



# **Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age**

*Jonathan Grant*

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## **Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age** Jonathan Grant

The digital revolution has ushered in a series of sexual revolutions, all contributing to a perfect storm for modern relationships. Online dating, social media, internet pornography, and the phenomenon of the smartphone generation have created an avalanche of change with far-reaching consequences for sexuality today. The church has struggled to address this new moral ecology because it has focused on clarity of belief rather than quality of formation. The real challenge for spiritual formation lies in addressing the underlying moral intuitions we carry subconsciously, which are shaped by the convictions of our age.

In this book, a fresh new voice offers a persuasive Christian vision of sex and relationships, calling young adults to faithful discipleship in a hypersexualized world. Drawing from his pastoral experience with young people and from cutting-edge research across multiple disciplines, Jonathan Grant helps Christian leaders understand the cultural forces that make the church's teaching on sex and relationships ineffective in the lives of today's young adults. He also sets forth pastoral strategies for addressing the underlying fault lines in modern sexuality.

## **Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age** **Details**

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# **From Reader Review Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age for online ebook**

## **Panda Incognito says**

Both scholarly and pastoral, this work explains why modern sexual relationships are so dysfunctional, and provides a Christian corrective. I appreciate the detailed and thoughtful explanations about how fundamental cultural narratives and philosophies shape people's ideas, senses of self, and practices, but I was especially interested in how the book provided ideological perspectives and practical ideas for how the church can provide gospel-focused, holistic alternatives, placing sexuality in a redemptive, healthy, Christ-focused context.

This was a good read that helped me refine my thinking on this issue, and I'm glad to have it as part of my personal library. I bought it from Amazon because I work at the library and would be far too embarrassed to inter-library loan a book called "Divine Sex." Even so, it has taken me the greater part of a year to complete this book, because I kept hiding it under other books to avoid siblings' notice, and would then forget about it. Despite this silliness, it's a very serious book, and I'm glad that I have spent time reading it and pondering its ideas.

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## **Matthew Richey says**

Such a deeply important book. I'm currently teaching a class at my church largely based on this book. Every Christian pastor, teacher, and leader should read this book. Grant corrects the church's lack of a distinctive vision for sexuality and offers us a practical and compelling vision steeped in Christian theology, teaching, practice, and desire.

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## **Christopher says**

Spot on analysis of where our cultural vision of sexuality is. Avoids intellectualizing society, and recognizes that it's our material and social contexts that shape our sexuality (capitalism, porn, etc.). Offers a compelling Christian alternative.

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## **Benjamin Shurance says**

A complex, thorough look at what sexuality entails, and the cultural forces that have obscured the Christian vision. Accessible yet nuanced writing, building off of diverse and rich sources, pointing to an integral vision of discipleship and community. Highly recommended.

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## **Amanda Patchin says**

Strong - very strong - on diagnosis and analysis of the ills of modern Christian marriage and singleness. Short on practical examples and narratives. Grant clearly articulates the need for renewed cultural habits and imaginaries but does not offer "a compelling vision" (which would, admittedly, be a challenging task).

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## **Jeff Hart says**

### **Review**

In *Divine Sex*, Jonathan Grant seeks to help the church navigate the complex landscape of modern romance and sexuality. He does this in two parts, the first exposing the cultural scripts that set expectations for romance and sex and the second offering a number of proposals to help the church minister to those trying to navigate these fraught cultural waters.

Overall, Grant's book is an incredibly helpful guide for church leaders seeking to help people in their congregations navigate the cultural dynamics which (de)form our desires in the realm of relationships and sex. When it comes to countering this de-formation, half of the battle is simply recognizing the cultural scripts for what they are. In this respect, *Divine Sex* is a compelling resource for anyone trying to navigate relationships and sex in our modern context. As the title implies, the book is focused more narrowly on sex than relationships (and marriage), though both are addressed throughout. The arguments of the book are developed more along philosophical and sociological lines than explicitly theological lines, but they nevertheless exhibit deep theological resonance. As a result, the book has a bit more of an academic tone (which, unfortunately, makes it seem lacking in grace toward sexual sinners at times), making it more suitable for an academically-minded audience than a general audience. However, I would still readily recommend this book to anyone seeking to understand why the modern romantic and sexual landscape holds such sway.

