

# Eros Intimacy and the mind of God

## Smith Lecture 2012

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## **Sex, Sexology, and God**

Sex and God. It's hard to think of two topics that are further apart. Sex is all about passion, desire, love, pleasure and fulfilment. So the only thing God would say about it is: "don't do it". Because God is the ultimate cosmic killjoy. And Christians are the most anti-sex, boring, bigoted, puritanical, homophobic, repressed hypocrites in the world. And the Bible is just a set of out-dated rules that has no place in the scientific, learned, enlightened, liberated 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Isn't it?

These are some of the questions I am asked when people find out what I do for a living. How can I be a sexologist and a Christian? The two topics at best have nothing to do with each other; at worst they contradict.

Don't they?

For those of you who have never heard of sexology as a profession, much less ever met a sexologist, and are right now visualising someone who spends their time reading the Kama Sutra while surrounded by sex toys... I'm sorry to disappoint you. We're researchers, teachers and therapists, with an interdisciplinary perspective on sex, sexuality and sexual health. We're represented by professional and clinical associations like the World Association of Sexual Health (<http://www.worldsexology.org/>); the Australian Society of Sexual Educators, Researchers and Therapists (<http://www.assertnsw.org.au/>); and the International Academy of Sexual Research (<http://www.iasr.org/>). We publish specialist academic and clinical journals such as Archives of Sexual Behaviour; Journal of Sexual Medicine; Journal of Sex Research; Annual Review of Sex Research; Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy; Journal of Sex Education; and Sexuality and Disability; and many others.

How does my profession fit in with my Christian belief? When a senior professor of sexology in the US asked me that question, I said: "as sexologists we all study sex; as a Christian I have the honour and privilege of a personal relationship with the creator of sex."

I invite you, in this Smith Lecture, to join me as I bring together the two passions of my life: God, and sex.

The presentation is in three parts. First, we will explore sexological research, on eros, or sexual desire; intimacy as expressed in the power of romantic love or limerance; and the attachment of couple bonding. Second, we will take a critical look the role sex plays in today's society. Sex is self-obviously powerful; the question is: are we sanctioning, even inviting and enjoying, a destructive use of sex, while also lamenting the destructive effects on our society and especially our children? Finally, we will look into the mind of God, the creator of sex.

## **From Christian to Sexologist to Christian Sexologist**

Before we begin, let me tell you a little about myself. I was born to Christian parents in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka Hill country. My grandparents were converted from Hinduism to Christianity by a wonderful missionary from England who decided that "Rasiah Muthuveloe Rutnam" was far too pagan a name and changed it to Roberts. I grew up as Patricia Roberts – about as Welsh as you could get in Sri Lanka in the 1950s. I always knew that God had a purpose for my life; I just didn't know that it was working in sex down under.

I came to sex late in life. It happened in Hawaii in the late 1970s. I was a junior lecturer at the University of Colombo, and was awarded a scholarship to study for a Masters at the University of Hawaii. In my studies, I met a wonderful sexologist, Professor Milton Diamond – still regarded as one of the great researchers of this relatively young science – and he set my feet on the path of understanding sex. This was interesting, given that I was four years married, and had a two year old son, and my husband and son were both with me there in Hawaii. Anyway... so there I was in late 70s-early 80s Honolulu, meeting gender benders changing their sexual identity in search for happiness, watching floor shows that were the forerunners to modern porn, talking to colleagues who frequented BDSM and fetish parlours in search of that perfect high, and sitting in consultation rooms listening to stories of sexual pain and rejection... all the while trying to reconcile what I was learning with what the Bible told me was God's plan for sex.

What did I learn about sex during this time of postgraduate study in Hawaii?

I learned how *amazingly complementary* we are sexually as male and female. We have the most exquisitely matched genitalia. The penis is an engineering marvel, made to perfectly match the vagina. And the vagina is perfectly structured to enfold the penis; yet it opens wide enough to allow passage of a baby's head. And the penis, and its little female analogue the clitoris (which is, incidentally, the only organ created solely for pleasure) are both so sensitive that we call them our erogenous zones – a term reserved for the zones of the body that are highly sexually sensitive. And the male and female sexual responses are perfectly harmonised: the man turned on rapidly, like a quick-touch microwave, and the woman, more like a slow-cooker who can accept his guidance and leadership in romance.

I realised that sex is *powerful*; an energy that drives men and women to seek that ultimate sexual high. In a moment, we'll look at the neurochemical basis of this power.

