

Book Reviews

Embodiment, An approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology, by James B. Nelson: Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Reviewed by Jerry Cain, Chaplain to the College, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

James B. Nelson, Professor of Christian Ethics at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, has written an eyebrow raising book entitled "Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology." The reason this effort will raise eyebrows is that it is bold enough to deal with human sex and sexuality in an open and free way. His work is readable and enjoyable for both student and campus minister.

The first half of the book is an attempt to build a theology of sexuality. The strongest part of this effort is Nelson's definition and use of the incarnation as a model for sexual understanding. His attempt to avoid segmenting human existence into body vs. soul vs. spirit vs. everything else is commendable.

"The embodiment of God in Jesus Christ is, in faith's perception, God's decisive and crucial self-disclosure. But for those who believe in God's continuing manifestation and presence, the incarnation is not simply past event. The Word still becomes flesh. We as body-selves-as sexual body-selves-are affirmed because of that."

We are not machine-like bodies who happen to have a mind. Our bodies (and thus our sexual beings) are inseparable from the rest of us. I like his use of the term "body-selves" when referring to people.

Dr. Nelson's definition of sex (pp. 17-18) is very concise and useable. However, the three paragraphs used to define sexuality seem to go in circles and never end up at saying what needs to be said. This nebulous definition of sexuality is one weakness that haunts the rest of the book.

However, chapter five in building the theology stands out as the high water mark of the book. In defining the classic Greek variations of love (epithymia, eros, philia, agape) he writes:

"If we define Christian love as agape or self-giving alone-without elements of desire, attraction, self-fulfillment, receiving-we are describing a love which is both impoverishing and impoverishing. But the other elements of love without agape are ultimately self-destructive."

Thus agape becomes the salt that gives meaning and flavor to these other and equally essential elements of love.

Nelson does a good job in blending the old and new in his section on decisions about sex related issues. He is able to keep new wine in the old wineskins. Respect and importance are given to traditional resources (Bible, church) while other resources are also provided credibility in making moral decisions. This section would be a good resource for the campus minister who is looking to assist students personally or corporately in this area of decision making. Nelson's bias in beginning the section on application of these principles is reported on page 129:

"I personally find certain sexual rules important and useful. I do not view them as exceptionless absolutes, but I presume strongly in their favor, and the burden of proof is then on me to justify any exception by its greater faithfulness to the higher loyalty. Rules can protect us at the boundaries of our experience where we encounter our limitations in knowledge and wholeness. But however sexual rules are used, they should nurture our growth into greater maturity and responsible freedom, and not inhibit it."

Thus the next four chapters deal with the application of his embodiment theology in specific areas of sexual life: Marriage and fidelity; sexual variations; homosexuality; the sexually disenfranchised (physically disabled, ill, ageing, retarded). He is very conversant and well read in each of these areas.

Nelson's norm for sexuality is not rules or principles or even love. Ethical judgements are made on the basis of moral actions which help us become what we are.

"The positive ethical claim upon us, then, is that we are to become what we essentially are. We are to realize in our actions and in our human becoming that communion of love. The negative side of this-sin-is not fundamentally the breaking of moral codes or the disobeying of laws, though it may involve that. More basically, it is the failure to become what we are. It is the estrangement, the alienation, which inhibits fulfillment and destroys communion."

This good sounding phrase still leaves little or no guidance for ethical decision making since little is said about what we are to become.

Embodiment was well worth my time. Nelson is plowing new ground in an area in which our students have been interested for years. (The three most popular courses on the community college curriculum are sex, death and bellydancing). This book is not a must for the campus minister but certainly is a plus and positive addition to his library.



Sex Isn't That Simple
The New Sexuality on Campus

by Richard Hettlinger

Richard Hettlinger approaches the subject of sex and the contemporary college student from the perspective of the social scientist, not that of the religious moralist. Though not hesitant to state his own ethical values, he draws heavily from facts gleaned from empirical research and available data. Therefore, this book is a valuable tool in understanding the moral thoughts and actions of a segment of the college community.

