

is that *which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise*" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II.56.3). If, on the other hand, some disposition of character is ordered toward wrongdoing, it is not a virtue but a vice, a defect of character. It is not conducive to overall flourishing and happiness, but to mental and physical decay, as well as moral and spiritual atrophy.

Positive psychology's account of moral virtue attempts the impossible task of defining its subject matter without referencing the concepts of good and evil. For example, Seligman and Peterson, in their seminal work *Character Strengths and Virtues*, identify six core virtues around which they categorize twenty-four measurable character strengths representative of a flourishing life. But they define the virtues and strengths in value-free terms. For example, prudence, they say, is the developed skill to devise plans, formulate efficacious means for their realization, maintain the resolve to see the plans through to the end, and avoid the kind of rashness that arises from preoccupation with short-term payoff at the expense of long-term gain. Prudence, by their account, is future directedness. The obvious problem with this definition of prudence is that it characterizes Osama bin Laden as accurately as Mother Theresa. So prudence must be more than the habit of

resolute future directedness—it must direct a person toward a future in which good is done and pursued and evil avoided. Therefore, inasmuch as empirical research claims to identify and measure those human habits that contribute to true happiness, it is not, in fact, identifying the presence and activity of positive psychology's self-defined, value-free traits, but the realization of true virtue. So either positive psychology does not measure qualities conducive of true happiness, or it relies on a value-rich account of virtue while setting forth merely a truncated account.

It would be a valuable scholarly project to integrate Seligman and Peterson's account of virtue with the moral insights derived from the classical account. It seems to me that relatively little would have to be omitted from the modern interpretation. The problem is not so much what they say about the virtues as what they do not say. This is where the nourishment of Catholic faith and philosophy may play an important role in strengthening and, in some respects, correcting the field of positive psychology.

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Living the Truth in Love:
Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction
edited by Janet E. Smith and Father Paul Check

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 328 pages, ISBN 978-1-62164-060-8

This volume has received high praise from Archbishop Allen Vigneron, Cardinals Donald Wuerl and Seán O'Malley, George Weigel, Helen Alvaré, and Robert P. George. In the foreword, Vigneron describes the book as both a response to the 2014 Synod of Bishops on the Family and as a practicum for situating same-sex attraction in the family structure (8). Janet Smith is a well-respected

theologian of ethics and Rev. Paul Check a revered pastor and the executive director of Courage International, an apostolate that organizes support groups and other resources for people with same-sex attraction (SSA). In the preface, the editors explain how the contributors present "good pastoral approaches to those who experience same-sex attraction." They point out that the "different

positions” presented in the book are meant to help readers learn from those who experience SSA while providing a “sound grounding upon which to build.” Check indicates that the book should encourage “accompaniment” and “intellectual charity” (12–18).

Janelle Hallman’s pastoral reflection is especially moving and could well have been the book’s introduction. She points out that statements such as “homosexuality is wrong” inadvertently and falsely “blanket” the entire person, causing individuals with SSA to “become a thing of shame,” trapping them in “an ongoing state of internalized badness.” She calls for “radical unconditional acceptance” of those with SSA, especially young persons, and presents a number of practical steps for how this might be accomplished (225–239).

Hallman’s pastoral attitude is not consistently expressed by the other authors. While the contributors in the theoretical section present those with SSA as “morally precious persons, made in God’s image” (24), they disagree on the viability of the spiritual-friendship movement: persons with SSA committed to one another while living chastely. These authors generally agree that, like “scoliosis and blindness,” SSA is not chosen but is a “defect” that might not be “curable in this lifetime” (30–32).

Some contributors rely heavily on research on reparative therapy conducted by Joseph Nicolosi, Leanne Payne, and Elizabeth Moberly, which presents SSA as a “wound” that festers from early childhood. While this concept has received widespread attention and acceptance in some circles, the authors fail to critique its reasoning and exclude a wider range of theories about the origins of a homosexual orientation. They conclude that “a man who is sexually attracted to other men is a man who suffers desires that cut across the grain of what he truly is” (123). Those with SSA are characterized as seeking a homosexual encounter which amounts to nothing more than an “exhausting search for a beauty that is dreamed of but always pursued in vain” (136). Furthermore, Timothy Lock’s examination of reparative therapy concludes that “many individuals have successfully completed this

type of therapy resulting in a change of their sexual attraction” (264). There is no mention, however, of the balanced critiques of this therapy or how its original authors, along with numerous mental specialists, have repudiated it. The book also uses the context of reparative therapy to present multiple disorders associated with SSA. While some of this evidence is credible, no mention is made of other factors that might cause such disorders—for example, a narcissistic personality—or any satisfactory data about persons with SSA who live balanced and psychologically healthy lives.

The testimonies are moving but generally sad, and their protagonists understand SSA as a burden that “God allowed” (157). While prayer is mentioned as an important tool for gaining a sense of relief and freedom, some speak of rage (156). The perplexity of these testimonies evidence the incredulous conclusion that individuals with SSA must “trust that God has given the bishops in charge of our care more wisdom on our sexual identity than we have ourselves” (166). While bishops certainly play a critical role in providing moral and pastoral guidance, this testimonial borders on an abdication of one’s conscience and its proper formation.

Moving as they are, these testimonies have a tendency to overstate SSA. For example, Robin Beck confesses that “it seems obvious to me that homosexuality is one of the sins that put the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet” (177). Transgender persons are briefly mentioned but with little awareness of recent research regarding the origins of gender dysphoria.

There is some mention of the biblical presentations of homosexual acts, but the authors avoid a robust discussion of these texts in their historical and anthropological settings. The volume would have been greatly enhanced by a clear presentation of how and why biblical writers considered homosexual acts to be depraved, in contrast to understanding homosexuality as an orientation.

The authors who contribute to the pastoral section are generally sensitive to persons with SSA. While the essays reiterate Church teaching asserting that homosexuality is “disordered” and reaffirm her mandate that

people with SSA should be treated with pastoral respect and honor, it would have been helpful if they provided readers with a deeper explanation of the meaning of disorder. They also would also have done well to correct the misimpression that the Church considers SSA a psychological disorder, which implies that a person with SSA is intrinsically disordered.

In the afterword, Smith wisely writes that “there is no reason that any unmarried person, whether or not they live with SSA, should not be able to achieve love, fidelity, devotion and sacrifice in selfless chaste relationships” (328). This is a wonderful commentary that should help those with SSA as well as their families, friends, and church community. As one might expect in a volume with multiple authors, this posture does not represent each contributor equally. *Living the Truth in Love* will be helpful to those with SSA who find solace and support in Courage International,

but it will be a difficult read for those who reject the Church’s teachings on homosexuality. Gay pride is a hallmark of much of our culture and, if properly understood, contains the truth that homosexual persons are created in God’s image and deserve our support and respect. However, this volume will not receive a warm welcome by those who view gay pride as approval of homosexual acts. This observation is not meant to undermine the book, but to situate it for an audience who will find in it a welcome embrace. Others will think it is out of touch with their belief that homosexuality is ordinary and wholesome.

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