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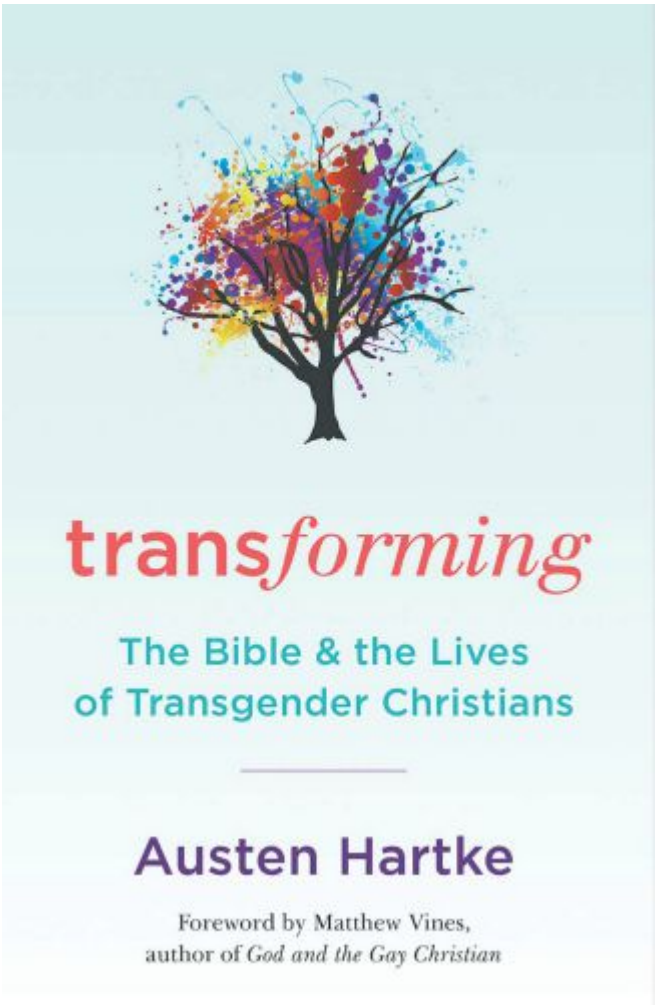
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Shortly before receiving Austen Hartke's *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* for review, a New York Times article announced " 'Transgender' Could Be Defined Out of Existence Under Trump Administration." It revealed that President Donald Trump's administration was considering narrowly defining gender as a biological, immutable condition determined by genitalia at birth, the most drastic move yet in a government-wide effort to roll back protections of transgender people under federal civil rights law.

Overnight, calls quadrupled to TransHelp, the suicide hotline by and for transgender people. This "leak" may have been an election device to pander to Trump supporters, but it underlines both the fragility of this marginalized group and the contempt with which portions of our society treat us. Into this cultural divide comes this book by a transgender theologian to help readers visualize a more inclusive Christianity.

I've been working toward a more inclusive society for transgender people for 25 years, and specifically with faith communities for the past 10 years. Hartke's accessible storytelling about both Scripture and transgender lives is impressive. He catalogs the stakes for transgender people who don't receive family acceptance, including the story of Leelah Alcorn, who stepped in front of a truck in 2014 after being forced by her parents to attend a Christian conversion therapy to "cure" her gender identity issues.

He continues with a "Beginner's Guide to Gender," which does a really good job for those who need to be introduced to the subject. It's current enough to give even old timers like me new information, while being readable and interesting. Hartke then delves into some problems with the way evangelical theologians are looking at gender, because an introduction is needed to what the problems are before getting to the solutions.



TRANSFORMING: THE BIBLE AND THE LIVES OF TRANSGENDER CHRISTIANS
Austen Hartke
225 pages; Westminster John Knox Press
$16.00

In Chapter 2, Harke starts teaching theology how I have always wanted to teach, but have never been sure I got right: teaching like Jesus. Hartke deftly weaves biblical stories with the life stories of real transgender people, including himself. It was here that I came to believe *Transforming* would be as outstanding a tool for cisgender parents and pastors as it would be for transgender Christians like me, who can use some tools to find their way in the Christian community. Through the next nine chapters, Hartke shows many ways the Bible urges us to embrace those who are not like us, just as Jesus did. That is, telling the parable and letting us find our own conclusion.

One of the effects of seeing biblical teachings revealed in these transgender lives is that you begin to understand the riches that transgender people can bring to a faith

community. What the parables teach is that transgender Christians are not asking to be included for our own sake, but because we bring true gifts to the table. I don't want to shortchange the theological gender answers revealed though these chapters, which are impressive, but there is an alchemy here that warms the heart and nourishes the head.

Having (hopefully) convinced us that the bridge between Christians and transpeople needs to be built, Hartke takes us into a nuts-and-bolts chapter of the "Trans-Affirming Toolbox." This has real action items for one's church, school and neighborhood to help bring about healing from a shameful history of injustice.

Hartke expresses the heart of his book in the conclusion, writing:

> At the messy, lovable, chaotic potluck that is life in the church, transgender Christians have a lot to bring to the table. We can help the church see Scripture through different lenses; we can help other Christians understand their own gender identities; we can help breakdown the barriers created by sexism and misogyny; we can remind people of the diversity of God's creation and of God's unlimited nature; we can stand in the gaps and bridge middle spaces where others may be uncomfortable or uniformed; we can help make connections between the sacred and the secular, making the church more relevant for the world; and we can provoke people into asking questions about themselves and about God that they may never have thought to ask before.

I hope Hartke's first book connects with readers. It can help heal what is broken about enforced gender normativity in our religious institutions, and, in turn, heal what is broken in our religious communities for queer people of faith.

[Hilary Howes is the founder of TransCatholic a Roman Catholic apostolate to support the dignity and inclusion of transgender laity. Information can be found at TransCatholic.org.]

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