

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

by Jonathan Grant

select quotations with Kindle reference numbers

One of the most influential legacies of modern politics and philosophy is the conviction that personal identity is premised on the individual's freedom to choose his or her own source of meaning and form of life, largely free from outside influences. This conviction has seeped so deeply into Western consciousness that it has become part of the religious landscape. 233

Although a number of influential Christian leaders have addressed issues relating to sexuality, the church has often struggled to perceive and effectively come to terms with the significant misformation of the self that occurs within the (post)modern world. 269

our inability to perceive the influence of cultural misformation is undermining the power of the Christian gospel to guide and form people so they can walk its pathway to sexual maturity. 275

As Charles Taylor observes: "For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn't seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life. The injunction is, in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: 'Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self.'" 439

Believing that we must be true to ourselves, especially our strongest feelings, increases our vulnerability to the infatuation cycle, which can pull us in ever-new directions. 566

In regard to sin, our culture of authenticity has sought to deny its existence and to rise above it. This subtly distorts the gospel by offering us the counterfeit of personal resonance and self-discovery without deep transformation. This should lead us into deep compassion rather than judgment over our culture, because behind the confident mask of the "authentic" self often lies self-hatred or a lack of self-acceptance. 753

Within postmodernism, the connection between what we do and who we are becomes less clear. The emphasis is on expressing freedom rather than on what that freedom expresses. 933

Wolfe suggests that postmodernism, despite its obvious flaws, has become the dominant way of thinking, not because it makes sense of life, but because it affirms the highest modern priority: unconstrained liberty. 954

Christian Smith -- "sovereign individuals lacking conviction or direction." They value freedom but are confused about what to do with it. They value information but have no coherent lens through which to organize it, and so they find themselves overwhelmed by it. They value

diversity but have no standard for evaluating differences, which become fuzzy and gray. They want to keep their options open, but openness easily becomes a void filled by default imperatives: the easy rush of pornography, consumerism, uncommitted relationships, the next big experience, and so on. 956

Romanticism describes the freedom of the expressive individual. It says we should freely express with our bodies what we feel in our hearts; how we feel about someone should determine how far we go with him or her sexually. 986

Realism, in contrast to romanticism, represents the freedom of the utilitarian individual. Realism tries to “demystify” sex by reducing it to a sort of “happiness technology” that offers fulfillment in the most immediate sense. 990

“selfism” views each person as an autonomous being and often locates the source of our problems in formative relationships with our parents and siblings. Within this model, true freedom involves becoming self-sufficient and freeing ourselves from the control and dysfunction of other people. 1079

The transition from adolescence to adulthood -- this open-ended, freewheeling stage of life is becoming longer. There are even signs that, for some, this stage can morph into a prolonged adolescence that lasts well into their forties and beyond. What used to be a brief transitional phase is becoming a permanent lifestyle choice. 1157

The modern myth is that we can become whole and mature on our own. 1192

Christianity views human identity as holistic, in that our sexuality is an essential part of who we are. Despite attempts throughout history to place sexuality at the edge of human personhood, the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection — as well as the divine blessing of marriage — all affirm our embodied existence, including sexuality as essential and ongoing, although we will express it differently in the age to come. Our sexuality also goes beyond our physical form to our essential “maleness” and “femaleness.” Modern social sciences have confirmed aspects of male and female sexuality that go beyond our different bodies and reproductive capacities. Sexuality is described broadly as “everything in mind, body and behavior that arise[s] from being male and female.” We can draw a distinction between a person’s physical sexuality and what it means to be a gendered being more broadly — that is, our social or affective sexuality. Although our culture has sought to “level the playing field” between maleness and femaleness, there are critical differences between how men and women generally relate to each other. 1773

Living faithful Christian lives is impossible unless we are nourished and sustained by a vision of what human flourishing looks like—what philosophers call our picture of the “good life.” Unless we really come to love this vision at the unspoken levels deep within ourselves, and come to understand our whole lives as heroic adventures to walk faithfully within this vision, our

perspective will be pulled out of shape and distorted by our cultural context, tantalizing us as it does with unrealistic expectations of sexual satisfaction and relational perfection. 2631

A comprehensive Christian vision of sexuality has four essential characteristics....

The vision is eschatological: it places our sexuality within the bigger context of God's unfolding plan for creation.

The vision is metaphysical: it aligns our sexual lives with the nature of things as they really are, the present reality of heaven. It attunes us to the kingdom of God, seen and unseen, which we seek to reflect.

The vision is formational: it shapes who we are (our character) as we journey toward maturity in the image and likeness of Christ.

The vision is missional: it shapes what we do (our behavior), which gives a purpose to our sexuality that expresses God's character and so witnesses to his mission in the world.
2660

Referring to our sexual lives, Richard Hays says: Those who demand fulfillment now, as though it were a right or a guarantee, are living in a state of adolescent illusion. To be sure, the transforming power of the Spirit really is present in our midst; on the other hand, the "not yet" looms large; we live with the reality of temptation, the reality of the hard struggle to live faithfully. Consequently . . . some may find disciplined abstinence the only viable alternative to disordered sexuality. . . . The art of eschatological moral discernment lies in working out how to live lives free from bondage to sin without presuming to be translated prematurely into a condition that is free from "the sufferings of this present time." 2783

if our sexuality is intricately connected to our spirituality, then our sexual desires must be properly directed to God before they can be healthily expressed in our sexual lives. 3307

If our moral compass is only oriented by what resonates within us, then our susceptibility to self-deception exposes us to being led astray by these impulses. 3379

One of the most influential trends in the modern world is the intrusion of a form of gnostic dualism, whereby mind/spirit/personality are seen as separate from material reality and physical embodiment. 4417

As the popular reasoning goes, what counts is my faith—since Jesus is interested in my heart—not what I do with my body. 4422

The Christian life can only be learned, like a language, in conversation with others. Within the committed context of the church, we need people who are capable of being faithful to a way of life and to each other, even when that chafes against the consensus morality of our culture.
4568