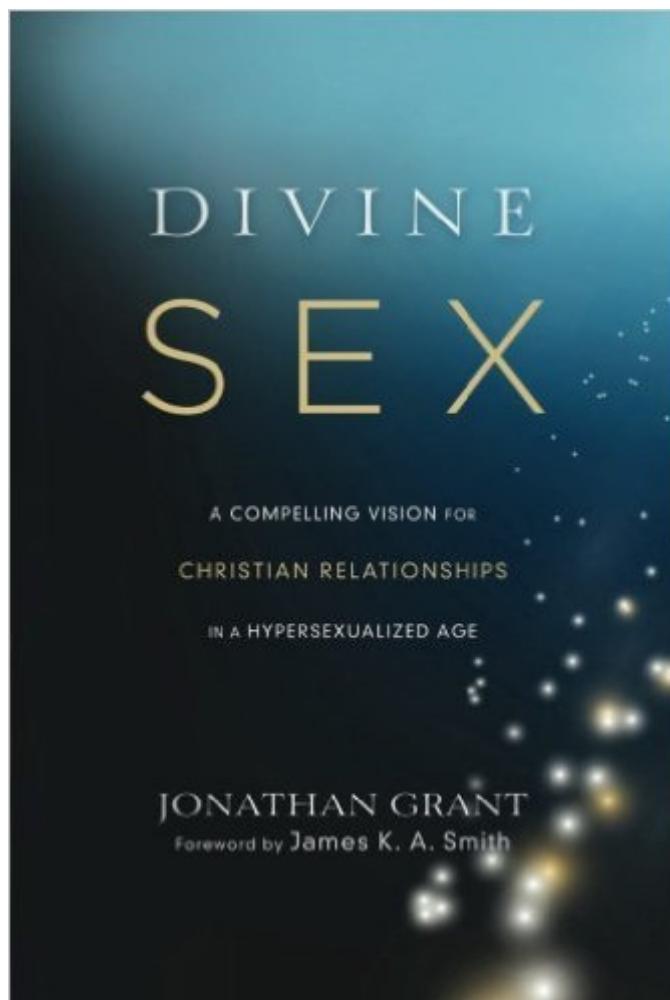


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Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision For Christian Relationships In A Hypersexualized Age



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

What images does the word "sex" bring to mind? Are they positive images of beauty or negative pictures of filth? Are they from respectable publications or are they from erotic tabloids? Do Christian publishing houses talk often enough about sex and sexuality matters, apart from abstentions, avoidance, or sexual addictions? Not often enough, which is why this book aims to bring back the beauty of sexuality and how the world at large needs a vision of God's creation,

something Jonathan Grant calls, "Divine Sex." The world we live in unfortunately have inundated us with corrupted images of what was meant to be good into something that represent all things wrong. Grant calls it "hypersexualized age" where sex and love are confused with personal preferences and sexual objects for self-gratification. Even churches stayed silent on many matters on sex. Maybe it is due to ignorance, or probably it is due to fear of negative pushbacks by a society that is bent on insisting upon their own ways. Grant asserts that we as a Church need to "catch up," "to understand the needs of this generation as it deals with the brokenness and fragmentation of modern sexuality." Based on this recognition, Grant goes on to tackle these key questions.- Doing a Cultural Exegesis: "What is it about our cultural moment that has led to such a complex dysfunction in sexual relationships?"- Exploring Paths Forward: "In what significant ways is our secular context shaping our sexuality?"- Empowering Christians: "What is the Christian vision of relationships, and how can Christian leaders give that vision power in people's real lives?" The first part of the book deals with "Mapping the Modern Sexual Imagery." He laments the vast number of relationships that are seeking a romantic perfect partner instead of becoming one's best version of oneself. When personal freedom and individualism becomes more important, personal integrity and authenticity take a back seat. This sets people on the path of finding transcendence in themselves rather than from God above. Without a proper foundation on what true authenticity requires, many couples base their versions of person-hood on self and on modern worldly desires. Grant calls this the "distraction of attraction" where in trying to seek gratification outside, we miss out on the real needs inside us. We are caught in a complicated web of fantasy and fatalism, intimacy and autonomy, shifting commitments and sinful desires. He points out the three inadequate paths to personal freedom.1) Utilitarianism that sees the world as a place to compete rather than to cooperate and co-exist2) Expressivism that splits the doing from the being of the person.3) Postmodernism that focuses solely on human experienceEven Christians are caught in the trap of false freedoms. Marriages crumble as individuals become disappointed when their personal needs are not met by their soul-mates. Consumerism becomes the substitute for self-definition. With modern desires come multiple ways to accumulate stuff to shore up our empty beings. We becomes consumers rather than producers, a close parallel to people who want to be served rather than to serve others. The love they provide comes with strings attached. With technology, eroticism and relational detachment gets elevated a few notches. Love becomes a commodity and people trust machines more than people. Grant makes a shrewd observation that what we do with things, we invariably do the same with people. In other words, we begin with consuming things, progressing to consuming people and what they can offer, before becoming a self-indulgent consumer. We then

