

How can the Church tackle the problem of educating Catholics on the Eucharist?



They are missing the forest because they see only the trees. This old saying much applies [to the news media](#), and to many Catholics, even many Americans who are not Catholics, when they discuss the current discussion among the bishops regarding the Eucharist.

The tree is the question of what to do about political figures who profess to be Catholics but support abortion on demand. The forest is the seemingly widespread confusion among [Catholics regarding the Eucharist](#).

Back in the day, the old catechisms taught that the consecrated Eucharist was “the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.” This principle was utterly fundamental to being a Catholic. Now, popular-opinion studies (and no reason exists to deny their findings) say that, by startlingly high numbers, many American Catholics do not hold this ancient belief, or they are imprecise as to what it means.

Politicians come and go. This broader problem – the forest, not just one tree – is the issue. When a large bloc of Catholics does not believe in the Real Presence, as the reality of Christ in the Eucharist is called, not just bishops or priests, but every Catholic should stop to think.

More studies are needed. Just knowing the problem, the absence of belief in the Eucharist among many, alerts us to the issue, but how to fix it?

Is a special age group particularly a concern? Are Catholics, as they mature, as they are affected, and victimized, by the

prevailing culture, and as they hear conflicting ideas about religion, more a problem? Quite possibly.

Are young Catholic adults or adolescents, newcomers to independent thinking, a problem?

What about current Catholic education? This is a fact. The Catholic school system is a shadow of its former self. In 1960, probably 80% of Catholic children were enrolled in Catholic schools. That day is gone. The quite apparent trend is to close, not open, Catholic schools.

Has Catholic religious education, outside the schools, picked up the baton and run with it? Do parishes and dioceses apply sufficient resources to programs? Are instructors truly prepared academically? These are good questions, and they must be answered.

My early priesthood was devoted to religious education for youth who were not in Catholic schools. The job could be frustrating. It was not as if pastors were indifferent or hostile to programs and withheld financial support, but there was no blood to squeeze out of the turnip.

Parents let other priorities get in the way. In one parish, most of the youth attended the local public high school. A Catholic high school was available, but attending it cost a pretty penny.

The public high school scheduled football and then basketball practice at the same hour as the parish religious education classes. Guess what won the students' hearts? The parish changed its schedule. No one dreamed of demanding that the coaches make changes.

At best, attendance was hit and miss. Parents wanted children to receive first holy Communion, and to a lesser extent be confirmed, but then enthusiasm waned.

It is not all about educational programs. Western culture is briskly stepping into this pattern. Organized religion is not that important. "It is about me and God. I am spiritual, but I do not go to church." This is heard every day and everywhere.

With this assertion goes away any trust in an institution to declare anything, like the Church's doctrine that the Eucharist is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ.

Questioning widens. After doubt, dismissing moral teachings follows. "Who can tell me cohabitation before marriage or racist judgments are wrong?" The last step, all too often, is denying arguments for any almighty, eternal being. Not attending church, people lose access to information and inspiration. The cycle spins.

Catholics are battling with this flight from traditional religion, as are all other denominations.

How do these factors affect doctrines such as the Eucharist?

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