And sex is *fragile*: badly handled sex can damage, even destroy, our bodies and our 'souls' – our feelings, our identity, our sense of self. Sex, when handled wrongly, breaks hearts, wrecks lives, fractures families, and causes mental and physical illness.

## **The power of the passion: recent research into sexual neurobiology**

Sexologists over the years have recognised this search for the ultimate sexual satisfaction. Helen Fisher, neurobiologist and anthropologist says

Everywhere people sing for love, pray for love, work for love, live for love and die for love. Nothing can extinguish the human drive to love.<sup>2</sup>

Shakespeare's Romeo understood the power of sex when he said:

Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs. Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers eyes. Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers tears. What is it else? A madness most discreet, a choking gall and a preserving sweet.<sup>3</sup>

And the Bible speaks of the power of sex and love in a book called the Song of Songs.

...for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Helen Fisher 'The drive to love' in *The New Psychology of Love* edited by Robert J. Sternberg, Karin Weis, Weill Ballou Press, UK 2006.

3 Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act 1; Scene 1.

4 Song of Songs 8:6b-7.

Recent neuroscience research gives us a framework to explore the power and beauty of eros and intimacy. It helps us understand why sex is so powerful, why we feel its so core to our being.

Based on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRIs) studies, Professor Helen Fisher and her colleagues in Rutgers University have described the neurobiology of sexual emotions and motivations.<sup>5</sup> They explain it as a three-stage model of sequential, discrete, but interrelated neurological responses. Each stage is based in a specific brain area, and has distinct neurotransmitters as well as behavioural repertoire. In this model, *sex drive* motivates general sexual desire; *romantic love*, also known as *limerance*, is associated with preference for a specific partner; and partner *attachment* enables a long-term bond to be formed between man and woman to provide bi-parental care.

### **Stage One: Desire**

The first stage is sexual *desire*. It's that 'kick in the gut' feeling that says 'I want sex'. It's a testosterone-powered urge that happens deep in the limbic system of the brain, and it's driven by a powerful cocktail of neurochemicals<sup>6</sup>. It's an appetite, a craving, a non-specific hunger, for sexual gratification. We could satisfy it through a variety of ways: through sex with our partner, sex with someone else's partner, sex with a prostitute or surrogate, casual sex, masturbation... take your pick. Sexual desire motivates us to have sex. Without it we wouldn't bother to mate, and the human race wouldn't reproduce.

Puberty – the age of reproductive maturity – sets sexual desire in motion. The deep emotional brain begins to mature in early puberty, a time of growing awareness of sexuality and sexual identity. Neural connections, which set the 'script' for what 'turns us on' and 'off' begin to form and reform deep in the Limbic system and Amygdala of the brain.

Other parts of the brain mature at different rates. The frontal lobe, responsible for such "executive" functions as self-control, judgment, emotional regulation, organisation and planning, matures far more slowly – it does not reach maturity till the early 20's.<sup>7</sup>

In a process called pruning, neuronal connections that underlie cognitive and other abilities stick around if they're used, but wither if they're not. Some of these changes are purely biological and driven by hormones. But external stimuli strongly influence the overall process. We now know that the inputs into teen brains – environmental, peer influence or adult role models – all influence teen brain development. In fact the relatively new science of epigenetics looks at how environmental factors affect gene expression even within the womb.

### **Controlling our cravings**

What happens in adult life? Is our brain wiring fixed for life?

Our brains retain neuroplasticity. As adults, what we feed our senses continues to affect the control and expression of our desires.

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5 Helen Fisher, Arthur Aron, Debra Mashek, Haifang Li and Lucy L. Brown, 'Defining the Brain Systems of Lust, Romantic Attraction, and Attachment', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 31, 5, (2002): 413-419.

6 J. G. Praus, 'REVIEWS: Pathways of Sexual Desire', *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 6 (2009): 1506–1533

7 Laurence Steinberg, 'A behavioral scientist looks at the science of adolescent brain development', *Brain and Cognition* 72 (2010), 160–164.

Erik Janssen, and his team at the laboratories of the Kinsey Institute, has described what they term the 'dual control' mechanism of sexual desire response.<sup>8</sup> The way we respond to a sexual stimulus is based on the balance between two centres in our brain: one for sexual excitation, and the other for sexual inhibition. These function like accelerator and brake to our sexual desire. What we feed our brain through life – environmental influences, alcohol, drugs and especially pornography – all influence the sensitivity of the centres.