### **Summary of Arguments**

Grant's book is most compelling in its diagnosis of the modern situation, so it is worth outlining his arguments in some detail. Building on the work of Charles Taylor and James K.A. Smith, Grant focuses on how culture forms us in ways that often evade our conscious perception, especially when it comes to sexuality.

Grant first highlights how our "culture of authenticity" encourages us to seek emotional fulfillment and avoid the constraints of a moral code imposed from the outside. This leads to an elevation of personal experience, emotion, and intuition above Scripture as the highest authority over our sexual lives. In this context, sexual relationships also become important expressions of our authentic selves. This, in turn, burdens romantic relationships by saddling them with the unrealistic expectation that the perfect soul mate will meet all of our needs. Because of culture's formative power, this attitude toward romantic and sexual relationships characterizes many within the church.

From here, Grant highlights another trend: the privatization of sexuality. In a world characterized by radical individualism, sex is seen primarily as a means of personal gratification, severed from any larger communal purpose. Like the culture of authenticity, the idea that sexuality is purely private pervades not only the secular culture but the church.

Next, Grant explores how the rampant consumerism of our culture corrupts sexuality, training us to think of "our sexual choices... [as] different modes of consumption within an infinite spectrum of choice," where we simply "acquire, consume, and move on" (p 80). This, coupled with the power of technology, makes

commitment difficult since we are led to believe there are infinite romantic/sexual choices before us. Furthermore, divorced from any greater meaning, sex itself becomes what Grant calls a "happiness technology." In this connection, Grant also explores the prevalence and impact of pornography.

As the final part of his diagnosis, Grant explains how the loss of transcendence in our modern world has impacted our views on sexuality. The modern immanent frame leaves no foundation apart from self-expression upon which to think about our sexuality. Apart from any greater meaning, sex itself becomes a god. Here, Grant outlines an insightful five-step progression in the modern conception of sexuality: first, sex was separated from procreation, then from marriage, then from partnership, then from another person, and finally, from our own bodies.

The second half of the book seeks to lay out a compelling Christian counter-narrative for sexuality. Parts of this section rehash James K.A. Smith's argument that we are fundamentally desiring creatures and argues that the church needs to do more to shape the desires of its members in the area of sexuality. Grant argues for a balance between head and heart as we pursue romantic relationships. He also has a number of practical suggestions for churches to consider as they seek to foster environments where healthy relationships can develop. This part of the book is less compelling than the first half, but still offers valuable considerations.

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## **James says**

It is always a dangerous thing reading a friend's sex book. I learned this when my wife and I got married. I confessed to a friend that there was a lot about sex I didn't know about and he lent me one of those Christian 'sex books' that he and his wife had used after their nuptial vows. We took it on our honeymoon and when we opened it we discovered it was annotated, highlighted and smiley faces drawn in the margins. We closed the book and tried to forget what we saw.

Divine Sex is vastly different from my first experience of a Christian sex book. Written (not annotated!) by a friend, it does explore the mechanics and techniques of sex. I knew Jonathan Grant when we were both students together at Regent College and daughters in preschool together and I would often catch up with him at the local coffee shop while we waited to pick them up. He would be sitting with a stack of books--Charles Taylor, Robert Bellah, or whomever. His book Divine Sex is an exploration of how our contemporary context has shaped our attitudes toward sex (and how to recover a compelling Christian vision for sexuality as an alternative to our increasingly hypersexualized culture.

Grant divides this book into two sections. In part one, he explores how our contemporary context shapes our understanding of relationships and sexuality. Chapter two describes how our desire for authenticity and autonomy has caused us to customize our entire lives, including sexual choices, despite what Scripture or spiritual authorities tell us (34). Grant also looks at how through the sexualization of our personal identities, sex became more than something we engage in or abstain from, but the 'sun around everything else revolved' (36). The emphasis on independence, and emotional fulfillment has weakened the bonds of marriage and made multiple sexual partners the norm and sex without long term commitment more normative.

Chapter three explores further how radical individualism impacts our sexuality and relationships. Chapters four critiques the corrupting dynamic of consumerism and how it has bred unreal expectations of sex.

