



Catholic Theology of Marriage in the Era of HIV and AIDS: Marriage for Life

Emily Reimer-Barry

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Marriage for Life begins by listening to the lived experiences of Catholic, married, HIV-positive women, in order to better understand their struggles. The eight women interviewed in Chicago, Illinois, USA, shared their stories of marriage, of family life, of church involvement, and of living with HIV. Their candid reflections offer a fresh and grounded perspective on the challenges of living with HIV in a US context. After listening to and learning from these women's experiences, Reimer-Barry constructs a theology of Christian marriage that is life-giving in a world with AIDS. While Catholic teachings have developed and now affirm the equal dignity of women and men, troubling legacies of women's subordination remain embedded in liturgical practices and theological texts. Arguing that self-care is an indispensable component of a healthy marriage, Reimer-Barry constructs a life-affirming theology of marriage that is sensitive to the struggles of her collaborators. She argues that *marriage for life* must promote the full flourishing of both partners, respect wives as equal partners with their husbands, and offer a coherent and empowering sexual ethic. Building on the wisdom of her collaborators' lived experiences, Reimer-Barry examines the need for a more adequate Catholic response to HIV and AIDS, arguing that church communities should promote comprehensive sexual education, affirm both abstinence and condom use for HIV prevention, and actively work to reduce stigmatizing behaviors within church communities. She also unpacks the implications of *marriage for life* for Catholic liturgical practice, marriage preparation programs, sexual education programs, and family ministries. Modeling her method on what Pope Francis calls the "art of accompaniment," Reimer-Barry argues that Catholic theology of marriage must be renewed and updated so that all can plainly understand that marriage is *for life*.

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