This points us away from a mere biological, hormonal determinism. We can't deny our personal responsibility and say "my hormones made me do it". We are not simply balls of hormones seeking sexual satisfaction; we are not chimpanzees or Bonobo monkeys acting on primal instincts of desire. We have an executive cerebral cortex control over our desires; we choose what we put into our brains and choose how we act to sexual impulses. And that means we can, and must, conduct our sexuality in a responsible manner.

## **Stage Two: Love**

Remember that feeling of falling in love? That moment you looked in her eyes? That pupil-dilating, heart-palpitating moment when you knew that he was the one? It really is chemistry! It's the most delicious feeling in the world, which we feel we cannot resist!

The second stage of Fisher's three-stage model is called *romantic love* or *limerance*.<sup>9</sup> It's characterised by an increased focus on one preferred mating partner. It is a motivational state: we feel motivated to pursue one particular person, for the reward of intimacy – that is to say, we 'fall in love' with them.

This affective state is primarily associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine, a powerful pleasure chemical. Other chemical changes include an increase in norepinephrine and decreased levels of central serotonin. Dopamine gets sprayed all over the brain, with an effect a little like taking cocaine. Elation, light-headedness, euphoria, loss of appetite and trouble sleeping are all symptoms of this crazy phase.

Each of these chemicals play a part in those crazy things we do when we're in love. Dopamine gets us hooked on our beloved – we think about them all the time, we want to be with them, close to them. The decrease in serotonin caused us to concentrate on that person in exclusion of all others – a bit like obsessive compulsive disorder. Part of the desire for physical proximity is a desire to kiss the beloved – which, together with that deep sniff of pheromones, enables us to assess our potential partner's immune system. Evolutionary biologists theorise that this enables us to seek a better immunological 'match' in our potential partner.

Norepinephrine is in the same chemical family as adrenaline. It makes us feel fearless, and inhibits our pain centres, when we're around our beloved. This prevents us from seeing any flaw, any blemish, in our beloved – they are perfect. And we'll do anything for them – climb any mountain, swim any ocean, fight any battle. That's why people do stupid stunts to impress their beloved and win their love.

This is why love is so powerful: it's a potent neurochemical cocktail! Each of these chemicals significantly affect human behaviour on their own; mixed together, they're explosive!

That's why rejection and failure in love can be truly 'biologically' painful. It can induce clinical depression and in extreme cases lead to suicide and/or homicide<sup>10</sup>. Being 'in love' is an addiction, an obsession and like it, loss is felt at a neural and neurochemical level.

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8 Bancroft, John, Graham, Cynthia A., Janssen, Erick and Sanders, Stephanie A. 'The Dual Control Model: Current Status and Future Directions', *Journal of Sex Research*, 46: 2, (2009) 121 — 142

9 Helen Fisher, Arthur Aron, and Lucy Brown, 'Romantic love: a mammalian brain system for mate choice', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society Bulletin* 361 (2006), 2173–2186.

Fortunately, this romantic state of lovesickness lasts between eighteen to twenty-four months. We couldn't survive any longer than this, we'd blow up.

### **Stage Three: Attachment**

What happens to a relationship after that time? One of two things: either the couple break up, or they move into the third phase of *attachment* or *bonding*.

It's like having a favourite pair of slippers. They've lost their shape and fur – but through constant use, they're so perfectly moulded to your feet that they're really, really comfortable, and you're much more 'at home' in them than a new pair. Just like that, he's not going to walk into the room, rip off his shirt to show off his six-pack, and scoop you up in his arms and take you off to bed – the only six pack he's got is in the 'fridge and full of beer – and her curves are in all the wrong places now, it's been years since she looked good in lingerie... but you wouldn't exchange each other for the world, because you're so used to each other and comfortable with each other.

This phase of a couple's relationship is characterized by feelings of trust, calm, security, social comfort, and emotional union. The neural circuitry of this brain system has been associated primarily with the neuropeptides, oxytocin and vasopressin.<sup>11</sup> These are called 'cuddle hormones' for the simple reason that they increase with any form of intimacy between the couple. An orgasm sends oxytocin levels through the roof. This shared intimacy of a long term union brings lovers closer together, potentially triggering a "virtuous" cycle: the more you make love, the closer you feel, and the closer you feel, the more you make love. Evolutionary biologists theorise that it provides a mechanism to keep a couple together and provide bi-parental care for children.

