

CHRISTIANITY & JUDAISM

Topic: Controversial Canonizations
Convenor: Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary
Presenters: Kristin Colberg, University of Notre Dame
Robert Krieg, University of Notre Dame

Kristin Colberg and Robert Krieg collaborated in their interactive presentation of “Pope Pius X and Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D.: Holiness in the Church as a *Societas Perfecta*.” They framed their presentation through five steps. They first established the chronologies of Eugenio Pacelli/Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) and Edith Stein/Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D. (1891-1942), thereby situating their lives amidst the events of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Second, Colberg and Krieg analyzed the ecclesiology of *societas perfecta* in which the church was viewed as an organization that is “complete and independent in itself, fully sufficient in its own order to attain its proposed end, and not subject to any other society in those things which pertain properly to it.” Such an ecclesiology regards the church as God’s kingdom on earth, which must be preserved at all costs and safeguarded by the pope, bishops and clergy. The church is responsible for the supernatural order and the state for the natural order. Together, they form two, distinct perfect societies and reflect larger nature-grace issues. The ideal nation-state (e.g., F. Franco’s Spain and A. Salazar’s Portugal) supports the Catholic Church and merely tolerates other religious organizations; the church’s freedom must be preserved even over human rights and individual freedoms. Colberg and Krieg situated the notion of the church as a *societas perfecta* as a defensive reaction to the Reformers, Rationalists, and the French Revolution. It originated from a perspective in which the world was regarded as threatening, and the church as immutable and reliable, founded on the absolute authority of Jesus Christ.

Third, Colberg and Krieg examined the implications of the paradigm of *societas perfecta* for the way that many church officials and theologians viewed Judaism. While Catholics ought to respect the human dignity and legal rights of the Jewish people, Judaism, nonetheless, was religious legalism. Further, the Jewish people as a whole were/are responsible for the death of Jesus and, therefore, no longer God’s chosen people. Rather, they had been dispersed throughout the world as punishment for the death of Jesus. Christianity has fulfilled and superseded Judaism, and so Jews should convert to Catholicism. The church rejects a racist anti-Semitism but allows for a religious anti-Semitism grounded in views of Jews as “perfidious” and “unfaithful.”

Fourth, our presenters showed how Pius XII and Teresa Benedicta were influenced by *societas perfecta*, including its understanding of holiness and of Judaism. For example, while Pius XII privately provided assistance and protection for some Jews (including sheltering Jews in Vatican City, monasteries, and convents after Hitler took control of Rome in 1943), he regarded the church’s freedom to

administer the sacraments of more importance than acting on behalf of human rights. And when Teresa Benedicta wrote her will in 1939, she offered her life “for the sins of the unbelieving people so the Lord will be accepted by his own.”

Finally, Colberg and Krieg posed two questions: 1) In what ways is the holiness of Pope Pius and Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross pertinent today, given the understanding of the church as sacrament/*communio* at Vatican II? 2) What might these two figures say today about their respective canonizations, especially in light of concerns voiced by Jews?

Throughout the session, participants engaged actively with the presenters, who stimulated many thoughtful and provocative comments. Though the questions received no final answers, the discussion testified to the breadth and depth of the concerns in this consultation on the relationship of Judaism and Christianity.

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