

two distinct religions. We now know that the split between Judaism and what would come to be known as Christianity did not occur until several decades after Jesus' death. Despite this unfortunate, but very common, misstep, Vesley-Flad's tightly argued and richly original work should be read widely.

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Carnal Knowledge of God: Embodied Love for the Movement of Justice. By Rebecca M. M. Voelkel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017. xxi + 155 pages. \$24.00 (paper).

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Rebecca Voelkel, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ (UCC), has extensively promoted faith-based initiatives in the National LGBTQ Task Force, such as analyzing California's "No on Prop 8" campaign and leading LGBTQ concerns in the UCC. Her book begins with four personal stories that navigate her own sexual and religious awakening. They also show the beginnings of her scholarly interest in exploring interconnections between sexuality, the Christian faith, and social activism: work that began with her DMin research on the stories of 225 women and genderqueer persons, stories she calls "primary texts" from which to do theology.

Despite an early sexual trauma, her theology regards the body as the conduit of community. This book thus draws an important distinction: between the body as a vehicle for colonizing violence, and the body as the home of God. Voelkel's research names the Christian tradition as both ignorant and dismissive of the experiences of both women and genderqueer people in considering the value of the body and sexuality as sources of transformation and creativity. Indeed, as she rightly points out, the dominant cultural perspective on the body and sexuality is based on the experience of straight, white, cis-gender males. When the current statistic is that one in four queer youth will attempt suicide—a rate more than three times that of their straight peers—it is reprehensible that theologians have not done more to address the spiritual needs of the very age group that occupies their classrooms. Voelkel addresses these discrepancies in academic theology in a way that this reader hopes will be just the beginning of more profound attention.

Organized into four parts, the book considers the questions on the meaning of embodiment and its relation to justice in terms of the *Via Positiva*, the *Via Negativa*, the *Via Creativa*, and the *Via Transformativa*. The author's frame of reference is pastoral, speaking to the meaning of these questions in terms of the creation of community and the intimacy

and trust necessary to sustain it. The author's final chapter outlines a welcoming process for faith-based communities and churches that makes the formation of a welcoming environment for LGBTQ persons the flagship for other issues in social justice. Hence, this book would be an excellent anchor text for a faith-sharing group or an undergraduate classroom. Her reliance on poetry and literature both illustrate concepts and approach the questions in creative and engaging ways.

Her research consists primarily of hundreds of interviews, stories that guide the construction of theological concepts. The transcendence of God, for example, is challenged by the experiences described through the bodily knowledge that occurs through giving birth and maternity. Such experiences are not always warm and fuzzy; the embodied experience of the physical dependence between a mother and her child is often frightening, debilitating, and demeaning. But these experiences should also be recognized as valuable to the construction of a theology of intimacy between God and the world.

There are both positive and negative aspects to the way the body moves through the world and forms relationships; both are named by the author as valuable, as both lead to a deeper awareness of the way God communicates to and through us. Because sexuality is rooted in embodiment, it manifests the erotic power that "draws us to make love and justice in the world." Voelkel writes that the differences between hedonism and pleasure pertain to where and how the carnal knowledge of creation uses power: power for dominance and colonization, or power that empowers for further creation. Whereas pleasure in sexuality must be given to be received in a creative sense, hedonism makes pleasure for the self the focus of sexuality; without reciprocity in sexuality, there is no opportunity for empowerment. Without empowerment, hedonism cannot lead to the doing of justice. In this sense, hedonism is rooted in colonialism, using sexuality to subjugate and oppress rather than as a way to creatively elevate the other.

Given the previously mentioned lacuna in theology of LGBTQ experience, the author's use of incarnational theology signals that there must be further theological exploration of all forms of sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression. The author argues that the way forward is to recognize and respond to the theological hegemonies that prevent the full exploration of the doctrine of the Incarnation; to define sin in terms of action taken to remove the significance of any creature, person, community, or group of people; and to reject colonizing tendencies in individuals or systems.

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