## **Sex and society**

Let's move on now to explore the role sex plays in society, against this neurobiological background. How are we as a society dealing with the power and fragility of sex? Has feeding our desires become the goal in life? What about love? And long term couple attachment?

### **Insatiable desire?**

The desire for more and more sex, better sex, and longer-lasting sex has spawned an industry of medicalised sexuality: props, pills and surgery to enhance our bodily sexual functioning. As the large gold and red roadside billboards advise those of us who want to 'bonk longer' or have 'longer lasting sex', all we need is to make that phone call, and it will be ours. And if that isn't enough and you want the mega penis you see in porn videos – get a penis enhancement. Or maybe as a woman, you want that hairless prepubescent pubis of the porn star? Labioplasty and vaginal reconstructions are available. Or at least get a Brazilian. And it's not just about enhancing your body; it's about putting yourself in the right environment. Get yourself on a wild cruise-ship sex tour, where you can dull your inhibitions with alcohol imbibed from breast-shaped bottles.<sup>12</sup> Age, illness, disability – nothing need stand in the way of having the body we want, and the sex we want. Except

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10 Helen E. Fisher, Lucy L. Brown, Arthur Aron, Greg Strong and Debra Mashek, 'Reward, Addiction, and Emotion Regulation Systems Associated With Rejection in Love' *Journal of Neurophysiology* 104 (2010) 51-60

11 Bianca Acevedo, Arthur Aron, Helen Fisher and Lucy Brown, 'Neural correlates of long-term intense romantic love', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2011: 1-15

money, of course – all those pills and toys and surgery and cruising costs a fair bit, you know.

Advertisers know how to use sex to sell goods and services. Advertisements appeal to our sexual desires to sell the most unsexy products: cars, jeans, lamb chops, sleeping aids. What's scary is that some of these ads suggest sexual violence and subjugation of women. The aforementioned ad for jeans depicts a muscular young man – wearing jeans – holding a curvaceous woman down on the ground, while other young men – in jeans – stand around them. It hints towards a gang rape.

And then there's pornography. It's a 100 billion – that's *billion* – dollar global industry. The average age of first exposure to porn is eleven to thirteen years of age. Repeated exposure to porn rewires the brain. People – particularly men – who are compulsive porn users get used to porn-star sexual activity, and are therefore less and less able to respond sexually to their real-life partner. That's because porn is, believe it or not, *fantasy*. Porn stars are actors. Their screen names are not their real names. They don't actually care about each other; they're just doing a job. Their sexual activities are like movie stunts: ordinary people can't do them. They should come with a warning: "performed under controlled conditions; don't try this at home". Men are particularly vulnerable to porn because they are, on average, more visual – although there has been a recent increase in written, literary porn, directed at women<sup>13</sup>. Men watch porn, get used to fantasy sex, and grow more and more distant from their real, fragile, vulnerable, flesh-and-blood partner.

Is this really what we want sex to be? A desperate, porn-directed, pill-powered, surgically enabled pleasure explosion?

Do we have sex, or does sex have us?

### **Love vs. lust**

What about the relational aspects of sexuality – love and romance? Have we lost the ability to distinguish between "I love you" and "I want your body"? Do we actually love the other person? Or are we really just in love with ourselves: "I can't believe what you're doing to me, baby"?

Nowhere is this game of lust played out more than in our teenagers. We have very successfully passed on to them the message that 'if it feels good – then just do it'.

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society – a department of La Trobe University – conducts major Australian sexual health research. In the fourth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students<sup>14</sup>, they interviewed 2,926 year 10 and year 12 students on a range of sexual health knowledge and behaviours. They reported that:

- 78% of students have experienced some form of sexual activity, with students in year 12 more likely than those in year 10 to be sexually experienced (88% vs. 70%). Over three quarters of this group had experienced deep kissing, approximately two thirds sexual touching, and just fewer than half the sample had experienced oral sex.

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12 Sydney Morning Herald, 'Redneck paradise: wild and wasted on rock cruise', 4<sup>th</sup> June 2012, downloaded on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2012 from: <http://www.smh.com.au/action/printArticle?id=3337231>.

13 'Loved Fifty Shades? Try these...' Sydney Morning Herald July 13, 2012 Downloaded from <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/loved-fifty-shades-try-these-20120713-220f1.html> on 6th December 2012.

