

provider by caring for the children and tending to the household duties.' 57% of the St Michael's congregation disagreed, and Guest is shocked that the figure is so high – yet should he not rather be surprised that it is so low?

He noticed that the congregation featured 'a number of respected female workers' – yes, even women doctors, university lecturers, school teachers and social workers (93). Again he is shocked that they do not provoke hostility, and sees this as an erosion of basic evangelical foundations! But what world does he think evangelicals live in? Elsewhere Guest argues that *Visions* demonstrates 'classically liberal values' (162), such as a passion for human dignity rather than dogmatic truth. Yet this is an antithesis no evangelical would recognise.

The second drawback of the book is not the fault of authorial innocence, but the weakness of sociology as a discipline. By deconstructing evangelical beliefs and practices in sociological terms, they are emptied of their spiritual reality. To interpret the life of St Michael-le-Belfrey as an attempt to maintain social cohesion or to 'protect the integrity of the tradition' (126), is to miss the heart of the matter.

Sociology, when applied to the Christian faith, breeds cynicism. The researcher comes across not just as a detached observer, but as slightly patronising, even sometimes hostile. Guest gives the impression of being an enlightened anthropologist visiting the natives of Borrioboola, or like Sir David Attenborough out on location trying to understand the communal habits of evangelical orangutans.

*Andrew Atherstone
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford*

LISA NOLLAND, CHRIS SUGDEN & SARAH FINCH, eds

God, Gays & The Church: Human Sexuality and Experience in Christian Thinking

Latimer Trust, 2008, 249 pp
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I'm often asked 'Why do some Christians so passionately defend traditional Christian teaching on

sexual ethics and oppose homosexuality?' This book helps answer this question and in turn raises many key questions for the church. While far from all 'traditionalists' will agree with its content and tone, it captures well what the most vocal see at stake in current debates. Written in response to the General Synod debates of February 2007 (on what it labels 'gay Wednesday') the book provides a variety of approaches and expertise in 16 chapters (some of which have appeared on Anglican Mainstream's website).

Reflecting contemporary emphases, usually used to the advantage of those pressing the church to change, the book opens with experience and personal narratives. These voices of Christians who have struggled against homosexual attractions and resisted the call to embrace a gay or lesbian identity need to be heard if we are serious about following Lambeth I.10 and listening to the experience of homosexual persons. The impact of changing church teaching on them and those who could be like them cannot be ignored.

Importantly, the five chapters also go outside the evangelical world. I can't imagine any other Latimer House publications includes material testifying (as does the author of one of the weaker and more controversial chapters) that 'perhaps with the assistance of Our Lady of Guadalupe... and, last but not least, my special supernatural guide and mentor, the Venerable John Henry Newman, I can at least hope for a reprieve from some of the many centuries in Purgatory I have coming to me' (73)!

The next two sections focus on science, challenging evidence of a genetic causation, exploring how homosexuality might develop (Satinover) and advocating instead (in three chapters by Nicolosi) one particular psychological understanding of same-sex attraction, that of NARTH. Only then is Scripture the focus and then only in 42 pages.

Gagnon's article as always is thorough and detailed and takes no hostages but is weakened by being a response to an article that is not reprinted, making it not always easy to follow. Edith Humphrey, as always, is excellent value. Two further chapters helpfully explain what all this might mean in pastoral practice with pieces from Mario Bergner (who identified as a gay man for seven

years) and Paul and Christine Perkin on civil partnerships. Even those who don't agree with all the advice here will have to admit there is wise and valuable guidance based on extensive pastoral experience.

The last sixty pages, mainly by Lisa Nolland, seek to demonstrate the danger in accepting 'pro-gay' views in church and society. They do so in part by quite graphically drawing attention to attempts to normalise various sexual practices (I can't recall ever reading a book from an evangelical publisher that not only prints the 'f***' word in full but talks about the erotic use of urine and faeces!) and warning of the effect of such cultural trends on young people.

The reader by the end is left in no doubt as to why some sense that so much is at stake in this debate and the book raises some valid and important issues which require an urgent response. However, I was also left at the end concerned that the book not only failed to engage charitably with the best of their Christian opponents but also came close to relying on 'scare' tactics, guilt by association and provoking fear and disgust by providing explicit descriptions of the excesses of our secular and sexualised society. What is more, it illegitimately focused these excessively on homosexual forms of our sexual malaise.

Much better would be a more discriminating and more *theological* analysis and critique of homosexuality, our wider sexual culture and how to respond to it faithfully as the church of Christ. Such an approach would be less open to charges of bearing false witness against gay and lesbian Christians. It is also more likely – politically and rhetorically – to attract the many Christians in the 'middle ground' who are genuinely wrestling with these issues. That is important because, as was shown in the General Synod debate to which this book responds, many Anglicans are liable to be wooed by voices from Inclusive Church and Changing Attitude unless those committed to the Anglican Communion's current teaching and discipline can offer a more compelling, gracious and attractive Christ-like vision.

Andrew Goddard
Trinity College, Bristol

RON AUSTIN

In a New Light: Spirituality and the Media Arts

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£8.95

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In a New Light is a personal reflection on creativity, cinema and twentieth century society, written by a man who has been involved in Hollywood life for over forty years. It is an educational and thought-provoking read which will certainly appeal to aspiring film-makers and artists, although those with an interest in the history of cinema from the silent era to modern art-house productions will also find much to enjoy here. While not written specifically for Christians, the book would provide plenty of stimulation for a small group wanting to explore the spiritual dimensions of some classic movies. Anyone with a concern for how the preparation and experience of church worship might build Christian community could do a lot worse than spend time engaging with Austin's musings on the inherently collaborative and inter-personal nature of creating and experiencing visual art.

The book is in three parts. In the first section, under the heading of 'Spiritual Foundations', Austin examines three general principles that he argues form the basis of creative work. All those with an interest in creativity will find something thought provoking in this section, as Austin develops his ideas with thoughts snatched from Simone Weil, Martin Buber, René Girard and T S Eliot. Readers familiar with theories of art may want for a more thorough treatment, but these opening remarks provide a succinct introduction to some central issues in the making and viewing of visual media.

The second section consists of a short but exhilarating journey through twentieth century cinema. Beginning with the silent films of Dreyer and Chaplin, Austin interprets the major movements of European and American cinema as a visual commentary on the spiritual issues of the times. Austin is an extremely perceptive critic who provides helpful insights into many complex films. Not everyone will agree with all of his opinions, but it is rare indeed to have such a deliberately spiritual analysis conducted by one so steeped in the cinematic arts.