Chapter five examines how our hypersexualized age has robbed sex of its mystery and caused it to be seen merely as a legitimate pleasure to be enjoyed, without shame, between consenting adults with no outside moral standard or constraint placed upon it (99). In this hypersexualized age females are sexualized at young ages (100-103) and pornography has become ubiquitous (104). Porn increasingly provides 'sex education,' transforming the expectations of (largely) men in their relationship. This all has a major impact on modern relationships with a disproportionate impact on young people because of the way exposure of cyber-porn is

processed by those still developing sexually. Finally, Chapter six explores more in-depth how the atomizing of human relationships and loss of transcendence in contemporary culture has impacted relationships inside the Church.

In Part Two, Grant proposes an alternative Christian Social Imaginary (chapter seven). Chapter eight explores the way Christian eschatology, metaphysics, formation and mission provide a vision for Christian sexuality which embodies hope, ethics, spirituality, character, faithfulness, and Christian witness. Chapter nine describes the role of divine desire in Christian formation. Chapter ten explores how living a life that is contrary to the modern script of sexuality helps Christians and the church embody the gospel story for a watching world.

Chapter eleven exhorts us to counter the impact of the wider culture through Formative spiritual practices. Grant summarizes the impact of our hypersexualized culture on the church:

The consumerist mind-set has (. . .) been wheeled in like a Trojan-horse into the sanctuary of our personal relationships. Social media, online dating, and cyberpornography encourage us to be hyperconnected, but these interactions are almost invariably one-sided--we enter into them only as long as they satisfy our "needs." They offer connection without intimacy, commitment without risk, and companionship without mess. The Online world all too often offers ties that preoccupy us rather than one that binds us to each other (215-216).

Against this mindset, Grant suggests alternative practices which will enable us to not be conformed to our contemporary contexts and cultural understanding of sexuality. These include embodied public worship and the displacing modern social practices by providing a place for singleness as a Christian vocation, courting, encouraging signs of life, communal support and utilizing marriage preparation as counter-formation.

A book like this is long overdue. Grant offers insights into how much we have bought in to a romanticized version of sex. Focus on our own autonomous pleasure and emotional fulfillment has had a negative impact on our marital commitments and relationships. When married people don't feel in love anymore, divorce has become inevitable. We also dissolve other relationships and friendships when people fail to meet our needs. The value we place on autonomy, personal fulfillment and our choices have supplanted biblical sexuality, weakening all our relational bonds.

Grant doesn't deny the power of our sexuality or our longings for relational connection; rather he calls us back to a scriptural understanding of covenantal relationship. Grant draws on the insights of thinkers like Taylor and Bellah, as well as theologians and biblical scholars. The gift of this book is that Grant thinks through the influence of our social context on sexuality from a Christian perspective in a comprehensive way. I can't point to another book that does this, this well.

Too often Christian premarital counseling presents a biblical standard of sexuality without giving us a compelling vision of how our beliefs about God, desire, sex, relationships constitute a counter-narrative to our cultural script. Sex is more meaningful, relationships are more wonderful, desire is greater, and love is deeper than our contemporary context allows for. Grant showcases a biblical vision of sexuality which is formational and missional, helping Christians live compelling lives characterized by committed relationships.

I came away from reading this book with a deeper understanding of the way our cultural milieu contributes to our relational and sexual malformation. Romanticism, individualism, moral relativism is the water we are swimming in and that has impacted our understanding of sex. The blurring of sex with personal identity has produced an 'anything goes' approach to sex and relationships. The Christian story provides the narrative of resistance. As Christians pursue relational commitment, honoring both celibate singleness and marriage, we are able to offer a compelling alternative to meaningless sex, the using of others, and personal isolation. The Christian vision for sex gives us something worth championing. I give this five stars: ★★★★★

Note: I received this book from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

Thanks Johnny!

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## **Aaron says**

There is no doubt that the modern conception of sex is anything but healthy. Sure, we live in a time which affords more sexual freedom than anything that we have seen since ancient Rome; but our sexual liberty has come at a great cost and has resulted (ironically) in bondage- not freedom. The problem, as has been well documented, is almost as prevalent in the church as it is in the surrounding culture. How did our secular bookshelves get from Plato to Playboy in such a short time? How did the church's view of sex get from Solomon to sexual syncretism in that same time? Jonathon Grant answers these questions in his brilliant book, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*.

