Christ which gives them direction and strength for life. The women's descriptions of these experiences correspond roughly to Ignatius' descriptions of consolation as peace in God's presence and a strengthening of faith, hope and love for living the Christian life.

A lively conversation ensued, much of it concerned with how to revitalize eucharistic symbols for the young adult generation. What part do cultural factors as well as age play in people's experience of Eucharist? Why are today's young people interested in voluntary service? How can we as educators tap into this interest and connect it to eucharistic worship? Perhaps evoking story, giving them heroes they can admire and relate to, is a way to make the connection. We cannot be like them, nor they like us. Perhaps we need to be true to who we are, allowing them to catch our enthusiasm for what we love, and trust that they will translate that into their own ways of growing in grace.

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