14 A. Smith, P. Agius, A. Mitchell, C. Barrett and M. Pitts, 'Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2008', monograph series no. 70, Melbourne: Australian Research Centre, Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, 2009, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/downloads/arcshs-research-publications/secondary-students-and-sexual-health-2008.pdf>.

- Over one quarter of all year 10 students and just over half of year 12 students had experienced sexual intercourse. The proportion of students who had experienced sexual intercourse has increased between 2002 and 2008 surveys. In 2002, 35% of students reported having sexual intercourse with this proportion increasing to 40% in 2008.
- A considerable proportion of sexually active students have sex with three or more people in a year, and this proportion had increased significantly in 2008. Between 2002 and 2008 surveys the proportion of students reporting three or more sexual partners increased from 20% to 30%.
- For young women, among those who reported having sexual intercourse, the experience of unwanted sex has increased significantly between 2002 and 2008 surveys. In 2002, 28% of young women reported ever having unwanted sex and in 2008 this figure had increased to 38%.

When it comes to sexually transmitted diseases, the picture for our young people is ominous. A 2011 Kirby Institute report<sup>15</sup> asserted that Australia's young people are facing a sexual health crisis of epidemic scale. In 2010, young people accounted for 77% of all sexually transmissible infections (STIs) diagnosed in Australia. This statistic is driven by a 20% increase in the rate of STIs amongst people aged 15-29 in the past three years.

Chlamydia was the most frequently reported condition in Australia in 2010. The recorded number of Chlamydia cases increased dramatically by 17% to 74,305, following the rising trend seen over the past 10 years. Chlamydia is particularly frightening because it often has no symptoms, but makes women infertile. A girl could become infected with it, but not realise for years, until she tries to have children – and by then it's far, far too late.

The number of cases of gonorrhoea have also slowly but steadily increased in the 15-19 and 20-29 age groups. The report states that epidemiologically these statistics provide the quantifiable evidence to what is currently being described as epidemic proportion of STIs amongst both young Australian males and females aged 15 – 29.<sup>16</sup>

Even our pre-teens are hyper-sexualised. Consider this report on how fans of the pop music group One Direction behaved on live TV:

Gone are the days of sobbing teenage girls holding up innocent “Marry me!” signs. This morning, the crush-worthy boy band was greeted by handmade banners bearing such unabashed declarations as: “Do me in more than one direction!”, “I’ll give you one erection!”, “Point your erection in my direction!”, “1D get naked!”, “Do me Harry!”<sup>17</sup>

How have our young people got here? Maybe it is what we surround them with? The sexualised environment, the media, pornographic images and sexual role models?

We have to only pick up a teen magazine in the newsagent. Articles such as “Oral Sex 101: How to blow his mind and get him to return the favour,”<sup>18</sup> and “How to have boobies that you can really love,” scream out fantasy messages of sexual behaviour and body image.

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15 The Kirby Institute, ‘HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report 2011’, The Kirby Institute, the University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW.

16 ‘Second National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2010–2013’, Commonwealth of Australia 2010; Publications Number: 6661, Downloaded from [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-national-strategies-2010-sti/\\$File/sti.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-national-strategies-2010-sti/$File/sti.pdf) on 2nd December 2012.

17 ‘Aussie One Direction fans flash crude signs on live TV’, downloaded from <http://www.yourtv.com.au/blog.aspx?blogentryid=1000264&showcomments=true> on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2012.

18 If you can blow his mind with oral sex, I’m worried about where his brain’s residing...



Female models who would look comfortable on Playboy centrefolds are available to our kids at less than the cost of a hamburger.

### ***Intimacy vs. “freedom to choose”***

What about long-term intimacy and attachment? Is commitment an out-dated concept? Are we a nation of cheaters?

One particular on-line dating site, focused on married people who want to have an affair, attracted almost half a million members across Australia.<sup>19</sup> Articles abound that discuss extramarital affairs as harmless, and possibly even healthy to a relationship.<sup>20</sup> In this digital age we add to this chat rooms, webcams, instant messaging, and instant pornography. Marriage rates are down and divorce rates are increasing as couples choose to shack up, have casual sex, friends with privileges and one night stands. The Australian Bureau of Statistics census data tell us that one fifth (22%) of people aged 20-29 years were in living together relationships in 2010 compared with one tenth (10%) in 1992.<sup>21</sup>

Again, part of this is neurochemical. We fall in love with falling in love. We seek the dopamine-fuelled emotional high of being ‘in love’, and when it fades – as it always does after a maximum two years – we move on. We don’t have the patience to stay for the cuddle hormones to kick in.

