

de la liturgie ou sur les fondements créationnels de la liturgie ou encore sur la part que la liturgie pourrait prendre dans la réflexion suscitée par *Laudato si'?*» (284). Cela dit, plusieurs lignes de force se dégagent: entre autres, les références à Teilhard de Chardin (notions de «diaphanie», de «coextension du Verbe fait chair», etc.), la conception de l'Eucharistie comme «acte d'amour cosmique» et toute l'importance accordée à une conversion du regard permettant l'admiration, l'étonnement et l'émerveillement. En fin de compte, cet ouvrage met en lumière la possibilité de mobiliser les ressources de la liturgie afin de renouveler la compréhension chrétienne du rapport au monde, non pas selon une logique de domination, mais plutôt selon une logique de réception du don de la Création.

G. LEGRAND

Luk VANMAERCKE. *Zoveel toekomst: Over innovatie in geloofsgemeenschappen*. Antwerpen, Otheo, 2024. (17×24), 206 p. ISBN 978-90-8528-759-9. €27.99.

The review of this book, whose title loosely translates as *So Much Future: On Innovation in Faith Communities*, needs a preliminary remark, as this is a review for an academic journal and the book itself is not strictly academic. The book is more of a testimony to innovation in the Catholic Church in Flanders and the Netherlands and has no single author or editor. Moreover, it contains no footnotes or bibliography, as the academic community is not the book's primary audience. Lastly, it is rather flashy and well-designed, catering to a wide audience.

Why then devote an academic review to this book? For at least two reasons. The book raises important questions about the state of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands and Flanders. The aim of the title is clearly to counter (overly) pessimistic interpretations of the life of the Church in both geographical areas. The overall argument is that there are places (still) where "something happens". Moreover, the book incorporates contributions from both academic theologians and practitioners who employ scholarly methods to reflect on their own work and engagement in general, and on processes of innovation within their faith communities in particular. Especially the reference to academic authors and methods allows and even necessitates an academic review.

Overall, the book presents 20 projects of the *Space for Grace* initiative. This initiative funds innovative faith-based projects, sponsored through the philanthropic organisation *Picticus*. These projects range from initiatives aimed at creating a more welcoming church, to using church buildings differently in more inclusive or, for example, child-friendly ways. Each of these projects is rooted in the Christian tradition, yet they seek to translate that tradition into forms of "church-building" (in Dutch *kerkgebouw*) that speak to contemporary needs. Between these 20 projects, more substantive reflections (or interviews and group discussions) are placed to further discuss what is at stake and how the project of *Space for Grace* works. These reflections demonstrate and analyse (i) how initial ideas in local communities mature and how they are translated into concrete project applications, and (ii) how external advisors play an essential role in innovative processes, including the diverse functions they assume. In a similar vein,

the contributions highlight (iii) the significance of systematic monitoring and evaluation, (iv) the various approaches available for assessing the vitality of faith communities, and (v) what it entails for a Church to become a learning community capable of looking beyond itself. The book then concludes with a reflection on what to do with so much future, a reference to the title of the book thereby integrating the lessons learned from the variety of experiences.

Personally, I read this book as an encouraging perspective on the capacity of local faith communities to innovate. It demonstrates that these communities can chart new paths, and that they can significantly benefit from external and professional (and often also financial) support. In this sense, the book has significant theological relevance, both practically and academically. It foregrounds the complexity and necessity of different perspectives and concepts such as professionalism (of experts in communication and planning). Additionally, the book raises crucial questions about what it means for a faith community to be both vital and innovative, and how such communities can engage with traditional practices in ways that seek to renew them while simultaneously remaining connected to the broader, universal Church.

As a reviewer with a background in systematic theology and ecclesiology, I nevertheless want to raise the question of why the authors regularly feel the need to emphasise both the synodal nature of their projects, and the academic relevance and support for what they do. While synodality is a topical concept, innovative projects are not necessarily synodal (in the sense of being participatory or engaging the wider community), just as synodality is itself not necessarily innovative (it remains a practice deeply embedded in the tradition of the Church). Moreover, with regard to the use of the word academic in the book, other publications on the *Space for Grace* projects, such as the substantive booklet edited by Miriam Zimmer and Cyra Gendig, are indispensable to get a fuller picture of what the *Space for Grace* projects are exactly about. The book I discuss here, *Zoveel toekomst*, should therefore be seen both within the broader framework of the *Space for Grace* project and on its own terms, as it is rather idiosyncratic. It invites reflection and introduces readers to the projects in an efficient way, but it is not academic and should use that concept with more caution.

