

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Baptism and Unity?
Convener: Cynthia L. Cameron, University of St. Michael's College
Moderator: Jennifer Owens-Jofre, Loyola Marymount University
Presenters: Marc DelMonico, St. Luke Institute
Tiffany Hunsinger, University of Dayton

In response to the call for papers, the two selected proposals addressed the topic of “One Baptism” by exploring understandings of baptismal unity.

Marc DelMonico from the St. Luke Institute presented a paper entitled “Baptismal Ministries”: A Synodal Embrace of Lay Ministry ... or is it?: Synod ‘Vocabulary’ and the Relationship Between Baptism, Lay Ministry and Co-Responsibility.” In the paper, he explored questions raised by documents from the Synod on Synodality and their language of “co-responsibility” between ordained and lay ministers. He argued that the Synod documents, particularly those from the United States bishops, missed the opportunity to center the lay ministry movement, rooted in a common baptismal ministry, in the implementation of the synodal process. Indeed, lay ministry was only sporadically mentioned and was inconsequential in the US documents. Using an inductive text-based analytical method, DelMonico argued that ideas around baptismal ministry and lay ministry receive far less attention in the US bishops’ writing than do ideas around clergy, priests, and priestly ministry. He suggests that the US bishops’ documents contain a pragmatic and issues-focused approach to synodality and do not explore the theological foundations of synodality. In the Synod’s 2024 final document, *For a Synodal Church*, DelMonico found more evidence of a theological description of synodality and a desire to describe the interrelationship between ordained and baptismal ministries in the articulation of the church’s mission.

In her paper, “Catholicism and Indigenous Hawaiian Spirituality: Navigating a Legacy of Forced Conversion,” Tiffany Hunsinger from the University of Dayton explored the relationship between Indigenous Hawaiian communities and the Catholic Church. In particular, she described the practice by Christian missionaries of forced conversion and suppression of native spiritual traditions, rooted in the colonial history of Hawaii, and how these experiences have shaped the religious identities of contemporary Native Hawaiians. Using an ethnographic and case study approach, Hunsinger describes the ways that baptism and other Catholic sacraments are reclaimed as symbols of resilience and unity. She highlights the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Peace in Honolulu, St. Benedict’s Painted Church in Kona, and the Maka-Hiki Festival as examples of ways that Indigenous Hawaiians have navigated the tension between ancestral spiritualities and Catholic faith. With the aim of decolonializing religious practices in Hawaii, Hunsinger offered insights into how a reclaimed understanding of baptism can help the Catholic Church incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing.

The ensuing discussion explored details surfaced in each paper. For example, the ongoing tensions between Indigenous Hawaiians and westerners, as Hawaiians try to reclaim their culture, and the role of Western Catholic saints (Damian of Molokai and Marianne Cope) in Hawaiian Catholic faith practices were discussed. Hunsinger noted

that there have not yet been any canonizations of Indigenous Hawaiians and that questions of Hawaiian sovereignty and spirituality are related. In addition, the relationship between clergy and lay ministers was further explored, with questions arising about attempts to suggest a separation of the roles of lay and ordained ministers in the Synod documents. DelMonico noted that the documents themselves describe an interdependence between lay and ordained ministers; while challenges in these relationships exist, they ought not be overstated. In response to a question, DelMonico also noted that the documents make very little mention of the role of theologians in understanding the exercise of lay ministry. The role of women in ministry is mentioned as well, but not fully explored through the lens of baptismal ministry. Schools and parishes as locations of lay ministry were also explored in the conversation, as were contemporary movements at the intersection of Indigenous Hawaiian spirituality and Catholic faith.

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