But this goes precisely opposite to the facts. Recent research Deakin University’s Australian Centre on Quality of Life found that the happiest husbands and wives were those who have notched up more than 40 years of wedded bliss.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Loves labours lost?***

Our children are bearing the social cost of uncontrolled sexual promiscuity. In 2011, Professor Patrick Parkinson, Dean of Law at Sydney University, reported on the impact of the current social environment upon child and youth development. In a chapter titled ‘the canary in the coal mine’, he pointed to the dramatic increase in the last 15 years in the numbers of children who have been reported as being victims of, or at risk of, abuse or neglect. In just twelve years, from 1997 to 2009, the total number of children in out-of-home care has more than doubled, and foster-care programs are now stretched to the limit – and beyond. He reported that the Council of Australian Governments estimated in 2009 that State and Territory governments currently spend in excess of \$2 billion annually on child protection services, with average annual increases of more than 12 per cent. He attributed much of this to poor family structure, dysfunctional relationships and marriage breakdown.<sup>23</sup>

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19 Sydney Morning Herald, ‘Natural born cheaters?’

<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/natural-born-cheaters-20120807-23rmn.html>, 7th August 2012, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012.

20 ‘Natural born cheaters’ Sydney Morning Herald 7<sup>th</sup> August 2012. Downloaded from <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/natural-born-cheaters-20120807-23rmn.html> on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2012

21 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2012 Downloaded from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March+Quarter+2012> on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

22 Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University, ‘Early days more hangover than honeymoon’, <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/early-days-more-hangover-than-honeymoon-20121202-2ap2v.html#ixzz2E0rWRfHI>, downloaded on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2012.

23 Patrick Parkinson, *For Kid’s Sake: a special report on repairing the social environment for Australian children and young people* University of Sydney, 2011.

Even those who were of the sex, drugs and rock & roll generation of the 1960s recognise that it hasn't turned out to be the utopia they expected. Virginia Ironside, a British Journalist from the 1960s, says this in an article titled 'We paid the price for free love: The flip side of the sexual revolution':

After a decade of sleeping around pretty indiscriminately, girls of the 60s eventually became fairly jaded about sex. It took me years to discover that continual sex with different partners is, with very few exceptions, joyless, uncomfortable and humiliating, and it's only now I'm older that I've discovered that one of the ingredients of a good sex life is, at the very least, a grain of affection between the two partners involved. Would I go back to the swinging 60s? Never!<sup>24</sup>

In Australia: Richard Neville hit the headlines in the 60s as the co-founder of Oz magazine and advocate of free love. Yet, in a recent interview in Australian Women's Weekly (May 2011), titled 'Make love, not war ...unless you're MY daughter', it's obvious that when it came to raising his own daughters, he was nothing if not prudish.

Okay – so sexual behaviour, relationships, families, teens, children – they're all messed up. Enough about the problem. What can we do about this?

So we try and create a 'nanny state', where the government picks up the pieces and the expense of sexual freedom? Set up relationship centres and counselling to band-aid our fragile families – at government expense? Remember, that really means at our own expense, because all those programs are funded by taxpayer's dollars. Or should we introduce legislation to reduce sexual freedom, and punish the 'deviants'? Is anyone going to show any compassion to the deviants?

Is there a better way? A way that treats sex and sexuality as good, but fragile; powerful, yet manageable; important, but not ultimate?

## The mind of God

And so we move to the final section of this presentation: a peek at the mind of God, especially that part that planned our sex and sexuality.

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God lays down a plan for good sex:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.<sup>25</sup>

The God of the Bible is pro-sex. He's so pro-sex, he invented marriage as the framework for it.

This closes the circle and brings me back to why I am so passionate about God and Sex. My years as a sexologist and Christian have taught me two things. First: there is a wonderful *congruence* between sexological research and God's view of healthy and wholesome sexuality. Secondly: our sexual biology and neurochemistry is God's way of giving us the software and programming for the best sex ever.

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24 UK Daily Mail, on 18 January 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-1346813/The-flip-1960s-sexual-revolution-We-paid-price-free-love.html>, downloaded on 2nd December 2012.

