

5-1-1978

## [Book Review of] *Counseling the Homosexual*, by John Cavanagh

Donald McCarthy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>



Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McCarthy, Donald (1978) "[Book Review of] *Counseling the Homosexual*, by John Cavanagh," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 45: No. 2, Article 17.

Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol45/iss2/17>

The physical size of the book may be a drawback for some (it weighs almost five pounds). The total price of the book may also be a detriment, but on a cost per article basis, the book is relatively inexpensive. All in all, this volume ought to serve for many years as one of the standard texts in medical ethics. It is a pleasure to recommend this volume to those in medical ethics.

— Thomas A. Shannon

Department of Humanities, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

## *Counseling the Homosexual*

John Cavanagh, M.D.

*Our Sunday Visitor Inc., Huntington, Ind. 46750. 352 pp., \$14.95.*

Dr. Cavanagh's popular and useful book published in 1966 and then titled *Counseling the Invert* reappeared with some revisions, a changed title, and a new publisher in September, 1977. The price has doubled since the first edition, but then inflation has hit hard in the publishing industry.

Economic inflation has not nearly matched the inflation of interest and genuine concern about homosexuals and their problems since 1966. Not only have great numbers of individual homosexuals come "out of the closet" but militant homosexual organizations are lobbying for their civil rights. Attempts to control the possibly harmful role of homosexuals as school teachers are met with tremendous hostility, as Anita Bryant can attest.

In his book, Dr. Cavanagh speaks to the clergy and other counselors from his perspective as a psychiatrist who believes in the objective immorality of homosexual actions. Because of that belief his book will be rejected by those in contemporary society who take a more permissive position on homosexuality. They will consider his outlook a "voice from the past" and look upon the new edition of this book as a useless repetition of antiquated views.

Unfortunately Dr. Cavanagh's critics will be able to correctly argue that his new edition does not adequately reflect the tremendous research and debate about homosexuality which have occurred since 1966. For example, the 25 page bibliography at the end of the book contains predominantly his pre-1966 references with only scattered insertions of more recent research. It even fails to include an important article by Fr. John Harvey in *American Ecclesiastical Review* ("The Controversy Concerning the Psychology and Morality of Homosexuality," Nov., 1973), although Fr. Harvey contributed two chapters to this book. Likewise the text of the book relies primarily on pre-1966 data with some very useful exceptions. For example, the revisions of chapters 13, 14, and 15 (Homosexuality and the Law, Homosexuality and Government Agencies, and Homosexual Organizations) do provide some important and useful new information.

Furthermore, the very significant material carried over from the first edition on causes and clinical features of homosexuality, on homosexuality and marriage, on homosexuality and the religious life, and on pastoral counseling of homosexuals has continuing relevance for priests and counselors today. Also, the two excellent chapters written by Fr. John Harvey for inclusion in this book ("Changes in Nomenclature and Their Probable Effect" and "Contemporary Theological Views") help immensely in updating the book.

Since the book first offers 17 chapters about homosexuality before the 18th

and last chapter about pastoral counseling of homosexuals, it might well be titled *Understanding and Counseling the Homosexual*. Overall, it offers a helpful, balanced, and much-needed approach at the present moment when many publications are ignoring the objective immorality of homosexual actions.

This judgment does not overlook the book's weaknesses such as its limited integration of the past decade's research mentioned above. Another weakness is the lack of an adequate philosophical and theological overview of human sexuality itself, other than the abbreviated comments in the first chapter. Also, chapter 16 of the first edition on "Moral Responsibility of the Homosexual" was not updated and included in this second edition despite its critical importance in pastoral counseling.

The content of Dr. Cavanagh's book may well be divided into four sections. The first comprises chapters 1-4. After the introductory chapter on "The Community and the Homosexual" and a brief second chapter on the incidence of homosexuality, chapter 3 is Fr. Harvey's discussion of changes in nomenclature and chapter 4 establishes a glossary of terms.

Fr. Harvey's discussion of nomenclature deals with the 1973 change of classification by the American Psychiatric Association which decided that homosexuality is not *per se* a psychiatric disorder but which recognizes a "sexual orientation disturbance" classification for those homosexuals who are "either bothered by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation." Fr. Harvey points up the irony that "those seeking insight into the nature of their homosexual tendencies are given a new category in psychiatry while those who seek no self-knowledge are regarded as mentally healthy" (p. 36).

