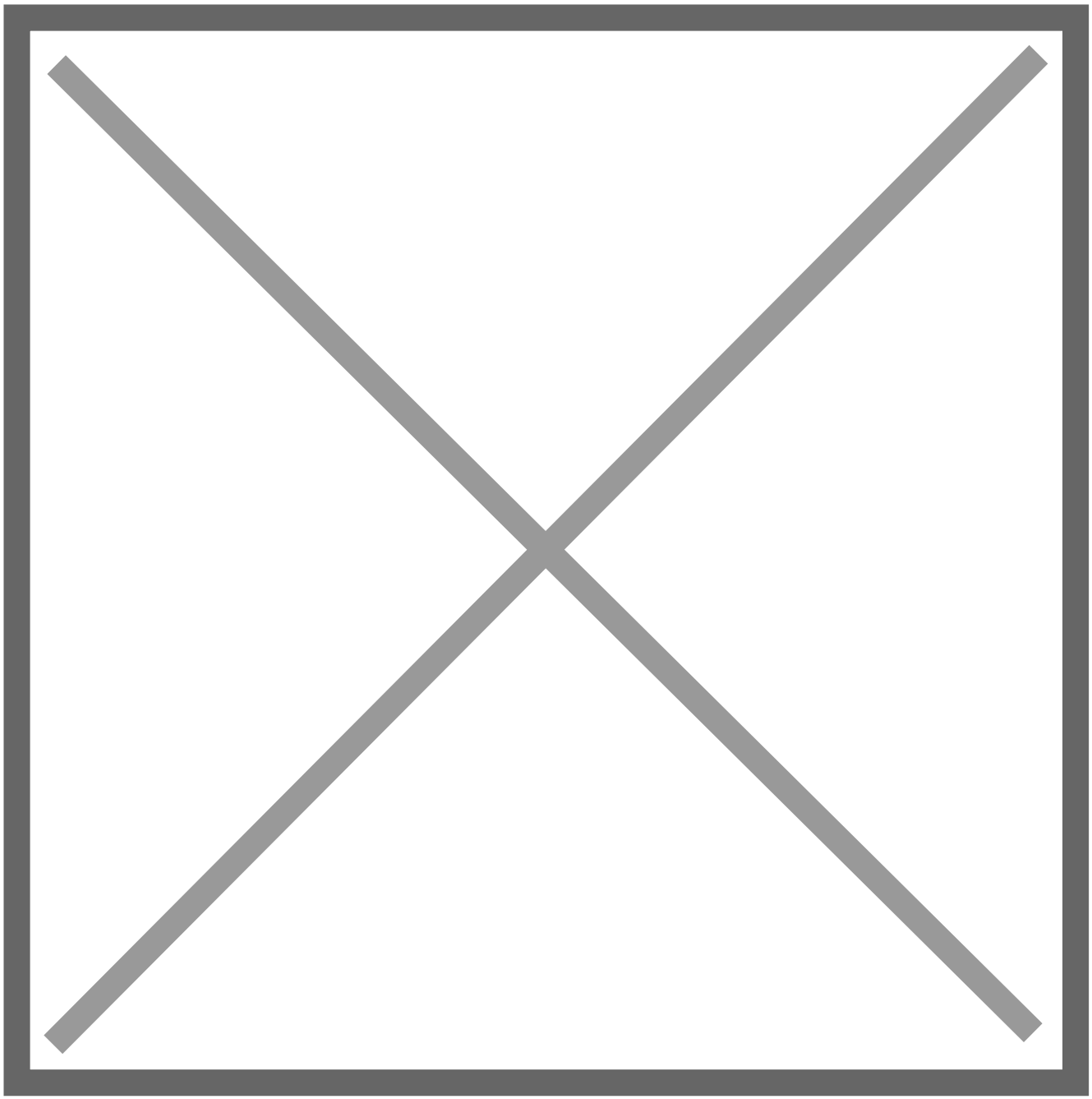
Opinion



(CNS/Bob Roller)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Last month, bishops around the country met by region to discuss the proposed document on the Eucharist, which in June they authorized the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine to generate. Those pushing for such a document want it voted on at the USCCB's November plenary session in Baltimore.

The regional meetings were not open to the public, but it seems there was disappointment and frustration. Some bishops wondered why they still had only an outline to consider, and not a completed text. Others said the outline was deficient, leaning heavily on Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, but strangely leaving out important parts of that text. One bishop wondered why they are even writing a new document when all that needs to be said was said there and said so recently. Others said the only consensus was that they needed to find an offramp from this misbegotten proposal that began as an attack on President Joe Biden and morphed into a proposed document that no one thinks is actually needed.

