

Pastor Stef's Book Review – May 2016

There are two topics I find particularly interesting: Death and sex. I read about them often! What cultures believe about these two things will tell you a lot about them. In fact, they are both intricately connected with religion – another area of fascination for me.

Every religion in the world is trying to answer the question of death and what, if anything, happens after we die. In the same way, sexuality, the deepest bond two humans can experience together, has also been tied to religion from its earliest days. Many of the ancient gods were fertility gods, which resulted in temple prostitution and other debased sexual practices. To this day Hindu and Buddhist tantric sex is deeply spiritual. In the Old Testament God had much to say about sex and how we are to engage (and not engage) in it for the benefit of worship and society.

The Christian church has stumbled along trying to find its way in the maze of different cultural and religious sexual behaviours. It has exalted celibacy as the most spiritual state, said that sex is only to be used for procreation (Augustine), written erotic love poetry to God (many Christian Mystics), and celebrated and indulged in the pleasures and freedom of sex within marriage (Puritans).

So, when I saw Rob Bell's book ***Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality (2007)*** at *Value Village* I picked it up. I knew right away from its layout that this was not going to be a scholarly book, but I felt it would be a quick read that I may be able to recommend for a more popular audience. The message of the book was great, but the title overreached. In fact, I think the title, and many of the chapter titles like "God wears Lipstick", "Leather, Whips, and Fruit" and "Whoopee Forever" are more attention grabbers than telling you about their actual content. Rarely did the titles have much (if anything) to do with what first comes into your mind when you read them.

The substance of the book is a fresh look at the gospel message. God created us for intimacy with him and with each other. This intimacy, however, has been broken because of sin. Sin distorts and breaks and muddies our relationships so that intimacy is something we are all looking for, but are unable to find. God is a great lover. Even after we have been unfaithful to him he comes to win us back, like the prophet Hosea did with his unfaithful with Gomer. In surrendering to God we are given the Holy Spirit who begins to develop in us the kind of character that is able to have intimacy with God and with others, both romantically and in good solid friendships.

The target of this book is twenty-somethings, but I know many people in their 40s, 50s and 60s that continually struggle with relationships and could use the scriptural lessons Rob Bell teaches here. The book would be a great evangelist tool to give to someone having difficulty in their relationships. It is also a good tool for Christians still sorting out what they believe about, or wondering why they keep failing at, love, God and relationships.

For a more in-depth book on a theology of sexuality I would recommend Stan Grenz's *Sexual Ethics* or Jonathan Grant's *Divine Sex*. This second book won the 2016 *Christianity Today* book of the year award in the category of "Christian Living/Discipleship". We have a copy of it in The Hub.