



Separate Challenges

The bishops, the Eucharist, and abortion

Peter Steinfels

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Peter Steinfels writes that “Catholics do not need a document on the Eucharist. We need a pastoral strategy on the Eucharist.” Do you agree? What should that pastoral strategy look like? How should the Church signal that the Eucharist is an ecclesial, communal reality?

2. What constitutes a “Eucharistic culture”? How have parishes and communities you’ve belonged to fallen short of it? How have they successfully embodied it through worship, ministries, social programs, advocacy, or daily accompaniment?

3. What pro-choice perspectives should the bishops take into account in drafting a guiding document about abortion? How should they address ordinary Americans’ “profound ambivalence” on the subject? How can more women’s voices be included in these discussions?

4. Steinfels poses three questions regarding abortion: What should the Church do within its own ranks? What should the Church ask of public policy? What should the Church seek by way of legal prohibition? Do your answers to these questions differ from each other? If so, why? Would a Church that advances “large, generous, and positive proposals to support the needs of mothers” have a more convincing pro-life message?

5. Should Catholic politicians who support legalized abortion be allowed to receive the Eucharist? How is your answer to this question influenced by your understanding of the primary meaning of the Eucharist?

6. Do you agree with Steinfels’s premise that the Eucharist and abortion are separate issues requiring separate approaches (a pastoral strategy versus a document)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Mollie Wilson O’Reilly, “The Real Threat to American Catholicism,” June 2021:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/06/catholic-bishops-joe-biden-abortion/619288>



Hear Mollie Wilson O’Reilly on the Commonweal Podcast:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/podcast/bishops-blind-spots>

The Editors, “Pastors, Not Prophets,” July 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/pastors-not-prophets>

Matthew Boudway, “There Ought to Be a Law,” May 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/there-ought-be-law>

Peter Steinfels, “More than a Symbol,” December 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/swift-spurn>

Ross Douthat and Heidi Schlumpf, “Joe Biden and the Communion Wars,” July 2021:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/opinion/biden-communion-catholic-abortion.html>