If you are looking for a book that supports a traditional negative approach to sex or one that uses biblical quotes for support of moral living, you will be disappointed.

Hettlinger's main premise is to urge students to "establish his or her own personal, coherent, rational basis for sexual behavior without being pressured by a need to comply with any dogmatic authority, old or new, or with any supposed uniform values charac-

teristic of the student community." He sees fallacy in a student's adopting the absolute standards of parental training or church teachings as well as adopting the latest sexual fashions of the college campus. The student must become his own authority after much thought, evaluation and choice. He believes that premarital sex is helpful or hurtful to an individual depending on "the capacities and attitudes of the couple involved." Some will benefit from premarital intercourse, others will suffer.

Hettlinger takes a strong negative position on what he terms "recreational sex," which he defines as "physical satisfaction which has no relation to personal affection or love." Several questions that the proponents of recreational sex do not always face seriously are: 1) Is sex as simple as it is made out to be? 2) Is it honest? and 3) Is recreational sex healthy?

One of the strong contributions Hettlinger makes is in helping us to distinguish between sex as a physical act and sexuality as a total expression. One of the tragedies on the campus is the hang-up on intercourse or orgasm as the main focus of sexual achievement. Much confusion and suffering could be avoided if we could distinguish sexuality from sex and integrate sexual relationship with interpersonal encounters as a whole, and to learn to be together with worth and openness.

The strongest contribution in the entire book, in this writer's estimation, is Hettlinger's treatment of the qualities of real love. This is the quality of love in which the sexual and the emotional find their ultimate integration. The first essential quality of real love is the absence of make believe or illusion. Secondly, mature love not only values the other as a real and independent person, but is also based on a respect for oneself. Thirdly, this love needs to be able to assume that the supreme intimacy will not be shared with others. This is not destructive jealousy, but the expectation of fidelity, the necessary trust in consistency and commitment without which love is diminished. This commitment and the marriage vows that accompany it is the stuff out of which solid and mature marriages are built. Many marriages survive and grow because of, rather than in spite of, the public commitment and the relative difficulty of separation. To talk about "trial marriage" or to imagine that living together is the same experience as marriage is nonsense. You can no more have a trial marriage than you can have a trial baby. It's the finality and irreversibility of the commitment of marriage that constitutes its significance and its potential value. Hettlinger sums up this type of marital commitment: "one-to-one commitment is hard as hell but no viable alternative presents itself that is as rewarding, as intimate, and as significant."

Reviewed by Bradley Pope, Director of Religious Activities,
Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi



Values In Sexuality: A New Approach To Sex Education, by
Eleanor D. Morrison and Mila Underhill Price: Hart Publishing Co.
New York - \$7.95

Reviewed by John Gilbert, Campus Minister, Arkansas Tech University

"Experience teaches one nothing. Reflection about an experience teaches one a little. Reflection about an experience with those who shared the experience teaches one the most." — Perhaps an oversimplified philosophy of experiential learning, but clear enough to enable us to see the basic concept for a relatively new and fast growing formal discipline in education today, which is the format for this paper back. Morrison and Price have collaborated on the suggestions given in this monograph which come from several years of work with students at Michigan State University, and which demonstrate the strength of teaching from experiential learning designs. In a relatively brief span (218 pages) the authors present some interesting, provocative, and in my opinion, effective learning designs for covering what they think are the primary concerns of human sexuality. They have also included designs which involve trust building in groups, and evaluation, two important aspects of experiential learning. The chapter titles indicate the scope of the book: Group—Building Activities, Physiology, Psychosexual Development, Sex Roles, Values Clarification, Dimensions in Relationships, Nonmarital Sex, Marriage and Parenthood, Discussion Starters. Summarizing Activities, and Suggested Content Resource Books.