In a style reminiscent of Nancy Pearcey (and her mentor the great Francis Schaeffer) Grant takes the reader on a fascinating tour of philosophical history as he unfolds the consequences of the theories and ideas that have shaped the modern sexual mind.

Taking a cue from Charles Taylor, Grant begins by assessing the modern social imaginary (defined as "the sum total of how we collectively imagine our social life..."). Grant takes this idea of a modern social imaginary and applies it in a more narrow sense to assess how it is that modern culture imagines sexuality.

I was impressed with Grant's clarity as he exposed the layers of philosophical thought that have resulted in this self-centered imaginary of sexual pleasure which has plagued our communities, churches, and families. Grant wastes no time getting to the root of the problem: a culture of authenticity. This is not to say that Grant believes that being inauthentic is a good thing, but rather, that the emphasis on "just being who I truly am" and "being true to myself" has led us to cast off any moral authority that threatens the self's hunger for feeding its sensual cravings. This idea is undergirded by the Enlightenment's false dichotomy between the public and private realms in which the public realm is characterized by reasoned discussion free from prejudice, and the private realm is characterized by the affairs of the heart such as faith and love. This created the perfect breeding ground for unbridled sensuality to run amok. Who are you after all, to tell me how to manage my sexuality if it is strictly a private affair in which I am free to pursue anything that is true to myself?

All of this results in what Fukuyama called a "moral miniaturization" in which we naturally gravitate toward those who are like us. This has the effect of narrowing our moral influences as we surround ourselves with those who will naturally encourage us to do what we already desire to do. As Grant points out, this further isolates us rather than expands our exposure to diversity. This allows us to pick our own morality.

Combining this with fantasy and a consumerism mindset, it is easy to see how modern culture has begun its descent into the downward spiral of auto-eroticism and a preference for virtual relationships over authentic flesh and blood companionship. Where this leads is anybody's guess but I think we would be wise to consider the auguries issued by Grant. With his keen insight and clarity regarding how we have come to find ourselves in our current predicament it would be foolish to write off his warnings as anything but informed and prophetic.

Grant Contrasts this modern notion of sexuality with the Biblical view which he defines as a holistic view which is essential to who we are as male and female. He argues that to define sexuality simply in terms of the sexual act misses the deeper essence of sexuality,

"The biblical metaphor of becoming "one flesh" in marital intimacy is consistent with Scripture's holistic view of human identity. We are integrated socio-psycho-somatic beings, and since sex engages our whole selves, sex outside of marriage is an act of personal disintegration."

This is what the consumerist, pornographic, and self-absorbed view of sexuality results in; a disintegration of our essential humanity. Furthermore, it leads to what Grant calls "the loss of transcendence within Christian Relationships" and a loss of a kingdom perspective.

The second half of the book is dedicated to mapping out the Biblical view of sexuality and applying it as a solution to the mental pathology of the modern sexual imaginary. The problem according to Grant is that we lack a unified vision of human sexuality and relationships. This lack of vision makes us susceptible to unconsciously adopting the prevailing sexual imaginary. In the church we have a lot of rules regarding sexuality but not a clearly articulated vision with which to intentionally combat the seductive narrative offered by the world.

Grant's vision of Christian sexuality has four characteristics which he says are essential to the vision. First, it understands that our sexuality is a part of a larger story; a story which began at creation and will continue to unfold throughout salvation history. Secondly, it tunes our sexual lives to the kingdom of God which we reflect as believers. The third characteristic is that it forms our Christian character and lastly, it forms our behavior.

A Biblical vision of sexuality is important because, as Grant says, it images God within our marriage.

"Sex matters because it involves one's whole self. It is a uniquely holistic act that provides the closest analogue we have for God's own intimacy within the Trinity and our spiritual union with God"

In the midst of all this talk of sexuality, I was happy to see that Grant didn't neglect the important place that singles play in reflecting God's image to the world. He places singleness firmly within the context of the full Christian life while not elevating it to a place of hyper-spirituality as some traditions are prone to do. Grant goes as far as to claim that singleness "positively engages sexuality rather than denying it". I couldn't agree more!

Grant concludes with a couple of very powerful chapter in which he frames the discussion within the context of the gospel and offers practical suggestions on how to redeem sexuality.

