

LITURGY/SACRAMENTS – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation
 Convener: Xavier M. Montecel, Saint Mary's University (San Antonio, TX)
 Moderator: LaRyssa Herrington, University of Notre Dame
 Presenters: Megan Effron, University of Notre Dame
 Susan Reynolds, Emory University
 Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, University of the Incarnate Word

In order to explore the convention theme of “Social Salvation,” the Liturgy/Sacraments topic session featured three papers.

Megan Effron's paper, titled “Women Preaching in the Spirit: A Dialogue Between Catholics and Pentecostals,” offered an analysis of Pentecostal theology pertinent to women's preaching and articulated three reasons to affirm the practice that might serve Catholic reflection on the matter. First, the outpouring of the Spirit on all people. In the Pentecostal tradition, noted Effron, Spirit baptism is the only credential for public ministry. Effron situated this claim in a historical context, specifically in light of the Azusa Street Revival of the early twentieth century, which modeled at times a “prophetic inclusivism” and endorsement of women's preaching and leadership. She pointed also to the importance for Catholics of revisiting pertinent passages in the Acts of the Apostles. Second, eschatology. In Pentecostal theology, said Effron, a decisive focus on the Second Coming of Christ provides an “authorizing hermeneutic” that relativizes gender differences in approaching the question of women's ministry. Eschatological urgency motivates inclusive and egalitarian practices. Effron warns that early Pentecostalism is not an ideal standard to return to. This tradition was and is still marked by obvious sexism and a sense of women's inferiority. However, the tendency toward egalitarianism where an eschatological sensibility is heightened is worthy of bringing into dialogue with Catholic eucharistic practice. Third, the manifestation of charisms or gifts of the Spirit. Charismatic ecclesiology, observed Effron, embraces a wide range of spiritual gifts, and Pentecostal worship includes charismatic speech acts. Such acts, whose truth is verified by the inspired community, create space for authoritative speaking on the part of women. Effron proposed an emphasis in Catholic theology on this link between charisms and ministry and suggested that Catholics might incorporate something like charismatic testimony into their worship.

Susan Reynolds's paper, titled “The Sacrament of Reconciliation Under the Gaze of the Surveillance State: An Accidental Study of Confession on the US–Mexico Border,” narrated the author's own experience doing field work in South Texas and offered a reflection on two stories of confession. In these stories, a small migrant boy experiences a moment of dignity and privacy during confession in an otherwise invasive and exploitative space, and a young woman with a baby is also enriched by the practice of confession. Reynolds asked what the seal of confession might mean to migrants deprived of the dignity of privacy, living under surveillance. She pointed to the way in which the seal of confession can supersede or circumvent the coercive power of the state, which historically has facilitated ecclesial violence and provided impunity for abusers. In the border context, confession implies a form of resistance to state violence. Reynolds admitted to being caught off guard by this “accidental” theological

finding. She detailed the ways in which migrants at the border are deprived of the dignity of privacy by a complex international surveillance apparatus, which exploits cell phones and digital media to harvest information from migrants—turning their bodies and movements into consumable data. In this setting, argued Reynolds, confession becomes a “fugitive sacrament,” a way to “steal grace” and to claim the right of the individual to honest self-disclosure and confidential speech. She called for deeper attention to privacy, surveillance, and the gaze of the state in sacramental and liturgical theology.

Jakob Karl Rinderknecht’s paper, titled “On Baptism into a Sacramental (and therefore Not-Final) Church,” offers an analysis of what it means to describe the church as sacramental given our present ecclesial context and in light of divergent ecclesiological models. Rinderknecht began by referencing the observation from Susan Wood that baptism is the sacrament of unity but also a sacrament of division, since we are baptized into divided and sinful churches. What then can it mean to speak of the church as sacrament? Rinderknecht approached the issue by examining two distinct models of church. First, he described the “institutional deposit” model which, looking backward, relies on the notion that the church has been founded by Christ and lives on as a perfect society or institution whose role it is to dispense grace as an “almost measurable quantum” through the sacraments for the salvation of souls. In this church, baptism is a mark of personal entrance in a perfect society and sacraments in general are means of grace that apply the benefits of Christ’s passion to citizens awaiting the coming kingdom. There is in this model a hard distinction between “church” and “not church,” a strictly limited acknowledgement of Protestants as full members of the church, and great difficulty articulating the possibility of a sinful church. Second, Rinderknecht described the *viator* model of Lumen Gentium, or the model of the church “on the way” which, looking not only backward but also forward, grounds the sacramental identity of the church in the promise of its eschatological fulfillment. The church functions in a real, though imperfect, way as the sacrament of Christ’s body and coming reign. Baptism is the beginning of one’s participation in a communal pilgrimage, which Rinderknecht associates fruitfully with the synodal process, emphasizing the importance of discernment, openness to reform, and hope.

Discussion of the papers during this year’s topic session was particularly rich and included voices from different theological sub-disciplines and generations. Themes discussed included the limitations of validity in contemporary sacramental theology, the meaning of communal discernment in light of Ignatian and Benedictine resources, the possibility of healing through confession not only from personal sin but also from the wounds of systemic violence or social sin, the state of Catholic pneumatology, and the broadness of sacramental theology looking to the past and to the future.

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