Perhaps my bias is showing, but I think this book is an excellent resource for a campus minister to use in dealing with sexuality, pre-marital counseling, and in some cases, marital counseling. Since each campus and minister are unique, each situations has its particular demands, especially when dealing with human sexuality. Morrison and Price have given an instrument which is readily useful and flexible. It is my personal experience that there are some pastors, parents, and students who are "nervous" about teaching or talking sexuality. There are sections in this book (jargon, sub-

ject matter, and suggestions of touching) which said folks would find offensive. There are some campus ministers who will be offended, probably. I still think the book is worth the price, because in the main, the material is sound.

As the chapter headings indicate, the students are encouraged to get in touch with their own opinions and feelings about the various aspects of human sexuality. The designs enable students to experience what they have been taught, consciously or otherwise, and they are confronted with their bias, ignorance, fear, guilt, and other feelings or thinking, in such a way that they can acknowledge where they are and begin to take on new, fresh, and hopefully, more truthful information and experience about their sexuality, should they need to.

I recommend this book because of its experiential approach to learning, because it deals with the issues of human sexuality in a frank and matter of course way, and because it lends itself to flexibility.



Homosexuality and the Christian Faith: A symposium, edited by Harold L. Twiss. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978. 110 pp \$3.95

Harold Twiss, managing editor of Judson Press, has compiled a collection of articles dealing with the controversial homosexual issue. The book is designed to help Christians think through the questions relating to the role of homosexual persons in the church and in the wider community.

The articles show the range of thought on the subject of homosexuality by Christians with various theological perspectives. The subject and its implication is so broad, this book can only serve as a brief introduction of the issues dealing with homosexuality.

Alan Bell, senior research psychologist at the Institute for Sex Research, Indiana University, states in the overview chapter that it is virtually impossible to stereotype a typical homosexual. Bell states that the only constant in defining homosexuals is that they have had and will continue to have sexual relations with the same sex. He, therefore, uses the term "homosexualities", the tendencies

toward homosexual behavior, either physical or mental. The remainder of the chapter points out the tremendous difference in attitudes and lifestyles of homosexual persons.

"The Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality" interprets the major scriptures dealing with homosexuality. It is one hermeneutical attempt to explain what the bible says about the issue. David Bartlett's major premise is that "proof texting" is an inadequate means of moving toward a more adequate Christian response to the issue of homosexuality. He submits that an adequate discussion must use theological and biblical insights, common sense, and our understanding of the empirical situation.

The "How Gray is 'Gay'" chapter differentiates between the practice and condition of homosexuals. Lynn Buzzard states that scripture does condemn the homosexual, but that Christ died for all sinners including the homosexual. He then states that any view of a homosexual which does not seek to demonstrate God's love is a perverted doctrine.

Theodore Jennings, Assistant Professor at Chicago Theological Seminary, presents in a theological reflection much of the same ideas in a different context. His major premise is that Christians have responsibility to all people in need.

James Harrison, a clerical psychologist, explores the psychosocial dynamics of anxiety associated with homosexual living, and indicates how everyone pays for it. He states that no universal Christian sex ethic exists, no stereotypes of the homosexual are accurate, and that it is time for dialogue between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

William Muehl in his essay deals with toleration and approval by explaining the motif of loving the sinner and hating the sin. He continues, however, by showing that love is a strong positive reaction, and not everything called "love" is, in essence, love. The remainder of the chapter deals with his statement that "a popular error in Christian ethics is to allow love to be an omnipotent spiritual quality which has the power to sanctify anything which is done in its name."

Chapter 8, "Conservative Christians and Gay Civil Rights", is a case study of a town adopting legislation guaranteeing civil rights to homosexuals, and the reaction of both gays and churches to the legislation.

The last chapter, "Shall Gays be Ordained" gives a historical overview of the ordination process with homosexuals. As stated earlier, this would be a good introduction to a study of homosexuality.