



Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith

Eve Tushnet

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In this first book from an openly lesbian and celibate Catholic, widely published writer and blogger Eve Tushnet recounts her spiritual and intellectual journey from liberal atheism to faithful Catholicism and shows how gay Catholics can love and be loved while adhering to Church teaching.

Eve Tushnet was among the unlikeliest of converts. The only child of two atheist academics, Tushnet was a typical Yale undergraduate until the day she went out to poke fun at a gathering of philosophical debaters, who happened also to be Catholic. Instead of enjoying mocking what she termed the "zoo animals," she found herself engaged in intellectual conversation with them and, in a move that surprised even her, she soon converted to Catholicism.

Already self-identifying as a lesbian, Tushnet searched for a third way in the seeming two-option system available to gay Catholics: reject Church teaching on homosexuality or reject the truth of your sexuality.

Gay and Catholic is the fruit of Tushnet's searching: what she learned in studying Christian history and theology and her articulation of how gay Catholics can pour their love and need for connection into friendships, community, service, and artistic creation.

Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith **Details**

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From Reader Review *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith* for online ebook

Grant Hartley says

This is one of two books (the other being Wesley Hill's *Washed and Waiting*) that I am able to recommend almost without qualification to both 1) straight Christians who wish to dive into the experiences of gay and lesbian Christians and 2) gay and lesbian Christians who want to dive into what it looks like to follow Jesus (and the Church's historical teaching on sexual ethics) well.

I could seriously gush on and on about how incredibly helpful and refreshing this book was, but I will try to keep it short. The two biggest strengths of *Gay and Catholic* as I see them are an emphasis on figuring out the "yeses" of the gay Christian life and not just the "nos" and an eye to addressing the practicalities of gay celibate life (What do I do when I have a crush? What does it look like for me to not only have a community and support system, but also be a part of supporting others? Intentional Christian communities? How can I make my church a more welcoming place for gay/same-sex attracted people?).

The book is written taking for granted the Church's traditional teaching on sexual ethics (sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman for a lifetime), so those looking to dive into apologetics on that issue will be disappointed. The book begins at the end of the answer to the question "What does the Bible say?" and instead addresses the question, "How do we then live?"

The book also requires little to no "translating" for it to be helpful for Protestant readers; oftentimes, Tushnet does the translating for you. Seriously, I recommend that this book be placed in church libraries, LGBT* resource centers, ministry offices, etc. Appendix 3 in the back (on how to make the church a more welcome place for gay/same-sex attracted people) is worth the price of the whole book. Seriously, buy it; I will be re-reading it for years to come.

Amanda says

I really recommend this for anyone with a traditional Christian view on homosexuality (which is to say, that those with same-sex attraction should be celibate) and also for those interested in how singleness can feel to Christians. She supports vowed friendships, which I don't know much about, but it's an interesting idea - not just for gay people, but other single and even married people. There are a lot of ideas about community and commitment to people besides the heterosexual nuclear family that will be percolating in my mind. Recommended.

Kate says

This was a cross between a memoir and self-help. Ms. Tushnet presents an easy to read account of her story as a gay woman who converted to Catholicism and has chosen to remain celibate in accordance to the Church teachings. I was drawn to this book to gain a better understanding of how she has paved her path. Many of the lessons she writes about can apply to anyone regardless of their sexual orientation. It is a great primer for those who are in church ministry of any kind to get a feel for the needs of same-sex attracted

Christians.

Peter Calabrese says

Excellent. At one point the author says some times you just have to start the conversation. This book does just that. Eve Tushnet want to let the world know that there are men and women with same sex attraction that want to live according to the Church's Teachings. New models of holiness need to be shown and this book gets that task rolling.

She gives a balanced look at the issues. She does not claim to have all the answers. Therefore the reader has to continue to think. I am sure that as she and others move forward there will be additional lessons learned will prompt new reflections. The book is one that causes us to think and rethink not doctrine but our modes of approach. She encourages straight people to have courage and she challenges all to put Christ at the center.

For those who are in Church ministry the book offers insights to keep in mind. Likewise sh offers insights for friends and family and fellow parishioners of men and women with same sex attraction.

Particularly interesting is the treatment of friendship which she says, and I agree, deserves some attention on the part of everyone. While not a scholarly work per se the references look quite good and I will certainly take her up on the suggestion to read about friendship - both classics and modern reflections.

I will certainly buy a copy for our parish Give a book take a book shelf and a couple of coopies to give out as needed.