So what did I think of Divine Sex? To put it simply, this is the best book on Biblical sexuality that I have ever read. It isn't a book on the anatomy of sex and it isn't your typical Christian pop-psychology book on how to improve your sexual intimacy within marriage. No . . . it is something far greater than that. Jonathon Grant has done the Christian community a gigantic favor by meticulously peeling apart the layers of the modern sexual imaginary to expose the pathologies which are at the heart of the secularization of sexuality. This will satisfy the intellectual curiosities of your inner philosopher; but Grant does not leave the reader with a philosophical assessment of the sexual imaginary . . . he offers a solidly Biblical and deeply profound vision for the future of sexuality. The church, for her part, would be wise to listen.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Brazos Press in exchange for an online



review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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## Dillon says

WOW. Most. Embarrassing. Title. Ever.

I mean, are you kidding me? This book was really good - probably one of the more helpful spiritual formation books I've read - and YET, I feel trepidation even bringing up the title in polite conversation. What on earth were you thinking, Jonathan Grant?

Ok, moving on - 21st-century American Christian, read this book. I found the analysis and recommendations herein to be extremely helpful for two reasons: 1. It provides perspective, and 2. It gives words of counsel to issues that many might feel but don't quite know how to say.

First, on perspective - the first thing that stood out to me here was his insight on context. We cannot choose our context, but our context inevitably shapes us. A fish in water takes the water it swims in for granted. Christian or not, no American can altogether avoid the sex-centeredness in our culture. In everything from our books, songs, movies, to our chocolate advertisements - really most types of media, sex is either explicitly or implicitly held up as *the* experience to chase, enjoy, and fantasize about - as well as a basic need, without which life should be considered incomplete. Grant takes us through the development of this line of thinking, including some of its roots in Freudian psychology and how the subsequent embrace of it has shaped modern culture, including many struggles which are now the church's. The important point here, I think, is contrast. Sex is of course fundamental, but Apostolic teachings are simply at odds with the culture as to the role that it plays in life. To understand that the culture we've grown up in is *not* the way things always have been, means that the predominant cultural narrative need not dictate how things therefore *must* go, and thus provides a foothold for the Christian to actively live according to Scriptural teachings. We must realize that we are partakers in what James KA Smith calls "secular liturgies" - patterns of action and expression in our culture which we have come to take for granted. Without such a lens it becomes easy and even natural that Christians will subordinate the Christian narrative to the cultural narrative, e.g. love God so that he will give you a spouse and you can have sex - the whole *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* movement and all of its associated baggage (whether or not it's fair to call it that, I think most people would know what I mean when I say it. Forgive me if I speak too broadly). This, Grant points out, is an inversion. Whereas the culture teaches a person to love and pursue sex (yes, among other things...prestige, riches, personal fulfillment in other ways...but that's not what this book is about), Christianity teaches a person to love and pursue God - above all else. Therefore, all desires must needs be subordinated to that chief aim, and never the reverse. So yes, the perspective element was huge.

Ok, regarding important things said - I thought Grant's treatment of singleness, the dating process, and Christian chastity were better written than almost anything else I've read on these topics. Singleness as a *vocation* was a new way of framing the topic for me. That singles have an essential role in the church is a point easily missed - particularly in family churches, older singles can feel marginalized - legitimately so, even if the marginalization is inadvertent. Regarding the dating process, I appreciated what he had to say about how American consumerism has affected the way we tend to view potential dates - as products with something to offer, and how the boom of dating apps *can* (though he does point out, don't necessarily) exacerbate this mindset. Lastly, on chastity (for the single, long-term faithfulness for the married), he brought it back to essentially a re-orientation of desires. If the narrative that the desire for sex is a primary

and fundamental driving force of a person's life is accepted, anything resembling such a sexual ethic would be an entirely uphill struggle. If, however, the desires are re-oriented to be focused on the riches of Christ, other desires and the struggles that accompany them begin to fade in comparison. The point is not that upholding such an ethic suddenly becomes incredibly easy - it doesn't - it's that the paradigm has shifted. What formerly had been all-consuming has now been displaced in favor of a new direction.

There is definitely more here too - broadly speaking, those were my two takeaways, but there are certainly more. Grant also provides a vision for what the church in modern context can look like, some good stuff on waiting faithfully, and other content, stuff, and things too.

