

## CHURCH/ECUMENISM – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Elyse Raby, Santa Clara University  
 Moderator: Mary Kate Holman, Fairfield University  
 Presenters: Amanda Osheim, Loras College  
 Flora x. Tang, University of Notre Dame  
 Carol George, KU Leuven

The Church/Ecumenism session took place Friday morning, June 13. Approximately twenty-five convention attendees joined the session, not including the presenters and administrative team. The three papers presented engaged the conference theme of “One Baptism” in distinctive ways.

Amanda Osheim presented her paper entitled “Born into Vulnerability, Baptized into Kenosis: Towards Ecclesial Examinations of Conscience.” Osheim compared various accounts of vulnerability (ontological, situational, baptismal), arguing first that through false identities, those with social privileges insulate themselves from vulnerability, and in so doing, exacerbate the situational vulnerability of others. In contrast, through baptismal identity, Christians are called to imitate Christ’s vulnerability and kenosis, understood as refusal to grasp at being God *and* letting go of received assumptions about others (e.g., Jesus’s encounter with the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7). Osheim argued that the Holy Spirit calls and empowers Christians to imitate Christ’s kenosis more fully through ongoing conversion. Ecclesial examinations of conscience can aid Christian communities in becoming aware of their collective involvement in social privilege and structural sin both within and beyond the church. These examinations may also help to inspire communal imagination, action, and collaboration in imitation of Christ’s kenotic vulnerability.

Flora Tang presented her paper entitled “Baptism on the Potawatomi Trail of Death: An Ecclesiology of (Limited) Solidarity for a Decolonizing Church.” Her paper focused on the Log Chapel in Notre Dame, Indiana, where the largely Catholic Indigenous Potawatomi Tribe prayed immediately before their forced removal from Indiana to Kansas in 1838; today, the chapel is primarily used for infant baptisms. Tang asked, what does it mean to be baptized into a church where both European missionaries and Indigenous Catholics are our ecclesial ancestors? What can the belief in one baptism do for a church where colonial-racial power differences seem to foreclose solidarity and true communion? Tang presented her archival research of a historic Indigenous Catholic congregation and their French-American missionary priests to demonstrate how the three priests participated in acts of limited yet embodied solidarity with the Indigenous community despite their continued anti-Indigenous and racist dispositions. Tang ultimately argued that “one baptism” does not make colonial divisions or racist ideologies disappear; nonetheless, baptismal grace does enable an ecclesial space where possibilities of imperfect communion and limited solidarity emerge.

Carol George presented his paper entitled “Unity in Diversity: Reciprocal Dynamism of Synodality and Receptive Ecumenism.” George argued that in an era of increasing diversity within the church, synodality and receptive ecumenism offer transformative pathways to unity. Synodality, the journey of the entire people of God

in mutual “listening,” aligns with receptive ecumenism, which promotes openness to diverse Christian traditions through active “listening.” By admitting the diversities within the church, synodality becomes a platform for mutual dialogue and communal decision-making. Concurrently, receptive ecumenism calls for humility and openness to learn from the richness of traditions outside one’s own, creating an environment where unity transcends uniformity and fosters a harmonious coexistence of differences. By allowing each of these methodologies and practices to enrich the other, a synodal church can recognize the *sensus fidelium* in others and strive for enrichment, even if not agreement. George ultimately argued that by embracing the reciprocal dynamism of synodality and receptive ecumenism, we can build bridges and cultivate a more vibrant and united “One” Body of Christ.

After each paper, a few minutes was allowed for brief questions for the presenter. After all three papers, more substantive discussion and question-and-answer took place. Attendees noted similar themes of the challenge of vulnerability, and the concomitant need for humility, to *hear* the pain of the church, the people of God, in various times and places (including in our own historical/political moment). Questions were also posed regarding the formation for communal examinations of conscience, how the Potawatomi remember their history vis-à-vis Catholic missionaries, and the state of ecumenical dialogue today.

ELYSE RABY  
*Santa Clara University*  
*Santa Clara, California*