Catherine says

Necessary, but not sufficient -- and that's not discrediting the book, that's demanding more of readers to seek out other voices besides Eve's own wonderful and generous story here. This book presents a lot of food for thought, especially on the subject of vocational seriousness about celibacy as opportunity, and on the virtues and beauty of same-sex love. I can see it being frustrating for people who need a more specifically Catholic/specifically Christian set of reflections. Like, it's really easy for me to see this book being helpful regardless of and outside of faith. Like another reviewer said, this works as a secular celibacy and does not directly invoke the contemplative tradition we associate with that. I don't think that's a weakness of this book. I think that's a story to be told elsewhere, but one that I'm glad this book was here to remind me I wanted. tl;dr: This is great. I want more.

Jaime K says

(Please note that when I say 'gay' I mean anyone with same-sex attraction, including bisexuals, just to keep it easier for me. I do not mean any offense to those with same-sex attraction who don't label themselves as gay/purely homosexual).

My rating is 3/5 because as a straight person, it gave me a bit of insight on gay Catholicism, but I feel like it

offers much more insight on what it means to be a child of God and one within the Catholic faith. That is, we all feel the need to love others and be loved in return. We can express that love in many non-sexual ways, even if secular society frowns upon some things if there isn't a "label" attached to them.

For a "gay Catholic" book I feel it's a bit "meh"; for a Catholic book on loving others and finding joy in our vocations (even when there are challenges), it's decent.

I heard about this from a guest or host on one of the Sirius/XM Catholic Channel shows. I'm not gay, but someone in my family is. Even more relevant, that someone is female. And, as Tushnet points out, it's more difficult to find anything on Catholic lesbians than it is on gay Catholic males. This is an important book for any Catholic in order to open our minds and hearts to what it actually means to accept our sexuality along with the Church's teachings.

Tushnet goes through her history and past with regards to family, sexual attraction, alcoholism, and religion. She provides great insight on theology that many tend to forget: agreeing with and accepting aspects of the faith does not always mean that you agree with the *leaders* and what they may say that does not directly relate to doctrine. It also does not mean always being happy with the teachings or even fully understanding them.

She is clear from the start that what worked for her in terms of a religious central focus, books/articles/other reading material, and spiritual direction may not necessarily work for others. She is very aware that healing methods and intellect are not universal, and that we sometimes have to go through trials and errors to come to terms with ourselves and our lives. It's an important thing to remember, no matter your orientation.

It is VERY important to guide others to the Catholic faith by answering questions that are actually asked, and not assuming we know what they're interested in, especially if they are gay. It's also important for people to keep in mind that they may indeed need therapy - though for any wounds received from the past and NOT for being homosexual.

Being single shouldn't be considered a vocation; what a person does while being single can be. Because not all vocations are based on sexual attraction. After all, those in the religious life may not have been initially called to celibacy; working in a pregnancy center is not limited to specific genders or attractions; friendship comes in all forms. All vocations have sacrifices, periods of loneliness, and many ways to love others. Based on that last bit, Tushnet brings forward a theme that "celibacy is not enough for gay people and that [they] must cultivate an outward looking spirituality, which seeks to love and serve others" (page 79). Non-homosexuals must also remember that 'being celibate' is indeed different for homosexuals and single heterosexuals, and not brush it off as if there aren't different challenges.

There is historical evidence of same-sex kinship/friendships, to where families were joined together. It's important to not let the fear that such friendships will become sexual hinder gays from forming such relationships and straights from encouraging them. Sexual sin can occur no matter one's sexuality, and close friendships are seen in religious orders, people who became saints, and the Bible itself. Additionally, the love of friends can further one's love of Christ.

Straights must ensure that unmarried [gay] friends are integral parts of our lives by continuously welcoming them into our homes. Gays in turn should reciprocate, and welcome married couples and full families into their homes. As Tushnet says, "Surrender control in favor of love" and "Knitting single people more closely into families is one of the biggest things the Christian churches could do to change the culture." (page 126). Being able to feel sympathy and solidarity with each other can help to prevent bitterness and resentment

about our own situations.

