

Sex on Earth as It Is in Heaven: A Christian Eschatology of Desire. By Patricia Beattie Jung. Albany: SUNY Press, 2017. xi + 185 pages. \$80.75.

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In her most recent scholarly undertaking, Patricia Beattie Jung writes, “Christian convictions about life in this new creation impact Christian approaches to the transformation of life on earth here and now” (xi). Jung believes this call includes transforming and cultivating our human sexuality. That is, for Jung, along with others before her, there might just very well be sexual desire and sexual delight (and gender) in heaven. Given this eschatological conviction and the Christian belief that we are “already but not yet” part of the Kin-dom of God, it makes sense to find ways we can begin to heal and transform sex on earth. Jung admits the problem with her proposed claim: it is not the view held by the church. In fact, much of Christian tradition has argued the exact opposite—there will be no experience of sexual desire or sexual delight in heaven.

Jung argues that there are biblical and theological reasons to affirm that there is sex in heaven, as it is both “plausible” and “deeply congruent” with other theological convictions Christians hold (xxiii). This provides a glimpse into the scholarly journey Jung embarks on in the remainder of the book. She begins by examining the concept of resurrection of the body within the Protestant and Catholic traditions. She concludes that through the body Christians “encounter not only goodness, beauty, and grace but also finitude and the mystery of evil” (19). This tension within the human experience of embodiment, combined with the Christian hope in the resurrection, did not prevent the church from proclaiming hope in a bodily resurrection. Nonetheless, defining what exactly this means has been nothing short of problematic for the church and theologians alike. In other words, the burning question still remains “open”: might there be sex (gender and/or sexual desire and delight) in heaven?

As she explains in her overview of New Testament texts, in the writings of Augustine and other early church thinkers concerning most matters sexual, scholarly opinion and interpretation exist to support both sides. And yet Jung admits that despite little interest on the part of the earliest Christian traditions to imagine there might be room for sex in heaven, she forges ahead with her creative imagination and dares to ask the unthinkable (for some)—all the while with a charitable eye toward the church’s tradition. She begins with a reconstructed anthropology based on her deep conviction that God longs to be in communion with humanity. Undergirding this reconstructed anthropology is Jung’s examination of desire (and sexual desire specifically) within the tradition.

After laying this groundwork in the first half of the book, Jung turns to delineating “why and how the reformation of our sexual desires (and not only their repression) is part of Christian discipleship” (121). With frank honesty, Jung asks her reader to “face the whole truth” about the human experience of sexual desire. She writes, “Anyone who is truthful with themselves knows at least some of their sexual desires are morally problematic” (122). She contends humans do have the capacity “to nurture and shape, and consequently some moral responsibility for, not only our sexual activities and practices but our sexual feelings as well.” Christian sexual ethics should explore how humans’ capacity to be aroused and arouse others can be transformed so one might embody sex on earth as it is in heaven (139). Put differently, for too long the church has shied away from discussing how one might cultivate her/his sexual desire so that it leads to what Jung refers to as “virtuous experiences.” This can no longer mean a list of “don’ts” or an exclusive focus on suppressing or denying sexual energy. Rather, Jung says, we must understand that sexual desire requires both restraint *and* nurture. This conviction, combined with Jung’s earlier claim that “discipleship calls Christians to bear witness in their lives on earth to their convictions about the life to come,” means everyone ought to be concerned with transforming their sexual desires, “whether they are dating, married, single, or avowed celibate” (160).

Expansive in its overview and scope, Jung’s book is a “must-read” for undergraduate and graduate newcomers in the field of Christian sexual ethics. For those more seasoned, it is a powerful reminder that our work as theologians and disciples is ongoing.

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Mother of Mercy, Bane of the Jews: Devotion to the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Norman England. By Kati Ihnat. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. xii + 305 pages. \$45.00.
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The Virgin Mary, monastic life in Anglo-Norman England, and the Jews might appear as distinct and separate topics, but Kati Ihnat’s significant book shows the close relationship between these three subjects. Monasteries flourished in England after the Norman Conquest, and the importance of the Virgin Mary in their liturgical and theological life contributed to an increase in her popularity and significance in the postconquest Christian culture. As the cult of Mary gained in status, the picture of the