Image: Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend (left), chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Doctrine, and Bishop Andrew Cozzens of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, chairman of the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis (YouTube screenshots).

During their semi-annual meeting held earlier this month online (June 16-18, 2021), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) discussed a total of ten "action items", among which we find the following on the official agenda: "Does the body of bishops approve the request of the Committee on Doctrine to proceed with the drafting of a formal statement on the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church?"

Bishop Kevin Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, current chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Doctrine, explained the larger context in these terms:

> "Last November, this conference passed its 2021-2024 Strategic Plan entitled, 'Created Anew by the Body and Blood of Christ, Source of Our Healing and Hope'. In the year preceding the adoption of the plan, the Doctrine Committee, like other committees, wholeheartedly endorsed the national focus on the Eucharist. As pastors, we have been concerned for some time about the downward national trend in weekly Mass attendance and a proven decline in belief in the Real Presence [of Christ in the Eucharist] among our Catholic faithful."[1]

He went on to mention "the pandemic" and related parish lockdowns, expressing concern that "the faithful's absence from parish life may have resulted in a loss of what it means to be a Eucharistic people. We worry that many of our faithful may, in fact, not return to the Eucharistic celebration." (After more than a year of many parishes being more or less closed, and access to the Sacraments either denied or restricted, the bishops' fears are well founded.)

Regarding the staggering loss of faith in the Real Presence among many Catholics in recent decades,[2] Bishop Rhoades observed:

> "In a pluralistic environment, where there are so many competing and conflicting ideas and opinions, the truth about the Eucharist can get lost. We have seen the national surveys indicating that many Catholics understand the Eucharist to be only a symbol. The need, therefore, for a unified and strong revival of the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and in the lives of each one of

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her members, is more critical now than ever."

His Excellency thus explained that the Doctrine Committee's goal is to produce a document — "a national statement" first suggested by current USCCB president Archbishop José Gómez, as Bishop Rhoades noted — which expresses "the rich theological and pastoral doctrine on the Eucharist, so that it might provide the theological framework for our Strategic Plan."

Controversy Around "Eucharistic Consistency"

The controversy surrounding this proposed document, the drafting of which a majority of U.S. bishops voted to approve,[3] revolves around a "subsection" that "would address Eucharistic consistency" — a natural and necessary part of the document's third and final section, Bishop Rhoades explained, which will emphasize "how participation in the Eucharist compels us to conversion and sends us out to be missionary disciples."

"There was a consensus among the members of the Committee on Doctrine," Bishop Rhoades related, "that one cannot discuss the centrality of the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life without addressing those actions that inflict damage to the honor due the Sacrament or cause scandal to the faithful." While His Excellency noted that the committee considered "formulating a national policy on worthiness to receive Holy Communion, as set forth in canon 915 and canon 916 of the Code of Canon Law," he was quick to assure his fellow bishops, "It was never our thought to propose national norms for denying Catholics Holy Communion, but to present a clear understanding of why the Church has these laws, outlining the rich tradition and profound teaching that is the basis for those canons."

(This strikes me as reminiscent of Pope John XXIII's opening address at Vatican II, during which he spoke about using "the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity," as well as his opinion that the Church "meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.")

"In addition," Bishop Rhoades said, "the proposed statement was never considered by the Committee on Doctrine to be a statement about any one individual, or about any one category of sinful behavior; rather, it would bring heightened awareness among the faithful of the need to be conformed to the Eucharist and to bear public witness to the Faith through a call to conversion and the abandonment of sinful behavior" — an obvious disclaimer harkening back to prior individual statements of certain bishops (e.g., Cardinal Raymond Burke; Archbishops Joseph Naumann, Samuel Aquila, Salvatore Cordileone — see here)

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about President Joe Biden and other 'Catholic' politicians who openly flout basic precepts of divine and natural law yet still present themselves for Holy Communion.