- Tushnet brings up gay Catholics who I didn't even know were as such, including Oscar Wilde and Morrissey, the lead singer of The Smiths.
 - She helps the reader to remember that when we believe we're closer to understanding the inherent meaning of an object (including living beings), we're noticing the fingerprints of the Catholic God.
 - A person can indeed be gay and Catholic. Thinking that there is something wrong with you and that your homosexuality needs to be "healed" can hurt you and the people around you more than accepting that you can't force an inner part of you to change.
 - Anyone can deny what erotic attractions want without denying themselves love. But we also must remember that expressing love is not erotic/sexual in nature, especially since gay people receive that stigma.
 - Intimate same-sex friendships are essential for our growth, personal understanding (and can solidify our sexual identity), and overall health.
 - Christians, no matter their sexual orientation, cannot push God/church teachings on others. Doing so is harassment and not being a witness to the Gospels.
 - There are insights on the challenges both gays and straights face, whether or not they are celibate.
 - In the appendices, Tushnet explains common challenges to gay Catholics and provides suggestions that can be helpful.
-

Mario And says

A good read for everyone

- Courageously honest
 - Resonated with me as a wife, mother, and practicing Catholic in need of much more practice
 - Refreshingly optimistic about alternative lifestyles including committed friendships
 - Inspirational for me as a woman, a friend, a wife, a Catholic, a good neighbor...
-

Annie says

Wesley Hill spoke highly of it.

Michael says

Put succinctly, this is a hard book, but the type of hard that reminds me of Eustace Scrubb in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* compare baptism to picking a scab: "It hurts like billy-oh but it is such fun to see it coming away." Tushnet offers firm but feeling correctives for the oligarchy of narratives that contemporary American culture endlessly parrots about sociality and sexuality. Consistent with this approach, she grounds her words in her own particular life, exposing to the reader her struggles with alcohol and God and her (perhaps surprising) relative lack of struggle with her gender and sexual orientation.

Among the stories dismantles are the whole spectrum of universal sexuality origin stories from "born this

way" to psycho-autobiography of abuse and/or gender non-conformity; the unquestioned primacy of romantic love among forms of socialization; and the conflation of calling, ease, and happiness. More typically conservative readers could be challenged by her unabashed praise for parts of the gay community and her acceptance of her own sexual attractions, while more typically liberal readers could be challenged by her stories of volunteering at crisis pregnancy centers, her willingness to acknowledge potential fluidity in human sexuality, and--of course--her dedication to celibacy in accordance with Catholic teaching.

Further, while she approaches her subject matter from a Catholic perspective, she recognizes that the symptoms of America's social diseases (pun intended) afflict each of us in different ways according to personality, social location, and life history. Cures for our individual brands of brokenness cannot be discovered by browsing a book. Tushnet's book, therefore, consciously seeks to orient the reader toward a mindedness of vocation, of finding the forms of sacrificial love (primarily an elevated, intimate friendship) that will serve to integrate us into community with our neighbors and God. And in that sense, I would heartily recommend her book to a much wider audience, including both those who puzzle over matters of sexuality and religion and those who simply wish to live a fuller life.

joseito says

i wanted to like this book.

i really did.

i feel badly responding negatively to it because i know a ton of people responded positively and i'm just like typical grouch me.

i guess the first thing i should say here is that eve is doing a tremendously brave thing here, by writing her memoir, sharing her story, and proving that gay people can actually exist within the catholic church. that's a tremendous cross to bear, and i think she'll be thoroughly sanctified by doing just that much.

my problems with this book bleed out into a lot of larger issues that have nothing to do with gay issues specifically, but rather how we think about sex, vocation, etc. and the christian life. i think there's a lot of wisdom that eve either isn't aware of in the christian tradition or doesn't entirely integrate into her view, and it's to the detriment of her project.

celibacy is traditionally the marian counterpart to the marthan vocation of marriage. it's a total consecration of the self to God, that enables a more complete friendship with Him than marriage does. the celibate life, on the traditional view (read the church fathers!) is just higher than the married life.

a couple things flow from this naturally. first is that vocational discernment is easier than we think it is, because broadly the goal should be to find out whether or not you are suited to celibacy, and then marry if you are not (instead of trying to be married from the get-go or waiting for some burning bush, which are the two options on offer). second is that the celibate life is generally speaking more contemplative, ordered toward prayer (ora et labora), and heavenly than the more secular concerns of the married.

the single biggest problem that i have with eve's book - and with a ton of the singlehood writing i see coming out of likeminded writers, many of which are not gay - is that it is a purely secular singlehood/celibacy that is being proposed. it's not a celibacy that's being elevated to the marian state; it's basically marthan, busy about

worldly affairs, instead of sitting directly at the feet of the Lord. i mean, traditionally, that's the precise thing that gives celibacy its distinctive power, its distinctive role in the church, its entire raison d'etre, and so on.