25 Genesis 2:23-25.

## **Desire**

Sexual *desire* is powerful because it is *purposeful* – it's meant to point us to our sex partner. The "I want" of sexual desire is good – when *coordinated* with the other aspects of our sexual function, as God meant it to be, and as recent sexological research has discovered. Sexual desire is meant to operate in harmony with falling in love with a *particular person*, and *bonding* with them for life.

Imagine for a moment: would you have sex, if it was as exciting and stimulating as doing your tax return? Or taking out the garbage?

The first recorded words from God to humans in the Bible are the command: "be fruitful and increase in number"<sup>26</sup> – that is, have babies. Until very recently, to have babies, a man and a woman needed to have sex. So, God's command to have children implies a command to have sex.

Usually, when we think of God commanding us to do something, we think it'll be difficult. Laws, commandments, are always bad, burdensome and life-draining – aren't they? Especially when God's the one doing the commanding. Because, like we said at the beginning, God's the ultimate cosmic killjoy – isn't he?

Then why did God make sex so much fun? Why did he wire it so deeply into our hearts and minds – into our 'souls', our very sense of our 'self' – that we *instinctively want* to do what he commanded?

God gave us sexual desire – including all the neurobiology of desire – because sex is good. And sexual pleasure is good. Both are good because he – the one true God, the source and definition of ultimate goodness – thought them up.

## **Love**

But part of the goodness of sexual desire involves using it the way God meant it to be used: in conjunction with falling in *love*. Romantic love focuses the powerful energy of sexual desire onto one particular person. All that heart-wrenching, heart-pounding limerance is meant to drive a particular man and a particular woman towards the mutual union of their bodies.

Not enough people read the Song of Songs these days. It's divinely inspired erotic romance. The man and the woman – the lover and the beloved – long for each other, search for each other, get married – a wedding lies at the middle of the book (SoS 3:6-11) – and delight in each other's bodies. There is absolutely no hint of fear, domination, or pain, anywhere in the book. The lovers enjoy mutually pleasurable sex, in a garden paradise. It's almost an idyllic reflection, a wistful contemplation, on what life might have been life for Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, if they hadn't disobeyed God.

This is the personal, relational context that God gave us in which to enjoy sex: one man and one woman, together.

## **Attachment**

And finally, attachment is God's mechanism for seeing us through the long haul. Separation, divorce, and infidelity were never in God's plan for sex and relationships. That's why they're so painful and traumatic.

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<sup>26</sup> Genesis 1:28.

When you've been married for 38 years, like I have, it's very reassuring to know that you don't have to produce a porn-star body, or a perfect performance in the bedroom. It's good to know that we've watched new wrinkles develop in interesting parts of our bodies as various bits of our anatomy migrate south. This is the long-term leaving-and-cleaving element of a naked-and-no-shame relationship. It's the trust built up through many years of shared lives, for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health.

### ***Sex, intimacy, and the mind of God***

So let me put before you God's good plan for great sex. Sex and God are topics that are not far apart, but very close together. Because the good God made us as sexual beings, and gave us a pattern for how to enjoy that sexuality in a healthy way, that's good for ourselves, our sexual partner, our families, society, and the next generation.

God made us male and female. Our genitalia, and our neural sexual responses, are different and complementary – they 'fit' together.

Sexual desire is a gift from God, enabling us to enjoy fulfilling his command to procreate and fill the earth. God meant us to enjoy this desire in harmony with falling in love, focusing all our reproductive energy on one person, establishing a one-flesh relationship with that individual. And God wired our brains so that we get used to, comfortable with, that one chosen person, so our one man-one woman relationship becomes more and more characterised by understanding, trust and care.

This is a proven pattern for healthy, wholesome, long-lasting sex. Try it – practice it in your bedrooms, and discuss it in your boardrooms.

It could be the next sexual revolution.

And ask yourself: if God's plan for good sex is so much in keeping with the recent research into healthy sexuality, could it be that the Bible, as God's word to humanity, has other useful things to say about life? Eternal life, even?

There's a famous Bible verse, John 3:16. It says:

God loved the world in this way: he gave his one and only son, so that anyone who entrusts themselves to him would never perish, but have eternal life.<sup>27</sup>

Might this mean that God desires a relationship with us – maybe more than we desire one with him? And that his love was so focused upon us that he was willing to do anything and everything needed to create that relationship? And maybe the kind of relationship he wants with us is one of long-term trust and intimacy – a relationship that really does go on forever?

Why not find out for yourself?

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27 Private translation by my son, Kamal Weerakoon, Presbyterian Minister.