Strategic Plan for "Eucharistic Revival"

The day after Bishop Rhoades spoke about the Doctrine Committee's plans for a formal statement, His Excellency Andrew Cozzens, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and current chairman of the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, outlined the much larger Strategic Plan mentioned by Bishop Rhoades — the one devoted to igniting a "Eucharistic revival," a phrase used by Bishop Cozzens several times during his prepared remarks.[4]

The goal, according to Bishop Cozzens, is to "renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist." After reiterating the fact that so few Catholics still believe in the Real Presence,[5] as well as "the yet unknown impact of COVID-19 on church attendance," Bishop Cozzens went on to emphasize "many positive reasons" for pursuing the USCCB's Strategic Plan:

> "For more than two hundred years, the Church has seen the need to rekindle the love of our people for the unspeakable gift of the Eucharist through her Eucharistic Congresses. … Here's the main reason we need this revival: Right now, the Church in the United States needs the healing and the unity that can flow from rekindling our love for the Eucharist. We need to rekindle the love of our people so they can become missionaries and reach out to the margins, as we're called to do by *Fratelli Tutti* [Pope Francis' 2020 Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship]."

(I wonder if Bishop Cozzens has read Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's commentary on *Fratelli Tutti*, or Bishop Athanasius Schneider's thoughts on that document. If not, he should.)

As Bishop Cozzens outlined during his presentation, the USCCB's Strategic Plan for "Eucharistic revival" rests on five "strategic pillars," which were formulated after extensive consultation with various leaders and groups around the country:

1. "Foster encounters with Jesus through kerygmatic proclamation and experiences of Eucharistic devotion.
2. Contemplate and proclaim the doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

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through the truth of our teaching, Beauty of our worship, and Goodness of a life of service.
3. Empower grassroots creativity by partnering with movements, apostolates, educational institutions, and parishes.
4. Reach the smallest unit: parish small groups and families.
5. Embrace and learn from the various rich intercultural Eucharistic traditions."

Additionally, the "revival" is divided into three distinct phases (similar to the upcoming Vatican "Synod on Synodality"): "Diocesan Revival" (2022-2023), "Parish Revival" (2023-2024), and "National Event & Missionary Sending" (2024-2025).

Bishop Cozzens described the agenda for Phase Two, the "Parish Revival" phase, as follows:

> "The second year, the goal will be to reach down to every parish that wants to participate. We'll provide online trainings for small group leaders, free catechetical resources for all ages and stages of faith. We'll help them animate teaching Masses, grow Adoration and Reconciliation, and Corpus Christi celebrations. We can train Eucharistic missionaries in every parish online, parish lay leaders who could help to organize and carry out the revival at the parish level, and they can be sent forth to evangelize those in need."

(What does it mean to "animate teaching Masses"? Are "parish lay leaders" going to be providing commentary during Mass? Also, why is the parish *priest* not mentioned as having an integral role to play? Or will he simply be managing "small group leaders"?)

Three Practical Suggestions

As a Catholic husband and father who grew up amidst the wreckage of the failed Conciliar experiment, I certainly agree that the Church in the United States and around the world desperately needs a "Eucharistic revival". In his call for a Eucharistic Crusade of Reparation last July, Bishop Athanasius Schneider rightly observed:

> "There has never been in the history of the Church a time, where the Sacrament of the Eucharist has been abused and outraged to such an alarming and grievous extent as in the past five decades, especially since the official introduction and Papal approval in 1969 of the practice of Communion in the hand. These abuses are aggravated, furthermore, by the widespread practice in many countries of

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> faithful who, not having received the Sacrament of Penance for many years, nevertheless regularly receive Holy Communion. The height of the abuses of the Holy Eucharist is seen in the admittance to Holy Communion of couples who are living in a public and objective state of adultery, violating thereby their indissoluble valid sacramental marriage bonds, as in the case of the so-called 'divorced and remarried', such admittance being in some regions officially legalized by specific norms, and, in the case of the Buenos Aires region in Argentina, norms even approved by the Pope."

If the bishops are serious about reviving Eucharistic faith and devotion among Catholics, they need to start thinking less like corporate managers and more like the Saints. Specifically, I would offer three practical suggestions to help clear away the Conciliar wreckage and start rebuilding:

First, every bishop and priest should be teaching the faithful about Eucharistic miracles — instances throughout history when Our Lord has removed the accidents (sense-perceptible qualities) of bread and wine following the Consecration and allowed His living Flesh and Blood to be visible. On several occasions, Our Lord has wrought this wonder specifically in response to doubts about transubstantiation and His Real Presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Take, for example, the first known instance in Church history, the Miracle of Lanciano (see here and here), which occurred in the eighth century and persists to this day.