we can't articulate why our priests are celibate anymore because we don't get this. it's just a lifestyle choice among many, we guess. we *must* reclaim this richer, fuller understanding of celibacy. and that's sort of fundamentally my beef with this book.

for ramifications of this secularity on eve's view of friendship in the book, and why she can't make sense of aelred of rielvaux's spiritual friendship, see here:

<http://farefwd.com/2015/01/verso-lalt...>

Sarah says

Meet one of the hardest books I've been asked to read and one of the most important books I've read and one that should be a must-read for everyone today.

Being gay isn't just a hot topic, it's a hard topic. I mean, who am I to speak of it? But then again, who am I to keep quiet?

This topic affects us all: it impacts those who face same-sex attraction, whether they're the ones struggling with it or the people on the sidelines watching and (hopefully) supporting.

Tushnet has, in just over 200 pages, given us a glimpse that's raw and challenging. It's not easy to read, in part because, wow, she's not so different from me, is she? It's honest and raw and it will make you examine assumptions you might not have even known you were carrying.

While the title may lead you to think that this book only applies to your reading list if you are gay, know someone who's gay, or have an interest in the topic, let me toss you this: I gained as much insight about my own vocation as a married woman as I did about Tushnet's vocation as a celibate gay. There was a relational quality in her writing, one that acknowledged the others in her life. Her self-awareness extends and invites us in, forcing us to consider who we are.

This book is not light reading, but I couldn't put it down. It's a book you deserve to read.

Emily Hartung says

I really enjoyed this insightful read. This is Eve's story she is not speaking in generalities but about her own experience's. I think this was really important to remember in reading this. I enjoyed her honesty. Understanding her struggles with and overcoming of alcoholism played a large role in her life and yet she never stopped searching and found her faith. I found this to be a beautiful reminder that it is our mess that leads us to Jesus and helps us find our own apostolate and unique way of serving.

Claire Gilligan says

Exceeded expectations by a long shot! Wow.

Tushnet doesn't try to explain or defend the Church's teaching; resources for that are found in her appendix. What she does instead is tease out some practical helps she's found in living out this teaching, both for gays trying to be celibate for religious reasons, and for straight people / families who can always be better at loving our gay brethren, especially those who are single/celibate.

Her chapters on friendship (a good third of the book) are very possibly the best I've ever read on the subject, and her words are relevant to every friendship, full stop.

I kind of want to buy this book for half the people I know! Just because it's so good (again, especially the friendship bits). If you read one book by a Christian, celibate gay person, it should probably be this one.

Elizabeth says

Update: I've been thinking of recommending this book and wanted to reread in case my impressions have changed over the past couple years. If anything, in a year that's been so fraught with controversy over the Church's pastoral approach to issues of sexuality, I appreciate Tushnet's honesty, humility (especially in making clear that her experience shouldn't be taken as *The Universal Experience of Gay, Celibate Catholics*) and compassion even more. And she's still wickedly funny.

First off, I think this was a phenomenal, brave and compassionate book -- must reading for any Catholics (gay or not) trying to navigate through today's society. I think there is plenty of room in Eve's candid discussion points for debate and disagreement, and I think that discussion is healthy for the Church*, especially as she kind of shatters both the typical "liberal" and "conservative" Catholic stereotypes. (I mean, she's a celibate, lesbian, Catholic convert who volunteers at a pro-life, crisis pregnancy center while making her living writing and speaking as a self-described "professional homosexual." Mind explode yet?)

I could see some points in the book as spurring the most controversy/discussion among orthodox Catholics, including:

- her definition of vocation, at least as it comes across in the book
- the idea of chaste, committed, same-sex friendships
- her hope for theological development in the Church's language on homosexuality (namely, whether homosexuality in itself is "intrinsically disordered") -- albeit while stressing that development in doctrine doesn't mean *change* in doctrine.

So yes, room for conversation/debate, but I very much believe that the discussions Eve proposes could take place within the realm of orthodoxy.

Overall, the highest praise I can give Eve Tushnet for putting her heart into this book is that if I ever had a child come out as gay, I would hope he or she had a mentor like Eve. She reminds us all that the life of a gay, celibate Catholic is not one of solely negatives -- what you can't have -- and anonymity, but still has life-

giving possibility. The life of abundance promised by Christ is open to all.

