

MORAL THEOLOGY (I) – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: One Baptism
 Convener: David Kwon, Seattle University
 Moderator: Megan McCabe, Gonzaga University
 Presenters: Marc V. Rugani, Saint Anselm College
 Federico Cinocca, Emmanuel College

In response to the call for papers, four selected proposals explored the theme of *One Baptism* across two coordinated sessions. Moral Theology I examined this theme through the lenses of human capabilities, social ethics, and intersectionality. Moral Theology II, as detailed in a separate report, turned to questions of global solidarity.

This first session featured two distinguished presenters—Marc V. Rugani and Federico Cinocca—whose papers investigated how moral theology can critically engage traditions of sacramentality and justice through the frameworks of human dignity, narrative, and grace. Both offered constructive theological proposals that challenge the church to listen more attentively to those at the margins and to imagine a more expansive vision of hope and grace today.

Marc V. Rugani’s paper, “*Capax Dei*: Living Out Christian Hope Through Capabilities Expansion,” employed the capabilities approach—developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum—as a dialogue partner with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). In response to Pope Francis’s call in *Spes Non Confundit* for Catholics to be “tangible signs of hope,” Rugani argues that human beings, though wounded, remain *capax Dei*—capable of receiving and embodying the life of God. Expanding human capabilities, he contends, is not only a developmental or policy concern but a moral and ecclesial imperative grounded in the call of baptism.

Rugani demonstrates how CST and the capabilities approach share overlapping concerns—particularly human dignity, justice, and flourishing—despite differing epistemological foundations. He explores three case studies—gender, disability, and nationality—as “corrosive disadvantages” that constrain the realization of human dignity and divine likeness. Drawing on disability ethics, *Fratelli Tutti*, and the capabilities approach, Rugani advocates a more inclusive theological praxis—one that affirms difference as a locus of grace. The Jubilee year—already underway since December 24, 2024—invites the Church to recommit to a baptismal vision of a diverse yet unified Body of Christ, especially by centering those historically excluded from ecclesial life.

Federico Cinocca’s paper, “Boundless Grace: Exploring Sacrament’s *Succedanea* from Baptism to Marriage for Same-Sex Couples,” offered a theological proposal rooted in the Catholic tradition’s doctrine of *sacramentorum succedanea*—substitute means by which grace may be received when formal sacramental rites are unavailable. While traditionally applied to baptism, Cinocca examines how this doctrine might be analogically extended to same-sex unions, especially in light of the enduring faith and witness of LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Cinocca traces the theological roots of *sacramentorum succedanea* from St. Ambrose and Peter Lombard through the Council of Trent and the International Theological Commission. Drawing on Bridget Burke Ravizza, James Keenan, and

Linda Hogan, he proposes that some same-sex couples exhibit spiritual dispositions—faith, charity, sacramental desire, and fidelity—that mirror the grace operative in sacramental marriage. He offers four provisional criteria for discerning sacramental grace in such unions: baptism, authentic desire for the sacrament, a life of communal service, and steadfast faith amid ecclesial marginalization.

While acknowledging theological objections—especially those related to sin and canonical form—Cinocca contends that a grace-centered moral theology rooted in conscience and communal discernment must challenge rigid exclusions. His presentation called the church to engage LGBTQ+ persons not only with pastoral care, but with theological seriousness—trusting in the Spirit’s presence beyond institutional boundaries.

The discussion that followed was both deeply engaged and wide-ranging. Participants raised theological and pastoral questions about extending sacramentality analogically, particularly in relation to ecclesiology, canon law, and the boundaries of liturgical form. Several attendees expressed appreciation for Cinocca’s proposal to retrieve and reimagine *sacramentorum succedanea* as a way to recognize grace already operative in the lives of same-sex couples. This sparked rich conversation around conscience, fidelity, and the importance of moral theology that listens closely to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ Christians.

Participants also reflected on how Rugani’s use of the capabilities approach and Cinocca’s theology of *succedanea* both surface grace and human dignity in spaces where ecclesial norms have often failed or excluded. Many noted how these frameworks affirm baptism not as a static identity but as a dynamic vocation—calling the church to deeper accompaniment, justice, and hospitality.

In connection with these themes, the session highlighted the contributions of scholars advancing this work, including Meghan Clark, Anna Rowlands, Christina Astorga, and Bryan Massingale. Their respective uses of capabilities theory, political theology, liberationist ethics, and intersectionality help reimagine moral theology as more expansive, justice-oriented, and responsive to the Spirit’s presence at the Church’s margins. The conversation also touched on the theological risks and pastoral urgency involved in integrating such frameworks into ethics today. Ultimately, the session modeled a hopeful and theologically rigorous vision for a Church attuned to the Spirit’s movement beyond conventional boundaries.

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