In her classic book *Eucharistic Miracles*, Joan Carroll Cruz describes the circumstances that preceded the miracle:

> "In about the 700th year of Our Lord [NB: some sources specify A.D. 750], in a monastery then named for St. Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierced the side of Christ with a lance, a priest-monk of the Order of St. Basil was celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to the Latin Rite. Although his name is unknown, it is reported in an ancient document that he was '… versed in the sciences of the world, but ignorant in that of God.' Having suffered from recurring doubts regarding transubstantiation (the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ), he had just spoken the solemn words of Consecration when the host was suddenly changed into a circle of flesh, and the wine was transformed into visible blood."[6]

In this writer's humble opinion, the key is to explain that Our Lord's Body and Blood would

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be visibly manifest *at every Mass*, except for the fact that He hides His natural appearances under the appearances of bread and wine for our benefit. In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas:

> "It is evident to sense that all the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration. And this is reasonably done by Divine providence. First of all, because it is not customary, but horrible, for men to eat human flesh, and to drink blood. And therefore, Christ's Flesh and Blood are set before us to be partaken of under the species of those things which are the more commonly used by men, namely, bread and wine. Secondly, lest this sacrament might be derided by unbelievers, if we were to eat Our Lord under His own species. Thirdly, that while we receive Our Lord's Body and Blood invisibly, this may redound to the merit of faith."[7]

Second, bishops and priests must be fostering devotion to Our Lady among themselves and the souls entrusted to their care. No human person has ever loved, or ever will love, Our Lord more than His Immaculate Mother. Thus, if we want to grow in love of Him truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, we must turn to Our Lady.

Fr. Stefano Manelli, co-founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate (FI), observes in his marvelous devotional book *Jesus, Our Eucharistic Love*:

> "The Eucharist is the Bread of the Mother of God, our Mother. It is Bread made by Mary from the flour of her immaculate flesh, kneaded with her virginal milk. St. Augustine wrote: 'Jesus took His Flesh from the flesh of Mary.'
>
> We know, too, that in the Eucharist, together with the Divinity, are the entire Body and Blood of Jesus taken from the body and blood of the Blessed Virgin. Therefore, at every Holy Communion we receive, it would be quite correct, and a very beautiful thing, to take notice of our holy Mother's sweet and mysterious presence, inseparably and totally united with Jesus in the Host. Jesus is ever her adored Son. He is Flesh of her flesh and Blood of her blood. … Therefore, it will never be possible to separate Jesus from Mary."[8]

Third, bishops and priests must act as true fathers and put a stop to "the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference"[9] present in their respective households (i.e., dioceses and parishes). This is not so much a "suggestion" as it is an *urgent appeal* to end the abuses that

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have been taking place on their watch for decades and continue unabated. No more Communion in the hand. No more lay "Eucharistic ministers". No more toleration of treating the Holy of holies — "our Incarnate God," to quote Bishop Schneider[10] — with such shocking indifference.

This necessarily includes crystal-clear instruction on the conditions for the worthy reception of Holy Communion — conditions which apply to *every* Catholic, *without exception*.

While I applaud the USCCB Doctrine Committee for considering "formulating a national policy on worthiness to receive Holy Communion," as Bishop Rhoades mentioned, sadly Bishop Rhoades himself failed to give a clear answer when a journalist asked him if "voting for abortion services" constitutes "mortal sin" (June 17, 2021). Here is how he responded:

> "That whole issue, I mean, we're not getting into the whole– we've already taught on that issue in *Faithful Citizenship*. So, all that, that's kind of taking us away from what our focus here is. The [USCCB] document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*[11] talks about the responsibilities of Catholics when it comes to voting. That's kind of, I think, a separate issue from what we're talking about when we're talking about the Eucharist, so we're not getting into, um, you know, um– yeah, we're not getting into voting and its relationship to the Eucharist. That's not what we're doing."[12]

