

Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart: Cultivating a Sacramental Imagination in an Age of Pornography. Edited by Elizabeth T. Groppe. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020. xiv + 361 pages. \$34.95 (paper). doi: 10.1017/hor.2022.66

In this volume, editor Elizabeth Groppe brings together theologians, a therapist, an iconographer, psychologists, and liturgists to examine and respond to pornography and its effects in society today. The overarching thesis of the book is that Christianity is a religion with a strong aesthetic sacramental sensibility: that is, it is our visual and corporeal culture that makes God real and present to us. Pornography is described as anti-sacrament, as a visual culture or aesthetics that distorts and obscures our ability to “see” God in one another and ourselves. The sacramental aesthetics of Christianity are presented as an antidote to the anti-sacramental aesthetics of pornography characteristic of our current age. Many of the authors use John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* to elucidate this contrast, using the saying attributed to him: that the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but too little. The body becomes an object for consumption in pornography, rather than a full human subject and encounter with the divine. One distinguishing feature of the volume is a beautiful insert of seventy-five glossy color reproductions of sacred icons and paintings, all referenced within the texts.

The volume is divided into five parts. The first, “An Age of Pornography,” features essays by a therapist and two psychologists on the negative effects of pornography on families and on the brain, particularly of young men who watch it. The second part, “The Visual Culture of Christianity,” includes essays that explore the history of Christian art and iconography as a culture of sacramentality. The third part, “The Sacramental Imagination,” explores exactly how one “sees” differently with a sacramental imagination. I particularly enjoyed Kimberly Hope Belcher’s chapter in this section, which shows, using both medieval images of the *Maria Lactans* and the visual/lyrical work of musical artist Janelle Monáe, what it means to see the person with Jean-Luc Marion’s iconic gaze. In the fourth part, “Cultivating a Sacramental Imagination in an Age of Pornography,” Nicholas Ogle makes a similarly strong argument about seeing others as holy using John Paul II and Augustine’s *Corporal Works of Mercy*. In the final, fifth part, “The Healing Vision,” the authors show how the Christian sacramental imagination can heal the anti-sacramentality of pornographic culture.

The volume of essays is particularly well suited to any professor teaching courses on theological aesthetics, or sacramental theology. As a book adjacent to sexual ethics and theological anthropology, I wish a bit more had been said.

Although attention is paid, particularly well by Jennifer Newsome Martin and editor Elizabeth Groppe, to the negative conditions of people working in the pornography industry, and all the authors do an excellent job of not shaming those who work in it, the main “victims” of pornography throughout the essays seem to be the men who watch it. One author goes so far as to compare the burden of having watched porn and being healed from it to the paschal mystery. By situating pornography as anti-sacrament, many of these authors write about the men who watch it as if they are victims of this mind-altering aesthetic culture. To be sure, pornography changes people for the worse. But the people who watch and get off on the violent sex acts, abuse, defilement, and lack of consent that characterizes the vast majority of pornography are the people doing harm, not just to their own minds, but to the women and sexual minorities who have to live day-in and day-out in the culture shaped by the normalization of this violence. In the final essay of the volume, John Cavadini thoughtfully notes that pornography “identifies manliness with the subordination and degradation of women” and posits that real masculinity, the “stronger man,” is exemplified in Love crucified. When I look at Love crucified, I see Christ spat upon, Christ bleeding, Christ naked and penetrated, Christ publicly humiliated for those around him to enjoy. To this theologian, the sacramental imagination must not only convert the minds of those who enjoy pornography, it must pay attention to and heal all those in society who have been harmed by it: all the women, sexual minorities, and children whose wounds resemble Christ’s.

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With this volume, editors Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM, and Stephen Okey seek to accompany readers who are trying to understand what “human being” and “becoming” mean in “an increasingly violent and threatened world” (1). Almost three years into a pandemic, this is an even more pressing task. Divided in four parts, the volume covers methods, themes, figures, and contemporary issues in theological anthropology. Well written, researched,