

Thirdly, it is puzzling and unsatisfactory to read the convoluted attempts to grade the Encyclical on a notional scale of Infallibility: having a *Magisterium* is meant to help, and for the status of the teaching to be still in some way unclear forty years after its publication is not a good advertisement for the authority behind it.

Edward Norman has pointed out that Anglicans have completely forgotten about the moral consequences of artificial contraception since 1930. This book will serve as a useful primer for those interested to know how Roman Catholics committed to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* now defend it in the light of the last Pope's exegesis. For Catholic Anglicans at least, this is of more than simply academic interest now.

*Robin Ward*

## **GOD, GAYS AND THE CHURCH**

Human Sexuality and Experience in Christian Thinking  
*Edited by Lisa Nolland et al.*  
Latimer Trust, 250pp, pbk  
978 0 9463079 3 7, £9.99

Back in my thirties, as a lecturer in Christian Ethics, I was particularly interested in the challenges of sexual ethics. Though this area rarely came up in lectures, they were the overriding personal concern of the undergraduates I was teaching. What did the Church have to say to a pre-Aids, contraceptive-using generation of young people? It was endlessly fascinating helping them through their dilemmas and temptations and confusions. Thirty years later, and it has all got a

lot more political and a lot nastier, and I am also a good deal older. Frankly, my dear, it is hard to give a damn.

Thirty years ago, the questions and answers were personal. Sexual ethics was part of growing up, a means of establishing personal identity, of filling in the elements of a self definition, somehow avoiding the tired (pre-contraceptive) mantras of older generations or the casual amorality of dull secularists. I would still maintain that the careful consideration of sexual ethics was a major element of evangelization; it was part of the proclamation of the Christian Gospel to intelligent young people. It was a genuine challenge: I can still remember my first 'abortion crisis', so vividly that I could probably paint the young woman from memory, though I have not seen her for decades. The Church had something real to offer, a demanding morality perhaps but a deeper understanding of the human condition that lazy 'situation ethics' simply did not answer.

Then it was personal: now it is political. I don't doubt that young people still have to work out their own moral behaviour, but the issues have taken on a more abstract flavour - justice, rights, equality - that require adherence but allow for little discussion. It is into this altered context that

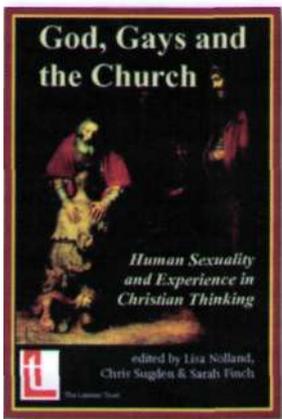
this strange book is introduced.

I found it oddly troubling, while at the same time being impressed that it was prepared to tackle issues more generally regarded as outside the realm of discussion. It is a collection of essays, mostly from America with added British input, about various aspects of gay sexuality, experience and morality, largely from an Evangelical perspective. It is in other words for those who are genuinely - and personally- concerned with such issues. Not me, nor those like me, who do not actually give a damn.

The personal testimony of an anonymous young woman who describes herself as 'post-lesbian was, to me, somewhat creepy and unconvincing, and almost voyeuristic. The more abstract and non-personal article 'Unexpected consequences: the sexualization of youth' was excellent - challenging and creepy in an entirely different way. This mix of sociological analysis and the counter-cultural personal experience makes for a powerful and unsettling book.

It is not for me, nor for most people, but for younger people, personally troubled by what one writer has correctly diagnosed as 'the paradox at the heart of gay culture', and personally challenged by the Lord Jesus and his higher vision of the human person, created in the image of his Father, then it may well be extremely helpful. I am glad it has been written (for others).

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# **VICAR**