

Book Reviews

Trans Life and the Catholic Church Today. Edited by Nicolette Burbach and Lisa Sowle Cahill. T&T Clark, 2024. x + 369 pages. \$200 hardcover.

This edited volume is an invaluable resource for those interested in the intersection of trans experience and the theology of the Catholic Church. The editors offer the collection as a work of “peacebuilding” (2)—not between trans and Catholic communities, as if these two communities were separate and opposed, but as reconciliation *within* the Catholic community, which includes trans members and contains resources to nourish trans life. This claim—that transness and Catholicism can be mutually enriching—is at the heart of the act of hope that is this book.

The editors aim at an “‘orthodox but affirming’ approach” (16) that situates the book firmly within the heart of Catholic theology. For that reason, the authors are largely trans and non-trans Catholics working in mainstream Roman Catholic spaces, with the inclusion of complementary Old Catholic and Anglican voices. Those looking specifically for a queer theology that builds new foundations outside the Catholic anthropological tradition will need to look elsewhere, but those seeking queer theologies that arise from, not in opposition to, Catholic sources will find fine examples in this volume, most notably in the contributions of Nicolette Burbach, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Craig A. Ford, Jr., and Benjamin J. Hohman.

Burbach’s introduction provides a brief but helpful summary of the development of both gender medicine and the Church’s concerns about “gender ideology,” connected through the conceptual distinction between “sex” and “gender.” The first section of the book focuses specifically on Catholic moral theological debates about the liceity of the recognition of trans identities and the medical treatment of gender dysphoria. Versions of almost all these essays have been published elsewhere but collecting them in one place gives the reader a useful primer on how theologians and ethicists who take the Church’s moral and anthropological traditions seriously have been able to find room for social and medical transition within Catholic teaching on the human person. Two of the essays were contributed by David Albert Jones, who initiated the volume and who is perhaps the leading Catholic bioethicist modeling how to take trans experience seriously

and integrate it within the Catholic tradition. Valuable papers by Lisa Sowle Cahill on the ethics of trans identity and Peter J. Cataldo on the legitimacy of gender transition treatments in Catholic healthcare round out the section.

The second section focuses on the personal experiences of trans people and their families. The essay by Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies provides an example of two Christian academics bringing their knowledge of theology, anthropology, and literature to bear on their understanding of their trans daughter. Essays by Shannon T.L. Kearns and George White give helpful practical guidance on the pastoral care of trans/non-binary Christians and the support of LGBT students in Catholic schools, respectively. Nicolette Burbach's essay on transness as a sacramental "reaching [out] toward communion" (170) is a theological highlight of the volume.

The third section focuses on interdisciplinary approaches to trans questions. The brief qualitative study by Claire Jenkins on transition-related grief among trans persons' families and Norella Broderick's literature review on the evidence for gender-affirming care are limited in their usefulness for researchers seeking comprehensive understanding of these topics but provide glimpses of relevant concerns. P.J. Johnston's exploration of nineteenth-century British colonial laws designed to eliminate India's *hijra* community was striking for the clear parallels with recent calls for "the complete eradication of 'transgenderism' from society" (250). Christina Beardsley's history of the engagement of the Anglican Communion with trans issues was particularly valuable to this researcher familiar primarily with the Catholic context. Benjamin J. Hohman's previously-published effort to locate a space for the complexity of human sexuality within a Thomistic metaphysics through putting Judith Butler and Bernard Lonergan in dialogue is one of the volume's most promising theological essays.

The final section proposes some areas of future development. Craig A. Ford, Jr.'s engagement with "gender ideology" as presented by recent magisterial statements and his counter proposal of a "queer natural law theology," a version of which was published in this journal in 2018, is solid work that is one of the foundations of recent trans-affirming engagement with the magisterium. Nicolette Burbach's final essay, on witnessing "transgender rage," serves as a coda to the volume, reminding the reader that, though not all experiences of transness may be interested in "bridge-building" (354), it is still important to receive those experiences as the guest who is Christ (*Rule of Benedict*, no. 53).

In summary, this volume is an essential resource for scholars exploring the possibilities for a trans-affirming theology within Catholic orthodoxy. Individual purchasers can look forward to the

paperback version being released in September 2026 at the lower price of \$58.95.

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The Sacrament of Same Sex Marriage: An Inclusive Vision for the Catholic Church. By Bridget Burke Ravizza. Rowman & Littlefield, 2024. xxi + 211 pages. \$24.00 paperback.

The Sacrament of Same Sex Marriage follows the author's previous book, *Project Holiness: Marriage as a Workshop for Everyday Saints* (with Julie Donovan Massey, Liturgical Press, 2015), which did not attend to the stories of same-sex couples. The title of this book points toward the thesis. Burke Ravizza argues that the marriages of the twenty-two same-sex couples she interviewed "are *de facto* sacramental" and that "the Catholic magisterium would do well to expand its definition of sacramental marriage to include same-sex couples" (xx). *The Sacrament of Same Sex Marriage* unfolds in five chapters. The first focuses on how each spouse is sacrament to the other. The second focuses on how the couples are sacrament for others. And in chapters 3 to 5, we hear stories of gay and lesbian couples' experiences of family life, the church, and navigating Catholic institutions. While there is some repetition and overlap, the framing of the chapters makes sense, and they flow nicely.

Burke Ravizza offers careful descriptions of magisterial teachings throughout, with helpful analysis of key ideas such as sacrament, intrinsic disorder, complementarity, procreation, sin, scandal, virtue, and conscience. The book exposes tensions and contradictions in Pope Francis's legacy, previously noted by other Catholic scholars, as well as organizations such as New Ways Ministry and DignityUSA. In Burke Ravizza's analysis of *Amoris Laetitia*, she cites paragraph 251's legalism and moral absolutism: "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family," as well as paragraph 305, which warns that moral laws should not be used as "stones to throw at people's lives" (50–51). Drawing on insight from outside the Catholic tradition, Burke Ravizza cites Christian ethicist David Gushee, who argues that pastoral change is not enough because doctrinal change is necessary.

Ethnography brings limitations: these couples do not speak for the entire LGBTQ community, and these interviews do not speak to each couple's entire story of married life. If this text is read as a first step in the church's listening, as it is intended to be, the stories curated for our listening can be understood as valuable in themselves without needing to be understood as representative or as the final word on the