Overall, the message of this book is very similar to that of James K.A. Grant's *You Are What You Love*. Humans are desiring creatures, and therefore what we desire most shapes us immensely - it has the power to shape us totally. The shaping and formation desires are therefore essential to discipleship, thus this book - the competition for human desires is fierce, and in the current climate would sway the Christian in many directions contrary to Scripture. I recommend this book for Christians in the West. Its message is fundamental.

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### **Jillian Rugani says**

I gave up on this book. Very academic and difficult to read. While thorough in its presentation, the writing lacked humanity. Themes are aligned with Tim Keller's "Meaning of Marriage" which I found a much more compassionate read.

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### **Mark Taylor says**

Grant offers an incisive analysis of the current sexual and relational chaos that plagues Western Society and a compelling vision for sex and relationships that transcends the consumerist, casual and non-committed cultural norm. With both pastoral sensitivity with boldness, he sets an agenda for truly transomative communal practices that will cultivate the Christian character needed to sustain covenant relationships that put divine love on display.

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### **Jonathan Coleman says**

No doubt the best book I have read this year.

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### **Esther Hunte says**

#### **Great discussion of Christian sexual ethic**

This book got me to think outside of the box. As a single I need to allow God to shape my heart's desires. Also he discusses how important the Christian church community is for spiritual formation including in the

sexual area. In order to develop Christ like love I need to be able to walk that out in the power of the Spirit in community.

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## **Bob says**

*Summary: Jonathan Grant argues that a powerful "social imaginary" shapes sexual expression even within the Christian community and only communities that live and articulate a "thick" alternative vision can hope to have a formative influence on the lives of Christian disciples.*

Often, when I talk with various people in leadership in the Christian community about issues related to sexuality, there is a sense of not knowing what "hit us" and not necessarily liking the result nor knowing how to address it. What I think this important book by Jonathan Grant does is parse out the cultural revolution that has occurred that forms the sexual desires of all of us, and articulates a path forward for the church that goes much farther than the negative messages of "what not to do, when not to do it, and who not to do it with" that has often summarized teaching around sexuality within the church.

Grant draws heavily on the ideas of Charles Taylor and James K. A. Smith. He argues that there is a secular "social imaginary", a vision of reality, that fundamentally shapes our sexual attitudes, whether we are Christians or not. In particular, and he draws on Smith here, we are desiring creatures, and this social imaginary shapes both what we desire and how we think those desires may be fulfilled. He develops a cultural analysis of this social imaginary in the first part of the book. Its leading characteristic is an expressive individualism committed to radical authenticity in relationships. With regard to sexuality, there is both the longing to find one's "soul mate" and yet preserve one's own sense of autonomous individuality. It results in a 'definitely maybe' culture where people long for intimacy but struggle with commitment.

He explores the surprising reality that increasing numbers are deciding to "go solo", living alone, while either engaging in a series of casual relationships, or substituting cyber-porn for real relationships. This leads to a focus on the consumeristic aspect of modern sexuality, where media has created a feminine (and perhaps masculine) ideal, and where, through online dating, there is this myth of infinite choice, where one is always wondering if there is someone more perfect than the one you are with. He chillingly chronicles the rise of cyber-pornography and how it rewires the brain and renders its users less capable of engaging in real relationships that fail to conform to video fantasies. All this leads to a hyper-sexualized self, where, as one person interviewed put it, "sex has no mystery."

The second half of the book begins to look at what the author thinks the church must do, drawing on his own parish experience. He believes in the development of a Christian social imaginary, a compelling vision of sexuality within the life of a Christian disciple. It is a vision that is eschatological, understanding ourselves as the betrothed of Christ preparing for our union as the Church with him. This situates sexual desire within the framework of being a sign of something so much larger and really good for which we were made. It is a vision that is metaphysical, recognizing that it is as male and female we image God. We do not complete each other, and so singleness can be honored and fulfilling, but the marriage union does image something of the Creator. It is a vision that is formational and missional. It emphasizes faithfulness and service of fulfillment and the autonomous self. All of this focuses around shaping our desire for God, recognizing that our longing for intimacy is met most deeply in God and all other intimacies point us toward, and are meant to reflect that intimacy.

