

GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND THE SENSE OF THE
FAITHFUL—INVITED SESSION

Topic: Gender, Sexual Orientation, and the Sense of the Faithful
Convener: Brian Flanagan, Marymount University
Moderator: Julie Hanlon Rubio, Saint Louis University
Presenters: Bryan Massingale, Marquette University
Cristina Traina, Northwestern University

Cristina Traina, in her paper “Whose *sensus*? Which *fidelium*? Justice and Gender in a Global Church,” addresses gender and gender theory in recent statements of Pope Francis, and argues that, despite apparent points of continuity with previous papal magisterial statements on the nature of gender, Francis’s location of gender as a matter of culture, and therefore as a matter of local cultures, is a stronger force in his teaching on gender than previous essentialist positions. After giving an overview of the concept of gender theory, Traina provides an example in which Francis’s concerns over the importation of “gender theory” into a particular educational context seem rooted primarily in Francis’s suspicion of colonization and of the ideological violation of a particular local culture’s integrity. Traina builds upon this case to argue, counterintuitively, that Francis opposes gender ideology but supports something like a gender theory perspective in assuming that different cultures will have diverse understandings and practices of gender. Looking also at the Pontifical Council on Culture’s February 2015 meeting on “Women’s Cultures” and Francis’s address to that assembly, Traina suggests that the current papacy opens toward an understanding of multiple, local *sensus fidelium* (plural) on gender rather than a single, universalist *sensus fidelium* (single) on gender. Traina argues that Francis does this without falling into utter relativism, but that his statements on gender provide the space for multiple, shifting theories and theologies of gender.

Bryan Massingale, in a paper entitled “Beyond ‘Who Am I to Judge?’ The *Sensus Fidelium*, LGBT Experience, and Telling Truth in the Church,” argues that shifts in magisterial discourse on LGBT persons constitutes a doctrinal development and not merely an adjustment of tone, a development rooted in the *sensus fidelium* and truth-telling of LGBT believers. Massingale begins by outlining previous magisterial teaching on homosexual persons, highlighting the language used in previous documents as well as the content of magisterial teaching regarding same-sex behaviors and the fittingness of homosexual persons for ordination to the priesthood. He then contrasts Pope Francis’s 2013 “Who am I to judge?” comments with regard to the pope’s use of the term “gay” and to the pope’s more positive appraisal of the spiritual lives of gay and lesbian persons. Massingale then outlined the tensions at the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family between a new approach to lesbian and gay persons, exemplified by the contrast between the language and content of the Synod’s interim report, and that found in the non-approved paragraphs on homosexual persons published in the final document of the Synod. In Massingale’s judgment, the Synod in particular exemplifies the newly unsettled character of what had been considered settled doctrine, and evidences newer experiences of Catholic bishops of the testimonies of gay and lesbian Catholics. He concludes by identifying such testimonies, both formal and informal, as manifestations of the *sensus fidelium* of LGBT Christians, and argues that this *sensus fidelium* of LGBT Catholics and those

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learning from their testimonies and experiences has doctrinal significance and authoritative weight—not merely pastoral import.

Following the presentations, questions were raised regarding ordination in relation to both gender theory and gay and lesbian persons; arguments for and against the shift in magisterial teaching in relation to lesbian and gay people presented by Massingale; the challenges less universalist, more localized theories and theologies of gender present for universal ecclesial action; the nature of celibacy in relation to homosexual persons and disagreements within the hierarchy regarding teaching on same-sex activity; and the hermeneutics of both Massingale's and Traina's readings of Pope Francis's statements.

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