Pope Francis addressed the issue without naming names during his Sept. 15 press conference on the plane back from Slovakia. "No, I have never denied the Eucharist to anyone, to anyone!" he said, when asked about denying Communion to pro-choice politicians. "I don't know if someone came to me under these conditions, but I have never refused them the Eucharist, since the time I was a priest."

Alas, even this obvious nudge from the vicar of Christ might not be enough to convince the culture warriors among the U.S. bishops to stop their campaign against Biden.

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It did not go unnoticed that while the bishops were holding their various regional meetings, the lectionary of the universal church gave us Jesus' exquisite "bread of life" discourse from the Gospel according to St. John on three successive Sundays (with an interruption for the Solemnity of the Assumption and the proclamation of the Magnificat from Luke's Gospel). If the bishops think their document on the Eucharist can improve on Jesus' bread of life discourse, they are wrong. I don't think they will improve on Pope Benedict's work either.

Chicago's Cardinal Blase Cupich took to the pages of Commonweal to propose that instead of a document, the bishops should plan a eucharistic revival. He identified five themes that would meet "the pastoral, catechetical, and formational challenges" of the church in the United States: "the imperative to worship; the necessity of the Eucharist; the Eucharist as call to participation; the Eucharist as model of self-giving; the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Lord's abiding presence."

All five themes are important, but the first and the last warrant a bit of additional comment.

Cupich cites the Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, who said, in effect, that "if we don't worship God, we will worship something else, and perhaps, tragically, we will worship ourselves." Is there a more apt description of the most damaging spiritual malady of our time than self-worship?

Cupich writes, "In a self-referential age plagued by all kinds of addictions and a (not unrelated) thick culture of consumerism, our worship can easily steer us away from God. The ever-present danger in this moment is idolatry."

Perhaps it was a coincidence, but Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, tweeted a few days before Cupich's article was published: "Garrigou-Lagrange said somewhere that Jesus was the only one who could speak of his own humility without losing it. That's always struck me as sublimely true.' Indeed. The obligation to worship is also a tonic against pride and hubris, or it should be.

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The obligation to attend Sunday Mass is just that, an obligation, and our culture is reluctant to recall that the Latin root of the word religion means "to bind." We are bound to God and, because bound to him, we are also bound to one another. The equation works in reverse: We are bound to each other, and because we are so bound, we are also bound to our common Father. Either way, that obligation should not be ignored lightly. It is more important than brunch.

The last theme Cupich suggests, the Eucharist as sacrament of the Lord's abiding presence, is also worth drilling down on. A study by Cigna identified an "epidemic" of loneliness, with three of five Americans reporting feeling lonely. There are few things sadder than being at a pub or tavern and seeing a table of four or five young people, each busy with their iPhones and not speaking with one another, not attending to the facial expressions and body language of their friends.

Cupich writes:

> Eucharistic adoration is a legitimate development of piety in the Western Church with many benefits for those who engage in it. Adoration highlights the abiding presence of the Lord in his sacrament. And with that sense of presence, we also grasp his availability to us.

Again, our relationship to one another, our sense of human solidarity, is linked to our relationship to God, both relationships changed forever by the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord that is recreated at each Eucharist.

A focus on Jesus' presence in the life of the church also serves to overcome the polarization that afflicts this country. We liberals need to be reminded sometimes that not everything is pliable, that the sacramental imagination cannot be replaced by sociology or psychology, that some things subsist in the life of the church, from Jesus' last meal in the upper room to the final Mass celebrated before the eschaton, after which, as the hymn says, sacraments shall cease. Conservatives need to be reminded that Christ is alive here and now, that his spirit inspires us no less than it did our forebears.

Revivals are about as American as apple pie. There is a small monument in Enfield, Connecticut, a little less than an hour from where I live, commemorating the sermon

preached there by Jonathan Edwards on July 8, 1741, "Sinners in the Hands of an angry God," which is generally regarded as the start of the Great Awakening. The history of both the 18th and 19th centuries in this country are impossible to examine without a lot of attention to these revivals, the habits of prayer and thought they aroused, the strange mix of community and individualism at the heart of evangelicalism.

You know what else is as American as apple pie? Immigration. And the immigrant Catholic communities bring a variety of eucharistic devotions with them, all of which can help the rest of us reawaken our souls to the centrality of the sacrament in the life of the church and in our own spiritual life.

There are no ideological barriers to this idea. Some conservative Catholics might prefer 40 hours devotions while some liberal Catholics might prefer a lecture series on sacramental theology. The point is that a revival is a wake-up call, a reminder of what is most essential, a genuinely prophetic act, calling us to become our truest selves, children of the living God and followers of his risen son.

Finally, if the bishops were to embrace the idea of a eucharistic revival, it would give them the off-ramp they are seeking from this horrible idea of crafting a statement that would be redundant at best and obnoxious at worst. They, too, might benefit from the promptings toward unity a eucharistic revival invites.