

Living the Feminist Dream

A Faithful Vision for Women
in the Church and the World

Kate Bryan


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Series Preface

Does the book that you are about to read seem unusual? Perhaps even counterintuitive?

Good. The Magenta series wouldn't be doing its job if you felt otherwise.

On the color wheel, magenta lies directly between red and blue. Just so, books in this series do not lie at one limit or another of our hopelessly simplistic, two-dimensional, antagonistic, binary imagination. Often, in the broader culture any answer to a moral or political question gets labeled as liberal or conservative, red or blue. But the Magenta series refuses to play by these shortsighted rules. Magenta will address the complexity of the issues of our day by resisting a framework that unnecessarily pits one idea against another. Magenta refuses to be defined by anything other than a positive vision of the good.

If you understand anything about the Focolare's dialogical-and-faithful mission, it should not surprise you that this series has found a home with the Focolare's New City Press. The ideas in these books, we believe, will spark dialogues that will heal divides

and build unity at the very sites of greatest fragmentation and division.

The ideas in Magenta are crucial not only for our fragmented culture, but also for the Church. Our secular idolatry—our simplistic left/right, red/blue imagination—has oozed into the Church as well, disfiguring the Body of Christ with ugly disunity. Such idolatry, it must be said, has muffled the Gospel and crippled the Church, keeping it from being salt and light in a wounded world desperate for unity.

Magenta is not naïve. We realize full well that appealing to dialogue or common ground can be dismissed as a weak-sauce, milquetoast attempt to cloud our vision of the good or reduce it to a mere least common denominator. We know that much dialogic spade work is yet to be done, but that does not keep the vision of the Magenta Series (like the color it bears) from being *bold*. There is nothing half-hearted about it. All our authors have a brilliant, attractive vision of the good.

And having Kate Bryan's book as our opening volume shows exactly what this series is about. *Living the Feminist Dream* addresses important, neuralgic issues in a characteristically Magenta way: boldly, carefully, dialogically—and by telling lots and lots of stories.

Enjoy!

Charles C. Camosy



Introduction

A couple of years ago, living and working in Washington, DC, I was part of a great group of friends and a good community. My public relations career was thriving. Many perceived that I was “living the dream,” and I would agree. I could do what I wanted when I wanted, made good money, and didn’t want for anything. Every morning I would wake up, pour a cup of coffee, and in peace read the headlines and major stories in every DC and national newspaper. But one morning everything changed. As I went through my usual routine everything—my beliefs, faith, and all I had worked for, lived for, and fought for—collided. I hit a “suddenly” moment.

That sunny August morning in 2016 I came across an article in the *Washington Post* by a woman who had recently published a book about sexuality. She argued that chastity and abstinence were archaic. She had been raised in a conservative evangelical home and, like so many other young people in the 90’s, had read Joshua Harris’s infamous book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. As a teenager she had taken his advice to abstain from sex before marriage, but as an adult felt

that her life and relationships had been damaged by thinking like that and living her life in this way. As I read her piece I understood where she was coming from because in high school I too had read that book and bought into the “Harris creed” concerning love and abstinence. But simultaneously I felt disheartened because unlike the *WaPo* author—who was being touted as an expert—my understanding had evolved since high school. I had come to recognize chastity as the “perfection of love,” and living this way had led me to true freedom. Instead of evolving, her understanding had been shackled. She had not gone beyond what she learned as a high schooler and blamed chastity for what had happened, or not happened, throughout her life. Instead of recognizing value in how she’d been raised and how she lived her life, she dismissed it. She felt bitterness and regret about her upbringing and wanted to tell the world about it.

That same morning I read another article, by a different author, with a similar thesis. She had also saved sex for marriage, got married young, had a couple of kids, found herself exhausted, and now seemed very unhappy. She also blamed her upbringing, presuming that if she had more sexual experiences in her younger years she would have chosen a different path and a different life altogether.

As I read both pieces, I felt compassion for these women. But at the same time I felt unsettled and angry (righteous anger) that no one had led them to a deeper understanding of sexual integrity and relationships. Left to fend for themselves, they did

not question what Joshua Harris had preached. And they are not alone. Harris sold 1.2 million copies of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. The many young people who bought into this faulty “theology” believed that not kissing and not having sex before marriage would guarantee a free and fulfilled life. They accepted the shackles of Harris’s teaching when they could have discovered, as I did, that—when understood fully and correctly—chastity and sexual integrity actually bring true freedom.

There are deeper issues at work here, but ultimately “surface level purity culture” and Christian celebrity culture are problematic. I disagree on many levels with the so-called “chastity” that has been preached in many circles. That understanding falls short, and we’ve watched the failures play out in modern culture. To me, the underlying issue is consistency—consistency between what you preach and how you live your life, consistency between what you say and who you are. Christian author, podcaster, and female empowerment coach Rachel Hollis came under fire for demeaning her domestic help as someone who “cleans my toilets.” Hollis, who so passionately promoted women’s dignity and purpose, was caught living in a way that clashed with what she was preaching. Famed Hillsong pastor Carl Lentz regularly preached about life, faith, and following Christ, but it came out that he had been unfaithful to his wife and sexually assaulted numerous women. And then there’s Josh Duggar, who was raised in a community that preached “save sex and kissing until marriage,” but

years later it came out that not only was he unfaithful to his wife, but also during his teenage years he had abused his sisters. He became what many would call a “sex addict,” and his computer was filled with child pornography so horrifying that a Department of Homeland Security agent testified it was “in the top five of the worst of the worst that I’ve ever had to examine.” I don’t lay all the blame on the surface-level preaching and teaching concerning chastity and faith, but I do partially blame the foundation that has been laid through it, and secondarily I do blame the hypocrisy in figures like Hollis and Lenz and Duggar, and the lack of consistency between what they preach and teach and how they live. And we ourselves, as Christians, may be no different. No one is perfect, but we should always be consistent—or at least strive to be consistent—in everything we say and do.

Years after *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, Harris and the megachurch where he preached were rocked by a sex abuse scandal. Although Harris is said not to have been involved, he and his wife separated and he has said that he lost his Christian faith. Harris has renounced *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* stating, “I apologized for it. I unpublished the books. I pulled the books off the market. But you can’t give people [back], you know, years of their life.”

Harris has since gone on to launch an online course to “deconstruct” his teachings and anyone “harmed by purity culture.” His course, “Reframe Your Story,” includes a \$275 “Deconstruction Starter Pack.” It’s noteworthy that, just as he did before,