
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), intersex, and queer rights are some of the most vexing and exigent issues facing Christianity today. Indeed, issues of marriage and adoption by individuals harbouring a non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered orientation are all too prevalent within the current politico-religious climates of various nations including North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The presence of this volume, which examines the current state of Christianity and its relationship to LGBT sexualities, is therefore an extremely welcome occurrence. Brimming with sociological, historical, cross-cultural, theological, and pastoral reflections on such a pertinent and persistent topic, this tome is an impressive and important addition to past studies of religion, gender, and sexuality.

To begin, Stephen Hunt’s Introduction to the work is such an insightful and illuminating foray into the field and its disciplinary parameters that it is able to stand as an academic paper on its own. Hunt begins by explicating the two opposing poles of Christian responses to non-heterosexuality and non-monogenderism (those conservative Christians who employ a discourse of medicalised pathology, and those liberal Christians who employ a discourse of genetic determinism), while also recognising the complexity of responses between this liberal-conservative divide. Examining the biblical exegetical and hermeneutical strategies that theologically support these views’ clerical applications, there then follows a discussion of the neglected concerns of LBT Christians in the face of the overwhelming body of literature on the lived experiences of Christian gay men. Although three of the nine papers exclusively discuss the relationship between certain aspects of Christianity and gay male sexuality, Hunt’s introductory call for studies on the intersection between Christianity and LBT individuals comes to be expertly realised throughout this volume. As an introduction to a fascinating yet pressing subject, Hunt’s contribution both informs and resonates.

Following the Introduction, Michael Keenan explores the role that religion and sexuality plays in the lives and workings of gay male Anglican clergy. To the various clergymen whom Keenan sociologically examined, sexuality is an intrinsic component of their personal identity and vocational performance. Reviewing the scholastic literature regarding gay Anglican clergy and the politics of identity, Keenan employs Giddens’s theory of authenticity in late modernity, Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to identity in everyday life, and Plummer’s concept of ‘storied’ identity to characterise the ‘embroidered’ influence sexuality has on clergymen’s religiosity (p. 35). Unsupported by the church and hidden from its ecclesiastical structures, it is intriguing that many clergymen believe their private homosexuality influences their public pastoral leadership in positive ways.

Chapter 2 sees Kristin Aune analyse the attitudes of evangelical Christians in the UK towards male homosexuality. In contrast to the view that evangelical churches wholeheartedly condemn gay sexuality, Aune examines how evangelicals combine ‘sympathy with the view that homosexuality is and should be a subordinate form of sexuality’ (p. 41). Aune further employs a sophisticated form of theorising when bringing the analytical concept of gender to bear on the study of evangelicalism and sexuality; through participant-observation and interview study of an evangelical congregation, Aune maintains that the evangelical subordination of homosexuality is due not to sexual genital
The interplay between contemporary Christianity, gender, and sexuality continues in Marta Trzebiatowska’s subsequent chapter. This erudite essay highlights the similarities in discourse between the mobilisation of a politicised lesbian identity in the ‘coming out’ narratives of young gay Polish women, and the mobilisation of a politicised spiritual identity in the ‘call’ narratives of Catholic novice nuns. Trzebiatowska makes known how both groups of women are seen radically to challenge Polish society’s norms and suppositions regarding gender and sexuality, such as compulsory heterosexuality and the hegemonic discourse of the assumption of femininity and motherhood. These women in turn experience societal discrimination, trauma, and rejection. This chapter is thus highly important in its attempts to provide resources for Polish nuns and lesbians, helping to reconcile their womanhood with their religiosity and/or sexuality.

In Chapter 4, Alex Toft explores the unique and precarious situation of bisexuals within contemporary Christianity. Through surveying sixty bisexual Christian men and women in the UK, Toft studies the way in which bisexual Christians define their identity, their sexuality, their religiosity and spirituality, their lived experience, the meaning that Christianity holds for them, and their position within their respective congregation and the wider Christian institution. Overall, the strength of Toft’s chapter lies in his remarkable presentation of a uniquely bisexual Christian subjectivity.

In the vein of ‘gendering’ and ‘queering’ Christianity, ‘transgendering’ Christianity is the task of the following chapter by Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip and Michael Keenan. Although this chapter is more a review of the existing literature on transgenderism, rather than a sociological account, Yip and Keenan do a wonderful job in attempting to reconcile Christianity with the phenomenon and experience of transgenderism. Their introductory consideration of the multifacetedness of transgenderism is indeed the most interesting and informative part of this book, expertly describing the lived realities of transsexuality, transvestism, transgenderism, and intersexuality, further disassembling the discourse of gender dimorphism and the homo-/heterosexual binary. Yip and Keenan then analyse conservative Christianity’s condemnation of transgenderism, and the hermeneutical strategies used to construct a subjective space of de-stigmatisation and biblical acceptance. Most importantly, Yip and Keenan believe transgender Christians are gifted in their intersectionality, contributing ‘significantly towards the expansion and enrichment of current understandings of gender, sexuality, and spirituality’ (p. 101).

The subsequent chapter, written by Hunt, extensively evaluates the mobilisation of human rights discourse within both the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) and its conservative Christian opposition in the UK. Hunt ultimately examines how secular human rights rhetoric interlinks with a Christian moralising discourse in both pro- and anti-gay and lesbian Christian activism, evincing a protracted battle between two opposing forces utilising the same discursive and politised strategies.

In Chapter 7, Richard O’Leary continues Hunt’s task of examining national politicisations of non-normative sexuality and Christianity by skilfully discussing the ethnoreligious context of Christian anti- and pro-gay activism in Northern Ireland. According to O’Leary, the issues surrounding a reconciliation of a Christian and non-heterosexual identity become exacerbated in Northern Ireland due to the rampant historical sectarianism between Catholics and Protestants. He concludes that sectarian divisions, issues of cross-denominational organisation, emotively charged evangelical language, and

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the militarisation of sectarian protest marches continue to resonate within the pro- and anti-gay Christian agenda.

Yvonne Aburrow’s ensuing chapter examines the connection of queer spirituality and theology to contemporary Christianity, finding various spiritual tropes that are consonant with both the queer and Christian spiritual experience (such as tribalism, justice, and liberation). Conversely, Aburrow also finds spiritual tropes that are in fact dissonant with Christianity and unique to a queer subjective positionality, such as ‘coming out’, ‘acting up’, finding the queer in the divine, and the divine in the queer. Overall, Aburrow argues for an inimitably queer spirituality distinguishable from the ‘mainstream’ religious traditions of which they are a part.

In Chapter 9, the work’s final chapter, Derek Jay discusses spiritual direction in LGBT communities. Jay’s essay, however, is more a polemicist tract than an academically rigorous paper, attempting to reconcile the perceived anti-Christian agenda of LGBT persons with some form of immanent life- and sex-affirming spirituality (which may or may not be Christian in kind). Nevertheless, Jay’s contribution does not wholeheartedly detract from the book’s accessibility, readability, or overall high quality. The preceding chapters’ solid sociological grounding, outstanding prose, and powerful insight on subjects deserving of greater scholastic attention make this work compulsory reading for all scholars and students of LGBT and gender studies, sociology, and studies in religion. The hope is that this work affects popular and public perceptions of Christianity and its relationship to non-heterosexual and non-monogendered persons.

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