JONATHAN GRANT, *DIVINE SEX: A COMPELLING VISION FOR CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN A HYPERSEXUALISED AGE*. GRAND RAPIDS: BRAZOS PRESS, 2015. (249 PP) [IBSN 9781441227164]

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Divine Sex presents a Christian understanding of sexuality. Grant's persuasive rhetoric and ability to draw upon personal experience is charismatic. However, Grant's approach also has drawbacks, testifying to the complexity of the subject. Grant does not identify his starting position, which leads to unexamined assumptions. As a result, this book may not be compelling for individuals who have different experiences to Grant.

In chapter one, Grant uses an awe-inspiring experience at Whistler and Blackcomb to frame his argument on sexuality (15). Grant emphasises the exhilaration and risk of the mountains, creating a metaphor for the state of contemporary relationships. He claims that relationships are "hypersexualised" (15), romantically idealistic concerning experimentation, and fatalistic regarding commitment (29).

Grant argues in chapter two that our identity is no longer built on an external moral code, but internally, through our pursuit of emotional and sexual satisfaction (30–31). Grant believes this "culture of authenticity" owes its origin to the "American Renaissance", where poets and philosophers like Walt Whitman and William James focused on (1) self-exploration and personal expression; and (2) spiritual transcendence (32–33).

In the four following chapters, Grant expresses concern at our culture's understanding of sexuality. Initially, he discusses the competitive tone of our workplaces and the expressivist nature of our home lives (57), reasoning that both are modern routes to individual freedom. He claims that postmodernity developed afterwards, emphasising the individual even further (57). Grant then looks at the impact of capitalism on sexuality. He maintains that we cannot help "*whether* we love" but "*what* we love" (73), and that sin has corrupted our desires so that we are drawn to idols rather than God (73–74). Grant examines the "hypersexuality" present in contemporary culture (93) arguing that we have diminished sex into a kind of "happiness technology" that devalues people and physical intimacy (99). His concern at the rise of pornography is particularly persuasive at this point (102–113). Finally, Grant explores the impact that an atomistic worldview has had on sexuality, which developed due to the loss of "transcendence (higher reality)" and "teleology (purposefulness)" (116–119). Grant suggests that Christians must be situated within a larger, coherent Christian story to counter this atomised perspective (125–132).

In chapters seven to eleven, Grant proposes that the way of countering the "influence of the modern social imaginary" is to go beyond cognitive approaches to discipleship and engage Christians in "*counter*formation[al]" journeys (135). Grant highlights the need for the church to develop a stronger

vision of Christian sexuality that is eschatological, metaphysical, formational and missional (142–143). Grant then identifies the need for Christian desire to be rightly oriented and, through the transformation of God (171), freed from false desires (169), such as self-love and addiction (172–174). Grant believes in the formative power of the gospel as a "counternarrative" to our "modern sexual scripts" (192–193). Grant suggests forming mimetic discipleship groups as a way of equipping individuals with the skills needed to counter secular understandings of sexuality (203-206). Grant also maintains that being intentional about the practices we engage in is key to forming us according to a Christian vision of sexuality (216–229).

It is hard not to be persuaded by Grant's perspective in *Divine Sex*. His examples come from years of ministry and of what he has observed. However, despite clearly holding a conservative (in the traditional sense) Protestant position, Grant does not articulate this. In his discussion on postmodernity, for instance, he assumes that the individualism of the enlightenment developed due to a self-centred desire to be free from God's influence. In doing this, he does not recognise any historical church-state governance that oppressed the working classes within Christendom, compelling a greater focus on individual rights (c.f. Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* or Colin Gunton's *The One the Three and the Many*). He seems to romantically assume that once things were good, now they are bad. This leads to philosophically unconvincing discussions in chapter nine where he attempts to demonstrate how a Christian perspective rectifies the evils of the enlightenment.

However, the most noticeable assumptions in *Divine Sex* concern sexuality. In chapter four, Grant discusses the evils of consumeristic and objectifying approaches to the body without reference to either feminist or liberationist theologies. Instead, when he begins to articulate a Christian understanding of sexuality in chapter five, he depends almost exclusively on Stanley Grenz's book *Sexual Ethics* (96–98). Later, Grant comments that in our culture we "choose" our gendered/sexual identities "despite the unambiguous testimony of our bodies" (121–122). This was a startling comment. If it were unambiguous, there would be no debate. However, some believe that there is genuine diversity, not only in a static sense, concerning what we are initially born as, but also in a process sense. Our experiences change us physically, and our physicality impacts our experiences. Referring to male and female like clearly demarcated categories ignores those who do not easily fit. Grant seems to believe the Christian view is straightforward. He simplifies and dismisses the perspectives of others on the subject, most notably, Rob Bell, where Grant comes very close to presenting a "straw man argument" (177).

Sex is a difficult topic for any one person to address. But perhaps its difficulty is suggestive of something essential. We cannot tackle it alone. Sex and sexuality inherently concern the self's relations with the "other". In my view, theological engagement in this subject is similar. It cannot be done without acknowledging both ourselves, and where we stand, and the "other", and where they stand. I do not think that Grant's work engages sufficiently with truly "other" perspectives. As a result, using his analogy from chapter one, I am not convinced that Grant leaves his camp sufficiently to tackle the mountain.