*you hear that, FUS?! I'm still appalled that they've kept her off campus.

ps -- I snickered a lot while reading. This is very funny, human, heartfelt writing!

Fr. Peter Mottola says

A poignant conversation story, quite frankly the best book on celibacy I've ever read, and a brilliant thesis on how the Church can become a welcoming environment for those who are gay while upholding Tradition. And it had me laughing so hard you would have thought I was reading Dave Barry.

This book is well worth your time if either homosexuality or Christianity is something important to you, and if both are, then this is absolutely indispensable reading. Eve Tushnet is a celibate gay Catholic who upholds the Church's teachings on marriage and thus finds herself in the difficult position of being looked upon as suspect (at best) by Christians who don't understand why someone would continue to self-identify as gay while at the same time being at odds with most gay communities. This is a difficult road: "I've never been ashamed of being gay that I can recall, but there have been many times when the frequent small, grinding humiliations of explaining my celibacy left me feeling worn down, resentful, and equal parts self-righteous and ashamed."

In order to help gay people live out their vocation, the Church needs to be a place "where we can be honest and where we can begin to come out to ourselves and to others in a space that may be safer than our homes and families." While many Christians are ready to help those who want to wholly renounce their former homosexual identity (Tushnet cites the "ex-gay" movement and apostolates like Courage), these approaches have been found helpful by some but not by all. She stresses that her experience has not been one of "struggling with same-sex attraction;" rather the "reason I continue to call myself gay," she writes, is because "being in love with women has usually made me a better person." The Church needs to welcome those who have found meaning within their gay relationships, although God will call such people to change the way they express their love. Drawing on a deep spirituality centered on the Cross, Tushnet writes: "the sacrifice God wants isn't always the sacrifice you wanted to make. And when you know how ready you are to sacrifice a great deal, *as long as you get to do it on your terms*, it can feel especially painful and unfair when God asks you for something different, a sacrifice you never wanted. Good gay relationships are often sacrificial. They are loyal, vulnerable, forms of loving service, and a school for humility and forgiveness. But they aren't the sacrifice God is calling you to make." But we in the Church can hardly expect people to rise to such a challenge without our support. "Sexual wholeness is more a property of communities or churches than it is of individuals."

At root her proposal is a re-evaluation of how we in the Church talk about vocations. "Our refusal to honor or even imagine important vocations [for laypeople] other than marriage causes a huge amount of pain, loneliness, and a sense of worthlessness." Along the way Tushnet deftly points out the many ways in which the experiences of celibate gay Christians have parallels with those living other vocations, making her proposal relevant for gay and straight alike. She captures well the peculiar anxieties of this state in life: "Never knowing that there's somebody who will always take your call. Asking yourself who your emergency contact should be, rather than filling in the name without thinking about it. Feeling like you're burdening people when you need them, [...] even when you're really seriously in need." She quotes Joshua Gonnerman, who starkly expresses the problem: "The person who lives celibacy in the world has, in her or his life, the

least and frailest support structures of all; yet he or she is expected to live chastity with the most general guidance and the fewest concrete examples."

What, then, can be done? Tushnet's answer (and I'm fully convinced of this myself) is that there must be ways for celibate people to become deeply involved in family life. "Knitting single people more closely into families is one of the biggest things the Christian churches could do to change the culture." She quotes Wesley Hill who recounts that "the 'after 30' friendships that I've made with married people have all depended in large measure on my married friends' treating me not as a frequent guest but like an uncle to their children." This requires families to welcome into the life of their homes celibate single persons, who in turn are called to be more radically available to their married friends. "For single laypeople living alone, it might be worth asking: Are there ways I could get a little closer to offering the on-call love my married and parenting friends so often must provide?" Tushnet admits that this "means giving up a lot of the perks that come with single life" and embracing many of the icky, gooey, sticky realities that come part-and-parcel with small children. "This is the price of admission to friendship with parents. It is totally worth it, but be prepared."

I got a lot out of reading this book, and highly recommend it to each and every one of you who have enough interest in the subject to have read all the way to the bottom of this review. I imagine that the primary audience, those who "find beauty, mutual aid, and solidarity in gay life, even though we believe we've found something much greater in Christ," will understand it on an experiential level that will make it resonate even more deeply. I hope that some day soon someone will write a book for straight celibate people that's this good and this honest. Eve Tushnet has given us something exceedingly well-written, thoroughly funny, and prophetic.