Really? Then how in the world are bishops going to enforce "canon 915 and canon 916 of the Code of Canon Law," which Bishop Rhoades himself mentioned in the context of "formulating a national policy on worthiness to receive Holy Communion"? This kind of cowering before the media has to stop. And in regard to public officials, every Catholic bishop needs to heed the following exhortation of St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), who served for a time as Patriarch of Constantinople (capital of the Byzantine Empire):

> "There is no small punishment for you [i.e., bishops and priests], if being conscious of any wickedness in any man, you allow him to partake of this table. 'His blood shall be required at your hands.' [Ezek. 33:8] Though any one be a general, though a deputy, though it be he himself who is invested with the diadem [i.e., the emperor], and come unworthily, forbid him; the authority you have is greater than his. … Fear God, not man. If you should fear man, you will be laughed to scorn even by him, but if God, you will be an object of respect even to men."[13]

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In short, the bishops need to admit the obvious — namely, "the failure of the Council and even more so of its liturgy," as Archbishop Viganò recently told Abbé Claude Barthe — and return to Tradition.

Conclusion

To end on a positive note, I will close with quote from Bishop Joseph Strickland, one of the leading lights among the American bishops, who said during the general assembly proceedings (June 17, 2021):

> "I speak in support of the drafting of a formal statement on the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. I urge that this document must make the clear connection between the Sacrament of Confession and receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We must all strive to repent of our sins and grow in virtue in order to rightly receive Our Lord. I further urge that we work to develop a culture of Eucharistic Revival immediately, we can't wait for a document. Refocusing on this greatest gift of our Catholic faith is essential to renewal of every aspect of the Church. We must focus on Our Lord Who is truly present in every tabernacle and at every Holy Mass."

Interestingly, Bishop Strickland (b. 1958) offered his first Traditional Latin Mass on the Feast of Corpus Christi last year (June 11, 2020). In an interview afterwards, he said, "Praying before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament drew me to this rite. I find my spiritual life has skyrocketed since I became a bishop [in late 2012] and especially as I have centered my focus on our Eucharistic Lord. … What I experienced was that this rite focuses so much on Him."

Let us pray that more of his brother bishops receive similar graces and expand (rather than restrict) access to the Traditional Mass — an indispensable condition for any authentic "Eucharistic revival".

UPDATE: *Matt Gaspers discussed the contents of this article today with Timothy Flanders of The Meaning of Catholic:*

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[1] USCCB, "Virtual Plenary Assembly Day 2 Part 2," YouTube, time stamp 28:30 and following.

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[2] Most recently, Pew Research Center published their findings about U.S. adult Catholics and belief in transubstantiation in Aug. 2019.

[3] USCCB, "Virtual Plenary Assembly Day 3," YouTube, time stamp 5:16 and following.

[4] USCCB, "Virtual Plenary Assembly Day 3," YouTube, time stamp 7:18 and following.

[5] See note 2 above.

[6] Joan Carroll Cruz, *Eucharistic Miracles* (TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1987), p. 3.

[7] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae III, q. 75*, a. 5.

[8] Fr. Stefano M. Manelli, FI, *Jesus, Our Eucharistic Love* (Academy of the Immaculate, 1996), p. 106.

[9] Excerpt from the Eucharistic prayer of reparation taught by the Angel of Peace to the three Fatima seers. Quoted in *Fatima In Lucia's Own Words* Vol. I (ed. Fr. Louis Kondor, SVD), 20th edition (May 2016), p. 78. Full prayer quoted here.

[10] Bishop Athanasius Schneider and Diane Montagna, *Christus Vincit: Christ's Triumph Over the Darkness of the Age* (Angelico Press, 2019), p. 219.

[11] USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*, originally approved for publication during the bishops' Nov. 2015 general assembly.

[12] For the full context of the exchange between NBC's Anne Thompson and Bishop Rhoades, see USCCB, "Day 2 Press Conference," YouTube, time stamp 24:20 and following. Prior to the question about voting, Bishop Rhoades did clearly state that "[t]hose in a state of mortal sin are not allowed to go to Holy Communion, unless they've repented and gone to Confession first."

[13] St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 82 on Matthew*, 6.

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