

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, Duquesne University
Moderator: Edmund Koo-Fook Chia, Australian Catholic University
Presenters: Kevin Glauber Ahern, Manhattan College
Jeanine E. Viau, University of Central Florida
Respondent: Professor Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, Duquesne University

The title of the first paper is “Mercy and Justice on the Margins: Toward an Integral Model of Mission.”¹ In this paper Kevin Ahern makes the argument that many parishes, dioceses, and Catholic organizations, such as Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), are on the frontlines of the present crisis of forced displacement, acting as institutional expressions of the corporal works of mercy. But is mercy alone sufficient? While few doubt that providing shelter and food to a refugee corresponds to the church’s mission, the same cannot be said of their engagement for social justice. Central to this debate is a missiological question: do Catholic organizations participate in the mission of the church in their collective action for justice?

The paper goes on to explore the dynamic, and occasionally contentious, interplay between mercy, justice, and the gospel mission. After highlighting the experience of one church organization, JRS, in its commitment to both mercy and justice, it places this experience into dialogue with two distinct models of mission and concludes by turning to the prophetic model offered by Pope Francis.

The title of the second paper is “Love Beyond Mercy: Respect as a Model for Communion with and among LGBTQ* Persons.” According to Jeanine Viau, this paper is a product of some field research she supervised. The research, which consisted of interviews and other forms of data collection, focused on the abuses and inhuman treatment suffered by LGBTQ* persons in American society.

The study analyzes Pope Francis’ sustained attention to mercy, especially as he applies this virtue to the pastoral care of gay persons. She argues that mercy alone is insufficient to bring about justice and love for gender- and sexual minorities in the Church. She proposes respect as a more just form of love, one that allows for greater interpersonal mutuality and recognition, as well as a vocational paradigm shift from pastoral accompaniment to consensual communion.

The respondent, Professor Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, complimented the research work of both presenters. He agreed with some of their conclusions and questioned the theological strength of some aspects of their argument. He expressed understanding and empathy with the challenges of the LGBTQ* community but questions if it is right to blame religion for many of the biases and violence against members of that community.

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¹ Parts of this paper are adapted from Kevin Ahern, *Structures of Grace: Catholic Organizations Serving the Global Common Good* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015).