

Himbaza, Innocent, Adrien Schenker, & Jean-Baptiste Edart (2007/12). *The Bible and the Question of Homosexuality*. Translated by Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press. *Clarifications sur l'homosexualité dans la Bible* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

This concise book (147 pp., \$15.00 US), approved for Roman Catholic reading with a *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*, although negative (heterosexist/homophobic), is moderate in tone, indicates wide reading, and I believe is the first such traditionalist work to include treatment of subversively positive biblical texts, such as those on David and Jonathan, Jesus and his Beloved Disciple, and Jesus' healing of the centurion's beloved slave. Perhaps its main weakness is to consistently beg the question and affirm that differing positive viewpoints are supported only by ideological prejudice, while naively pretending to represent neutral scholarly objectivity. Also, the treatment of Jesus and his Beloved Disciple ignores the main defense of a homoerotic interpretation, that of Ted Jennings (2003).

In the case of Genesis 19 (Sodom), Himbaza acknowledges that “the context of violence does not permit us to take into consideration the case of a relation based on mutual and free consent between the two partners” (128). Commendably, the question is raised whether Romans 1:26 might not refer to lesbians/same-sex acts but rather to women engaged in non-procreative heterosexual acts (anal/oral sex; 2012:93-94) and the significant pioneering study of James Miller (NT 37 (1995:1-11), which resurrected this interpretation, is appropriately cited. However, this interpretation is then treated as representing a rare, farfetched viewpoint, ignoring the fact that it was the only interpretation represented in patristic interpretations until around 400 C.E. and is advocated by a growing number of contemporary scholars (despite the attempted refutation by Bernadette Brooten, 1996).

Another weakness is the attempted defense of the death penalty in Lev 20:13 (for some kind of male same-sex act) “as a warning, not as a penal norm” (2012:63-65). This defense also involves recognition that “the Lord himself will put to death spouses who have sexual relations during the wife's period (Lev. 20:18)” (2012:63). Probably few modern readers will be convinced by arguments that defense of family values would be strengthened by attention to such warnings, much less to any theocratic fundamentalist imposition of such measures today.

Notably absent is any realistic confrontation with the pastoral implications of the book's negative biblical interpretation that “homosexual relations are a danger to family unity” (2012:132). Years ago one Roman Catholic judge in Oklahoma estimated that the majority of Catholic divorces he had to deal with involved a homosexual spouse who had been pressured by the church to marry. And the quack “Ex-Gay” therapies recommended by Robert Gagnon, one of the biblical authorities most cited in the work, are infamous for producing depression, drug addictions and more suicides than any claims to change in sexual orientation.

Also absent, of course, is any reference to the horrendous history of homophobic-inspired violence, paralleling the history of anti-semitism. The role of the Roman Catholic Church in centuries of anti-semitic violence is memorably recounted in *Constantine's Sword* by James Carroll. Byrne Fone's *Homophobia: a History* (New York: Metropolitan, 2000) reminds us of the parallel trajectories of these two elements in history (anti-semitism and homophobia), which culminated in the Nazi Holocaust.

Perhaps the best we may thus hope is that Catholic readers will have their curiosity aroused by the significant questions raised and seek in the more enlightened items cited in the footnotes and bibliography some alternative interpretations that would never receive any *Nihil Obstat* or *Imprimatur*. As Jacques Ellul pointed out, in our ideological conflicts the most dangerous propaganda is always the “majority propaganda” (the brain washings we are subjected to from birth)—not the feeble efforts of tiny oppressed minorities. And nowhere would that smothering danger be more evident than in the embrace of the enormous institution that is the Roman Catholic Church.