So much of this can happen only in a community that is living out the story of a gospel that calls us into

redeemed relationships marked by commitment, service, and self-giving love. Desire is shaped by examples, as friends, singles, and couples, model a new way of living and desiring that spans generations. He concludes with thoughts about various formational practices of such a community including embodied worship, that celebrates our physicality and churches that are courting communities, not in the sense of the singles "meat market" but as a place where men and women can serve and work together and have the chance to explore who the other is in the context of a supportive community.

The book is an elegantly written and thoughtful cultural analysis that avoids the easy nostrums of so many books while putting forth a rich vision of sexuality as both gift of God and harbinger of so much more. He speaks into a culture that has made sexuality little more than a pleasure function, even while so many who have been caught up in the secular social imaginary find themselves asking, "is that all there is?" Grant points the way to a different vision that would suggest that indeed there is so much more.

*Recently, this book was named one of Christianity Today's Books of the Year in the category of Christian Living/Discipleship.*

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## **Alex Stroshine says**

This book is red-hot! This is the best book I've read that encapsulates a biblical vision for sexuality and Christian relationships.

Jonathan Grant divides this book into two sections. In the first, he maps out the modern social imaginary, specifically focusing on postmodernism's views and values regarding sexuality (thus keeping us abreast of our cultural milieu). He notes that modern secular culture assumes the cosmos is closed off to the supernatural and that we have unshackled sexual intimacy from its original contexts of marriage and family. Grant explains how our contemporary understanding of sexuality is in bondage to individualism, autonomy, authenticity and consumerism. For instance, many people are electing to live alone, rather than having to share a space with others. The epidemic of easy-to-obtain online pornography has also left many believers mired in sin while the larger culture shrugs in the name of sexual liberation. While Grant admits that online dating services have led to good relationships, he cautions that the industry itself reduces relationships to a consumer service; people pay money to get matched and this provides them with a tantalizing plethora of possibilities, making commitment to one person difficult because we wonder if a better match will show up on our profile a few weeks later. Grant asserts that it is IMPOSSIBLE for us to be 100% impervious to how our current cultural milieu is forming us.

The main thrust of Grant's argument (okay, I pledge to abstain from puns from now on), explicated in the second half, is that Christians, especially the Church's leaders, need to do a better job of proclaiming the CHRISTIAN vision of sexuality and relationships. He admits the difficulty and tensions of forming relationships today. In a church he served in, he observed that the women were frustrated the men wouldn't make any advances while also frequently rebuffing the times men DID initiate as they waited on someone

they thought would be "better." This in turn led the men to avoid initiating any relationships because they were constantly rejected. We also tend to idolize relationships by placing such high expectations on our potential partners that we burden them with an overwhelming weight that they cannot possibly carry, which leaves us disappointed, resentful and pushes us towards dissolving that relationship.

Grant offers pastoral wisdom and guidance in the second half. A key point he makes is that contemporary Christianity needs to avoid the false dichotomy of reason and emotion by recognizing we are inevitably shaped and motivated by both our beliefs and our feelings; clinging to one of the poles is insufficient but by recognizing how our beliefs and feelings affect us we can enter into true authenticity. Following James K.A. Smith's argument that we are "lovers" rather than "thinkers," (along with Smith, Charles Taylor and Stanley Hauerwas are Grant's primary philosophical conversationalists while Mark Regnerus and Christian Smith provide sociology data and analysis), Grant asserts that we need to re-order our inordinate desires towards God and His holiness and vision for us (a la St. Augustine). Taking a cue from James Houston, Grant states we need to be aware that relationships involve passion, intimacy and commitment. Living out these aspects may be challenging at times (especially with the turbulence of young children), but they are necessary and vital. By reforming our desires according to the biblical vision for sexuality and keeping in step with God's narrative for our lives, our hearts and minds are both touched and we avoid the onerous obligation of mere duty (are we taking in the beatific vision or are our eyes caught in the cataracts of the flesh?). The author provides practical examples of how Christians can create spaces for relationships, such as organizing social events and programs catering to singles (Grant is well aware of the temptations and struggles of singles in the Church and also writes to them in this book; in general, he reminds us that periods we perceive as "desolation" can actually open us up to God's forming presence in our lives). Although on pages 183-84 I think Grant hints at it, I wish he would have been clearer about the role of physical attraction in seeking out a partner (it's not as if Isaac and Rebekah got to know each other over coffee, participated in the same small group and dated three years until getting hitched).

This is an excellent book for all Christians to read. Highly recommended!

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