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Researching Singleness

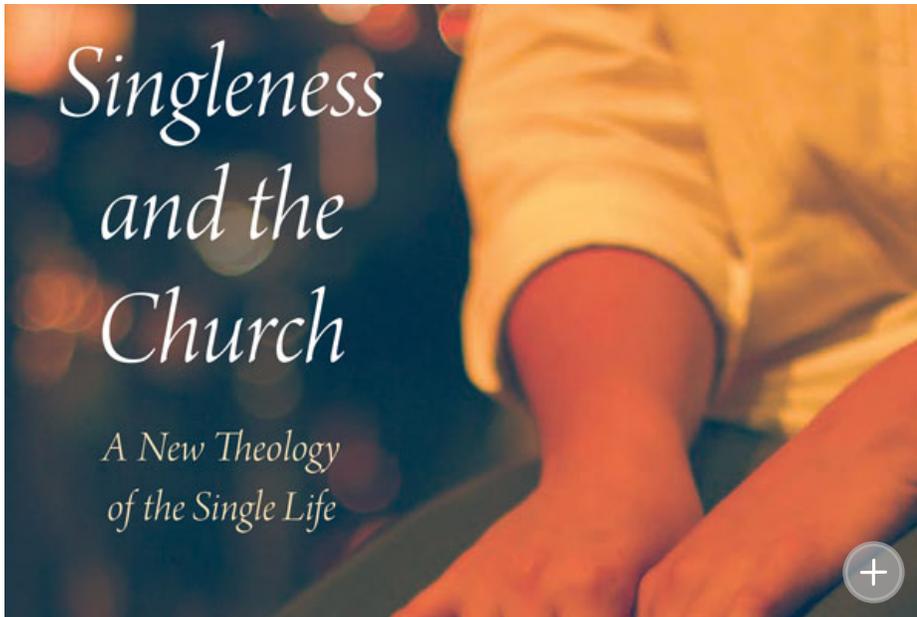
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Monday September 18, 2017

Researching Singleness

Those who never marry, the casually committed, the widowed, the divorced? these and other single people are being overlooked by the church today, Jana Bennett writes in her new book, 'Singleness and the Church: A New Theology of the Single Life,' from Oxford University Press.

Bennett, associate professor of religious studies, explores the Christian tradition of single life. The topic is timely as the single population continues to grow and now includes half of adults in the U.S. and a third of Catholics.

"More people are waiting to get married or deciding marriage isn't for them," Bennett said. "It's part of the culture and it's something the church needs to pay attention to."

Bennett says while Christians often treat singleness "primarily as a waiting game or a kind of purgatory on the way to marriage," they should take it seriously as a part of the Christian community.

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“This book is about celebrating what gifts singleness has to offer,” she said. “It’s not a book just for single people. It’s for the church as a whole to think through: What does it mean for us to take seriously the fact that engagements happen and widows happen? People find themselves in all these states of life, but that doesn’t negate that they are Christian brothers and sisters and follow the call of discipleship.”

Some of those gifts, she said, include new ways of understanding friendship or how we make choices or seek self-sufficiency. She said the book is a starting point for “restoring singleness, in all its amazing varieties, to its rightful place in Christian tradition.”

It devotes chapters to each of the “impermanent” states of life, as she describes them, because someone could, for instance, be single, then engaged, married, widowed and left a single parent. Each chapter includes a theologian who lived that type of single life, for instance the never-married Apostle Paul.

“My hope overall is to jump-start a conversation,” Bennett writes. “I think that Christians have thought more deeply and richly about states of singleness in other times and places than they tend to do now. I am gathering up some strands from tradition that have been dropped.”

Singleness and the Church builds on Bennett’s work, including her 2008 book on marriage and singleness titled, *Water is Thicker than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness*.

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