

CHURCH/ECUMENISM – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation
 Convener: Kathryn Reinhard, Christ Church Bronxville (*in absentia*)
 Moderator: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University
 Presenters: Daniel Minch, Ruhr University of Bochum
 Meg Stapleton Smith, Fordham University

This session was comprised of two papers, with a short question-and-answer period after each and a longer discussion after both papers. Daniel Minch's paper, entitled "The Persistent Problem of Institutional Ecclesiology: Absolutist Theopolitics as a Stumbling Block for Social Salvation" was read by Christopher Cimorelli (National Institute for Newman Studies and Duquesne University) because Daniel was unable to travel to the convention. Meg Stapleton Smith's paper was entitled "Queer Soteriology: The Effects of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Church." There were approximately ten CTSA members in attendance.

Minch argued that the image of Christ the King in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially as explicated in Leo XIII's *Annum Sacrum* and Pius XI's *Ubi Arcano* and *Quas Primas*, which created the new liturgical feast of Christ the King) arose more directly from absolutist concepts of governance that are intimately connected to theopolitical monarchy and the church as a "total institution." The image of Christ the King was, therefore, less meant to deconstruct totalitarian fascism and actually served to ground a kind of Catholic totalitarianism, including both exclusivist and imperialist claims about salvation. He argued further that, although Vatican II and contemporary theology has a plurality of ecclesiologies, the "applied ecclesiology" of the church in canon law remains essentially preconciliar and in line with the vision of Pius XI. It assumes an unequal society in which the laity are dependent upon, and must be saved by, a benevolent clergy, and it restricts the Spirit's sanctifying work to ecclesial borders. Thus, the practical application of such a totalitarian Christology hinders social salvation by confining it to the visible church, while also fostering soteriological and theopolitical individualism and neglecting this-worldly aspects of the gospel message.

Meg Stapleton Smith's paper followed. She began by examining the development of the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, and teachings on the necessity of the church for salvation more broadly, in Cyprian and the Fourth Lateran Council, in the twentieth century (e.g., Leonard Feeney and *Lumen Gentium*), and briefly in the Francis papacy. Stapleton Smith noted a double bind for LGBTQ+ persons: on the one hand, the refusal to sacrifice their own will and sexuality is to "prevent [their own] salvation" (USCCB, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 12).¹ Yet to "willfully separate" from the Catholic Church is to sacrifice their own salvation as well. For many LGBTQ people, the option is to abandon the church, abandon its vision of salvation, or both. In response, Stapleton Smith offered a queer soteriology that

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (October 1, 1986), § 12, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html.

redefines as “the path of well-being, wholeness, redemption and liberation, toward feeling safe in the here/now and ultimately with God in the hereafter. ... Willfully leaving the church is thus a matter of searching for that well-being, wholeness, and indeed yearning to find salvation outside of the church.” Ultimately, the flourishing of LGBTQ+ persons requires not only a reexamination of sexual ethics but doctrines of salvation as well. Indeed, the question arises—is salvation for LGBTQ Catholics possible *within* the church? (*Intra ecclesiam nulla salus?*)

ELYSE RABY
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, California