I account for this earlier point of criticism by noting that the book occasionally leaves the reader unsure about the precise extent of the *Space for Grace* impact and intervention. The specificity of the projects described appears to lie in a combination of both financial support and external supervision or expertise; however, this is not always clearly indicated in the project descriptions or in the book's more general discussions. Similarly, if synodality, the idea of the people of God walking together is essential for how the Church sees itself, how then does one explain that many of these projects seem to loosen institutional bonds with the Catholic Church? This is a question that arises quite often when speaking about the pastoral practices of the Church. Pope Francis's image of the Church as a field hospital, for example, speaks directly to this point. It is beyond any doubt that accompanying people and meeting them where they are is of great importance. Yet it also remains crucial not to innovate merely for the sake of innovation, as doing so risks blurring the line between a market-oriented logic and the particularity of the Gospel's proclamation. This is a tension that Pope Francis himself has noted, but one that is often overlooked by those who draw on the image of the "field hospital".

The most fundamental question I wish to raise concerns the fact that, on page 198, the authors, drawing on insights from Luk Vanmaercke, suggest that faith communities today are confronted with only two options: either they innovate or they wither away. They explicitly state that their presentation does not involve a moral judgment; nevertheless, the question remains whether these are truly the only two options. The ecclesial landscape is evolving at such a pace that it is certain that simply believing that the Church will exist forever because it existed so long before is untenable (203), but I do not agree with the authors that this necessarily means a forced choice between innovating or disappearing. A more profound reflection on, e.g., the fluidisation of faith communities (i.e., the understanding of the liquid church) and the possible risk of evaporation (i.e., their disappearance due to a loss of inspiration, cf. the work of theologian Arnaud Join-Lambert) seems necessary. This work would include longitudinal studies that more clearly establish the “rate” or “success” of innovation and how it persists.

In summary, this is a hopeful book. It is situated in a genre somewhere between academia and the pastoral world. Particularly in its ~~discussions~~ of ecclesial innovation, it succeeds in introducing readers to the topic and charts possible avenues for other communities. The book is, however, quite idiosyncratic, not least because it lacks a clearly identifiable author or even an editor. Nevertheless, this does not make it any less stimulating in its challenge to (re)think the future of the Church, a future that may well be one of abundance, as the book argues.

J. VAN ROMPAEY

Diarmaid MACCULLOCH. *Niedriger als die Engel: Eine Sexualgeschichte des Christentums*. München, C. H. Beck, 2026. (15×22,5), 752 S. ISBN 978-3-406-84292-4. €44.00.

Dieser umfangreiche Band ist die deutsche Übersetzung von „*Lower than the Angels*“: *A History of Sex and Christianity* (London, Allen Lane, 2024). Darin bietet der emeritierte Oxforder Kirchenhistoriker MacCulloch einen umfassenden Überblick über das Verhältnis des Christentums zu Sexualität in allen Facetten (Rolle von Frauen in der Kirche eingeschlossen). Den Autor ist daran gelegen, die ganze Fülle und Bandbreite von Positionen in der röm.-kath., orthodoxen und protestantischen Tradition zu zeigen. Dieses Ziel ist durchweg erreicht. Die Leser sollen sich selbst ein Urteil bilden können, ob sie für sich Grundzüge einer christlichen Sexualethik erkennen können oder ob die hier betonte Vielstimmigkeit dies gar nicht erlaubt.

Nach Überlegungen zur hell.-röm. Welt, Jesu Aussagen setzt M. mit Paulus und den ersten christl. Gemeinden ein, und skizziert die Entwicklungen bis ca. 300 n. Chr. (u.a. Jungfrauen, Unverheiratete und Asketen). Anschließend geht es um Entwicklungen im frühen Mittelalter in der östlichen Christenheit und im lat. Westen (u.a. die Entstehung einer Klosterlandschaft zw. 500 und 1000). Im späten Mittelalter und in der Reformation (weit gefasst 500-1700) macht M. zwei westliche Revolutionen aus (unter Gregor VII, 1000-1200; durch die Kreuzzüge entstand das Klischee der heiligen Krieger; Durchsetzung des Zölibats). Für die Neuzeit behandelt M. Aufklärung und Entscheidungsfreiheit, Revolution und den Wiederaufbau des Katholizismus, westliches Christentum zw. 1800 und 1914, das