become the very things we worship. There are thoughts about how one's search for happiness leads to radical freedoms including breaking traditional boundaries on sex, burying gender differences, and trusting pornography as the modern way to sex education. There are severe consequences for pornography use, even more serious for prolonged addictions. Eventually, people who are lost without God will lose themselves in seeking after things they need least in exchange for things that they need most. The first six chapters do a good job in showing readers how sex understood outside of God is painfully inadequate and spiritually fatal. Thankfully, there is hope. The second part deals with "Charting a New Course for Christian Formation." Here is where Grant charts his vision for what divine sex looks like. Instead of simply a new course for Christianity, he calls it "Christian Formation" to remind us that spirituality is a journey rather than a destination. We need a Christian narrative from which to grow. Such a "Christian social imagery" requires a vision regarding sexuality. Four essential characteristics comprise the "comprehensive Christian vision for sexuality." 1) Eschatological: Our sexuality must be seen in context of God's future revelation; 2) Metaphysical: Our sexuality is linked to both the present reality and the future kingdom to come; 3) Formational: Our sexuality needs to grow to a mature state; 4) Missional: Our sexuality expresses God's character that we can witness as whole beings for God. Divine sex is thus about sex within marriage. It is keeping the covenant. Singles are not excluded from this definition, for they can be "full participants in God's service." Even the Apostle Paul was single and was able to fully serve God to the best of his ability. Single people do not deny sex but engaging our sexuality via quest for meaning and personal identity. Facilitate true friendships and authentic relationships on the basis of who Christ is. Learn to paint the portrait of a "desiring self" by understanding the true longings of the human heart. Desires are not there for us to escape from or to see immediate gratification for. It is fuel for searching for our deepest experiences. One would eventually realize that our true need is always for God, whether we are married, single, or whatever condition we are in. Grant adds that "The goal of Christian formation is to form disciples within the rhythms of divine desire." Once we are able to let our Christian faith inform us in our attitudes toward others, toward self and our desires, we can live the gospel story. We can find contentment in God. We can become what we do. The musical metaphor is an appropriate one which tells us once again about the melodies of heaven rather than the notes of earth. So What? ===== I remember years ago hearing Josh McDowell asking audiences what is the most powerful sex organ. Replying to his own question, he said, "The mind." That is exactly the same conclusion that Grant has come to, that the way we live our sexual lives arise out of our thoughts and imaginations. We do need a social imagery, especially in such a complex and confused world we live in. Sex education has far too often become the

domain of science and technology which do a good job in describing the sex process but performs poorly when it comes to other aspects like morality, ethics, and wisdom. Knowledge without wisdom is useless. I am thankful that Jonathan Grant has written this book to counter the tsunami of information or misinformation about sexual matters. Perhaps, the reason why the word "sex" carries a negative connotation is because of the pervasiveness of pornography and the general tolerance of illicit sex. While the public are up in arms against political heads and society leaders whenever they commit an inappropriate sexual relationship, the same cannot be said of may others committing adultery in private, lust after underage children, and illegitimate sexual activities outside of marriage and God's divine purpose for human sexuality. What causes people to stray? Why are so many marriages in trouble? Why is there so much confusion about sex? We need an authoritative voice to wake up from our spiritual slumber. We need a clear light to show us the way. We need to recognize that our sexual desires can only find their fulfilment when we let God restore our human narrative of sexuality. That our desires are not simply there to be fulfilled once and for all, or to be avoided at all costs. Our desires are part of what St Augustine had brilliantly summarized: "Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You, man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that You resist the proud, yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You." Apart from the discussion on sexuality, the observations and perceptiveness of modern culture are insightful for other applications too. Sexuality and divinity cannot be separated. For when they are, we will be loosed from heavenly guidance and will be at the mercy of worldly forces that will suck us in mind, body, and soul. Any forms of sexuality that is based on foundations other than in God will crumble sooner, if not, later. Thanks to Grant, we have a book that helps point the way toward redemption of true sexuality. Rating: 4.75 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of Brazos Press and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

Besides the fact I am biased towards the author of this book because in describing him we have to use words like integrity, approachable, qualified, empathetic and authoritative does not cloud my judgement in anyway. For most of our married life as of 2015, 24 to be exact my wife and I have often mused at the troubles our younger contemporaries face in love. Here, in a succinct and well written dialogue, Jonathan builds an easy to absorb account and walk

through of what problems exist, why they are problems in the first place, and what can be done about them. It is not often we get to hear this sort of conversation — a great thing has been written here. Whether you're looking for something personal to help redevelop your understanding of this crucial aspect of our lives, or you're overseeing a group of people desperate for your loving leadership in their troubles, this book will give you sound material to begin your own journey of unpacking who we are in this highly complex, Post-Christian environment. Definitely recommended reading:

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 it is 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 *ego 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.

Disclosure of Material

Connection: I received this book free from the publisher. 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.”

Jonny is a great story teller who takes you on a journey founded on both real world personal experience and thorough academic research. This fine blend of reason and reality makes for an engaging read. His recount of how current thinking has evolved through time and cultural transformation provides context for a challenge to present paradigms. His vision for authentic relationships and willingness to speak out a clear message aligned with Jesus' way to abundant life offers hope to those robbed by conformity to current social norms. I enjoyed the journey, and have new perspective and context for relationship ahead. Well worth the read. Thanks.

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