The second edition of Dr. Cavanagh's book includes chapters 5-10, discussing the nature, causes, clinical features, and diagnosis of homosexuality. Little new material beyond the 1966 volume is presented here. Dr. Cavanagh responds to the question whether homosexuality is a disease in the same way he did in 1966, a way which seems quite accurate to this reviewer. He concludes (p. 58) that homosexuality is not a disease *per se* but the result of a character or personality problem in which the sexual orientation of the individual becomes fixated at an early age. He adds that homosexuality may be a symptom of a neurosis of psychosis, but in such cases it represents the individual's reaction to society or society's reaction to him.

The third section of the book includes chapters 11-15 which first discuss homosexuality in the context of marriage and of the religious life, and then homosexuals in society. Dr. Cavanagh argues that marriages of homosexuals are normally invalid. An almost certain misprint on p. 147 says that this opinion is *not* corroborated by the teaching on marriage given by the Second Vatican Council. On p. 154 he speaks rather pessimistically of the prevalent erroneous attitude that marriage is a cure of homosexuality. Dr. Francis Braceland in his Foreword to the book speaks more optimistically that "clergymen have given up a belief once prevalent years ago that marriage would solve the situation" (p. 10).

The fourth and last section (chapters 16-18) comprises Fr. Harvey's careful critique of the contemporary theological views of John McNeil, S.J., Gregory Baum, and Charles E. Curran, and the final chapters on treatment and pastoral counseling. As a supplement (pp. 269-281), the book includes the "Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality" published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1973 and not readily accessible elsewhere.

Many persons today, both homosexuals and heterosexuals, disagree with the opinions of Dr. Cavanagh that homosexuality is a psychiatric problem (p. 14) and that homosexual acts are not a valid expression of human sexual love (p. 21). This reviewer agrees with Dr. Cavanagh and finds it refreshing that he can still uphold these opinions while proposing in a realistic and helpful way a sympathetic and

sensitive concern for homosexuals as persons. *Counseling the Homosexual* is well worth its inflationary price and Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. is to be congratulated for producing it.

— Rev. Donald McCarthy  
Mt. St. Mary Seminary

## *Medical / Moral Problems*

Robert Heyer, Editor

Paulist Press, 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, 1978. 64 pp., \$1.75.

This 64-page book is a collection of nine articles which originally appeared in the September/October, 1976 issue of *New Catholic World*.

Charles E. Curran provides a concise overview of medical ethics, beginning with a brief historical study. Until recently, conflicts between medicine and ethics were relatively few because the good of the individual patient was a criterion for both fields. Tensions developed, especially in matters of human reproduction because Catholic theology taught that the generative organs and faculty were for the good of the species, as well as of the individual. With the advent of rapid advances in biomedical technology and its overflow into medical practice, ethical dilemmas proliferated. Father Curran proceeds to sketch out a number of problem areas in medical ethics: initiation or discontinuation of life support systems; organ transplantation; human experimentation; prioritization in the allocation of scarce resources; and technological reproduction.

Edmund V. Sullivan perceptually reviews Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis* in light of the South American educator Paolo Friere's principles for "problem posing education" and in doing so helps the reader to reflect critically on the institution of medicine. This article, perhaps more than others, is likely to provoke opposition. No doubt it is difficult to step outside one's profession and view it with a cool, critical eye. Sullivan's tone is less abrasive than Illich's, yet his remarks are probing and, while disagreeing with many of Illich's conclusions, he holds that the medical profession has become "one of the many sacred cows that our culture dishes up to us in a porridge which discourages critical appraisal.

In an article by Richard L. Rashke, Washington Correspondent for *The National Catholic Reporter*, seven physicians and paramedical personnel were interviewed and asked what each believed to be the most significant ethical/medical issue in their respective fields and in society today. They were also asked about their manner of making medical/ethical decisions, and their way of dealing with patient/therapist value discordance.

In an article on the "Physician's Role as Spiritual Healer," Dr. Frank A. Iula argues persuasively for the view that the physician is an instrument of God's grace. To serve the sick he uses his gifts and the healing substances found in nature prepared by man's skills. To accomplish this in a manner which proclaims God's glory requires the physician to have established personally a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Leonard J. Weber helps to clarify the question as to who makes the decision by distinguishing *medical* decisions, as such, and *moral* decisions in a medical context. That *moral* decisions are not to be left to medical experts is the first point Weber makes. The second point is that moral principles and guidelines have a proper function and should be used, ruling out a situation ethics approach. Professor Weber concludes with a third item: "Be prepared to make judgments and decisions on your own."