Culture
Book Reviews



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by Rachel Rastelli

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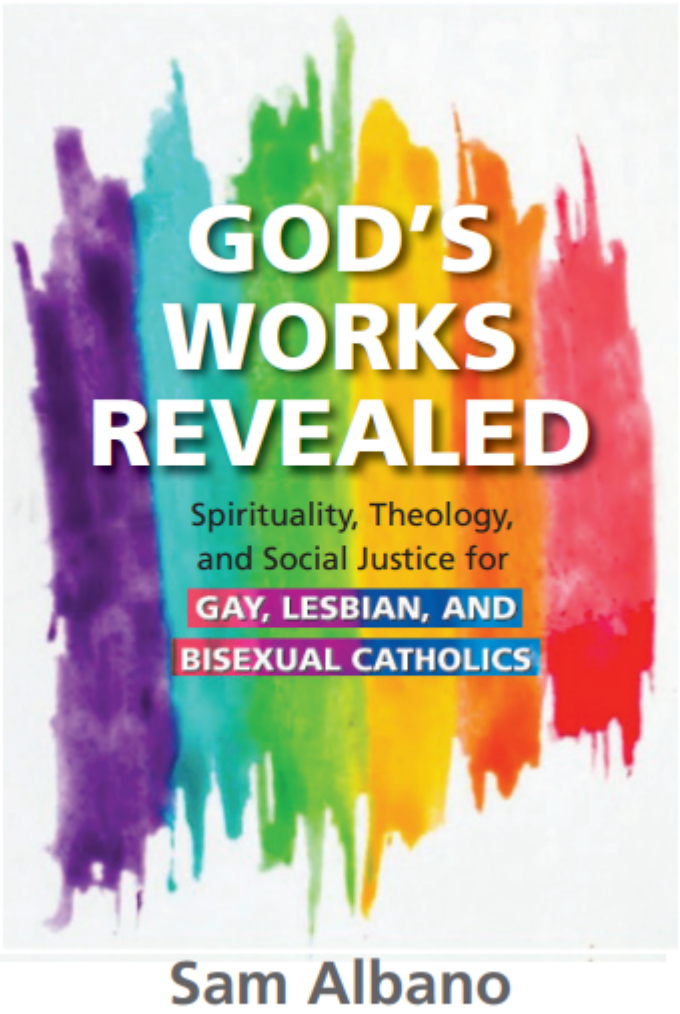
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In *God's Works Revealed*, author Sam Albano takes us on a well-sourced journey of the history of the Catholic Church's teaching on the LGBTQIA+ experience. Sam currently serves as the national secretary of DignityUSA which "works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities — especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual and intersex persons — in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support."

God's Works Revealed: Spirituality, Theology, and Social Justice for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Catholics is written for both straight and non-straight people. As a queer, millennial Catholic, one of the main issues I perceive in the Catholic Church today is the lack of education on all things LGBTQIA+ from the people in positions of authority within the church. Decisions are being made and statements are being released by people who do not know what they are talking about because they are not in communion with the LGBTQIA+ community in any significant capacity. In speaking of what they do not know, church officials have created confusion that has led to a lot of pain.



God's Works Revealed: Spirituality, Theology, and Social Justice for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Catholics
Sam Albano
256 pages; Paulist Press
$29.95

The pain of belonging to a religion that does not want to recognize your humanity is apparent throughout *God's Works Revealed*. However, the author remains respectful in his expressions of dissatisfaction and hurt. This book is not someone railing against an institution; it is a sincere attempt at dialogue from a viewpoint that has largely been ignored by those in positions of authority within the Catholic Church.

Too often LGBTQIA+ people are misrepresented as rebels who seek to destroy or desecrate church teaching and tradition. The author demonstrates what I have found to be true in my own community of Catholic LGBTQIA+ friends: a love for fellow humans, a yearning for truth and years of prayer and study of what the Catholic Church teaches. There are *12* pages of sources listed at the end of this book. *God's Works Revealed* proves that LGBTQIA+ Catholics are not entering conversations about dogma and theology uneducated or unprepared, and it is time non-LGBTQIA+ Catholics had the decency to do the same.

Knowing in advance that Albano and I have differing conclusions about church teaching on the sexual act, I expected to be somewhat put off by this book. But I was unprepared for how impactful it would be to have someone speaking within the context of church teaching *from and for* my viewpoint as a queer person — an all too rare phenomenon in Catholic media.

Since most church teaching and documents on the LGBTQIA+ experience are written by people who are straight, they tend to sound like "us against them" statements. This is not to say that straight people cannot effectively minister to people within the LGBTQIA+ paradigm; rather, it shows that when *all* teaching and ministry for LGBTQIA+ persons comes *only* from straight people it is not life-giving or effective. The queer community are important members of the body of Christ, and leadership in the Catholic Church does a great disservice by ignoring us or not seeking to spiritually shepherd and strengthen us. The systems currently in place are not working.

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To be honest, I am not sure how I feel about this book. I appreciate the lengths the author was willing to go to in providing people with accurate information: on the experience of being LGBTQIA+ and Catholic, how the phrasing of church teaching has affected that experience (largely in a negative capacity) and how it is all closely linked with social justice. Whenever I am presented with the opportunity to speak on being queer and Catholic, I worry that what I say will be received as me trying to prove I am worthy of being alive, that I am worthy of participating in society and

worthy of being a part of the Catholic Church. Books like *God's Works Revealed* are certainly necessary, but I can't help wondering if they feed into the mindset that LGBTQIA+ individuals have to "earn their place" here.

Albano and I have studied many of the same church documents. I am sure we have raised many of the same concerns within our prospective communities. Yet we have managed to come to "opposing" conclusions in several ways, even with our openness and desire for truth. Typically, this would be where we go to church teaching to "settle" the discussion, but I imagine Albano and I are united in our apprehension of trusting an institution that has been the source of so much misinformation, misrepresentation and harm when it comes to the LGBTQIA+ community. If the Catholic Church wishes to remain authoritative, then the people running it must cease being pastorally irresponsible and needlessly blunt when it comes to LGBTQIA+ matters.

Even though we have differing opinions, I trust Albano has come to his conclusions after years of prayer and agonizing — indeed, this book is proof! — and I ask the same trust and consideration be given to me. I do not see it as a conflict of interest or a betrayal of my belief system to encourage people to read this book. The Catholic Church is not meant to be an echo chamber. We need to be listening to *all* the members in order to truly love and care for each other.

I could have passed over this opportunity or written this book off as leftist propaganda. I didn't. You shouldn't either.

Author's note: *I am aware that the non-LGBTQIA+ experience is too broad to be accurately described with the terms "straight" or "heterosexual" but lack of widely understood terms and a need for brevity have forced me to use them in this instance.*

A version of this story appeared in the **March 31-April 13, 2023** print issue under the headline: New book on queer Catholicism highlights need for centering queer voices.