

WORKING WITH/IN THE CHURCH: CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
AND CHALLENGES FOR LGBTQ+ PERSONS – SELECTED SESSION

Topic:	Working With/In the Church: Contributions of and Challenges for LGBTQ+ Persons
Convener:	Adam Beyt, Fordham University
Moderator:	Craig Ford, Jr., Saint Norbert College
Presenters:	Jason Steidl, St. Joseph's College Margaret Stapleton Smith, Fordham University
Respondent:	Bryan Massingale, Fordham University

In “It’s Complicated: LGBTQ+ Catholic Employees and Public Criticism of Church Teaching,” Jason Steidl began the panel by providing an “on the ground” depiction of the precarious state of many LGBTQ+ (or queer) employees at various Catholic institutions in the United States. For some institutions, such as Fordham University, openly queer employees are not only allowed but protected. For other institutions, such as many local parishes or Catholic high schools, queer employees frequently lose their jobs for more public transgressions of church magisterial teaching. Steidl observed how maintaining a hardline stance against LGBTQ+ advancements has become a litmus test for conservative Catholics, particularly some bishops, as the church continues to participate in America’s culture wars. Given that they are at the financial mercy and control of local bishops, Catholic elementary and high schools have become the sites of many of these firings. Steidl ended his presentation with a reflection and a demand for Catholic institutions of various stripes to be more attentive to the myriad of vulnerabilities their out LGBTQ+ employees face.

Margaret Stapleton Smith, in “The Courage to Leave or The Courage to Stay? Mary Daly’s Lasting Challenge to LGBTQ+ Theologians and Catholic Thought,” engaged with the feminist thinker’s work to reflect on the disaffiliation of some queer folks from the church. Smith examined Daly’s reading of Thomas Aquinas, particularly how she interprets Thomas’s account of God through the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. For Daly, humans participate in the final cause, the Be-ing of God through the dynamism of their self-actualization, an actualization that is often impeded by social ills such as patriarchal religious authority. Smith thus argued that LGBTQ+ folks participate in the Be-ing of God through their own self-actualization. She saw Daly’s departure from Catholicism (or rather, Catholicism’s departure from her) as participation in divine Be-ing. With the radical feminist’s thought in mind, Smith suggested that Daly’s reconfiguration of the *analogia entis* provides a model for rendering sacred both the coming-out process of many LGBTQ+ Catholics along with justifying their departure from the church.

In his response, Bryan Massingale spoke to the historical nature of the panel while gesturing towards new areas of constructive theological work. He distinguished a difference between being “out,” allowing others to know about one’s sexual identity and/or gender variance, and being “public,” a way of being “out” with a specific humanizing mission. Publicly identified queer Catholic theologians have a specific aim of doing “Catholic theology for the sake of the Church and its understanding of God’s ways with humankind.” More public LGBTQ+ Catholics (rather than open) require a

fundamental revision of theology. The present reality of publicly queer Catholics creates a liminal status towards the institutional church for many. For some, this necessitates a leaving the church, a loss that must be mourned. Massingale also gestured towards the ongoing sites of social concerns many LGBTQ+ individuals face throughout the world.

For the discussion after the presentations, the panelists elaborated on the different models of “church” operative within their thinking. With over thirty individuals present who were not involved with the panel, there was a robust attendance for the virtual format.

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