

LITURGY/SACRAMENTS—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Liturgy and the *Sensus Fidelium*  
Convener: Jonathan Tan, Case Western Reserve University  
Moderator: Katharine Harmon, Marian University  
Presenters: David Stosur, Cardinal Stritch University  
Bruce Morrill, S.J., Vanderbilt University  
Kimberly Belcher, University of Notre Dame

In his paper, “Let the Church Say ‘Amen’: Liturgical Participation and the *Sensus Fidelium*,” David Stosur explores the extent to which the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 14) may be considered an act of the *sensus fidelium*. He compares and contrasts liturgical participation, which typically comprises individuals acting in a collective and communal manner with *sensus fidelium*, which operates on the universal level. He notes that much of liturgical participation is at the level of tacit interaction. Responding to these challenges, Stosur discusses the possibilities and limitations of considering liturgical participation as an act of the *sensus fidelium* using the analogy of “prefiguration” (the first of three mimetic movements—prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—in Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory).

In his paper entitled “Rethinking with the Faithful the Symbol of Sacramental Participation,” Bruce Morrill highlights the increasing number of “non-participating” or “done” Catholics and wonders whether the active presence and participation of all is a naive idealization that is out of step with the current trend that points to an increasing number of the faithful no longer putting a priority to be bodily present and participating together in the church’s liturgies. Is active participation an unsustainable ideal that has given way to the reality of liturgical participation by a small but faithful remnant in the face of “non-participating” or “done” Catholics? How do those who occasionally show up typically at Easter and Christmas perceive their participation in liturgical celebration? Has Pope Benedict XVI’s agenda for a small but fervent church body, meticulous in liturgical execution and individual piety, encouraged a *sensus fidelium* that the work of the liturgical rites can adequately, or even perhaps worthily, be carried out by only the few? Does—or can—such a *sensus fidelium* of the celebration of the sacraments by the few bear any conviction about the benefit to the many?

Kimberly Belcher’s paper, “Ritual Practice and the Real Presence: College Students and Eucharistic Adoration” examines the ritual practices of college-aged women and their articulation of beliefs about eucharistic presence, spiritual identity, and ecclesial belonging in the light of those practices. In interviews conducted with college women and men, she focuses on the manner in which young lay women have chosen to express their relationship to Christ and the Eucharist through weekly private adorations. Unlike the Eucharist, the ritual practices of private eucharistic adoration are self-directed and young people often freely ritualize complex understandings of self, Christ, and church. She unpacks the relationship between private prayer and participation in the mass, the motivations for choosing eucharistic adoration, and the possibility for ecumenical reception within this small, passionate group of young laypeople.

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In the conversation that followed, John Baldovin makes the point that, fifty years ago, “hell emptied out.” Unfortunately, *Sacrosanctum concilium* failed to substitute a compelling reason for the faithful to come to church to participate actively in the liturgy. Daniel Sheridan highlights the rise of devotional practices such as eucharistic adoration in the diocese of Portland, ME that has been hard hit by parish closures and declining clergy numbers. Others wondered about the implications arising from the shift away from public witnessing in the liturgy in favor of an emphasis on personal intimacy with Jesus in eucharistic adoration. There appears to be a broad consensus that the liturgy does not, and cannot do it all. A number of factors, e.g., revisions to the missal, the quality of preaching, socio-cultural upheavals, moments of personal crisis, impact on whether a person chooses to participate in the liturgy.

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