

Author seeks to connect the dots between sex and God

March 3, 2007

Posted: 3/02/07

Author seeks to connect the dots between sex and God

By Charles Honey

Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (RNS)—About halfway through his new book, [Sex God](#), Rob Bell recalls a scene of exquisite torture at a middle-school dance.

He was 12, lined up with all the boys on one side of the cafeteria, while all the girls were lined up on the other. Then he worked up the guts to “bravely venture across this massive chasm” and ask a girl to dance.

Her response? “She burst into tears and ran into the girls’ bathroom, where she spent the rest of the evening,” Bell recalls.

Rob Bell

The anecdote is more than a funny and familiar peek into the adolescence of the pastor, author and leader of the Emergent Church movement. In typically elliptical fashion, Bell links this bit of hormonal humiliation to God’s yearning for love from humans.

Like the girl at the dance, people have the choice to say no to God, writes Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich.

With references to the Song of Solomon and corny country ballads, Bell relates the vulnerable risk of love to God's heartbreak when people turn their backs on him.

"In matters of love, it's as if God has agreed to play by the same rules we do," Bell notes.

In his second book, published by Zondervan and due in stores this month, Bell says sexuality is really about spirituality—a powerful human urge to connect with each other and with God.



"Sex. God. They're connected," Bell writes. "Where the one is, you will always find the other."

It's an argument likely to find an eager readership. Between the 11,000 worshippers who attend Mars Hill, more than 2 million viewers who have seen his NOOMA series of short videos and more than 200,000 copies sold of his 2005 book, [Velvet Elvis](#), Bell has built up a national following.

A book on sex was a natural extension of his ministry, Bell said. When he's preached on the topic at Mars Hill, people always thank him and ask for more.

“You can’t live in this world and deal with all the issues without bumping into spirituality and sexuality. It’s everywhere,” Bell said. Besides, he asks with a laugh, “Is there anything more interesting?”

Publisher’s Weekly found the book plenty interesting, in a starred review awarded to only one of about every eight books it reviews.

“Sex God is about relationships revealed in a way that elevates the human condition and offers hope to those whose relationships are wounded,” the review says. “This book joyfully ties, and then tightens, the knot between God and humankind.”

The tie is implicit in the title, which Bell playfully says “has lots of room for interpretation.” Does it just mean sex and God? Or sex is our god? Sex is like God? Bell leaves it up to readers.

“A lot of people are looking for God in sex,” he said.

He traces the idea in his 200-page book, subtitled “Exploring the endless connections between sexuality and spirituality.”

Sex God is bound to raise eyebrows. But readers will find more scriptural teaching than sex manual in its spare, often witty prose.

“Our sexuality is all of the ways we strive to reconnect with our world, with each other and with God,” Bell writes.

He compares the sexual experience with the sense of oneness people experience at rock concerts, church services or justice rallies. They are moments “God created us to experience all of the time. It’s our natural state. It’s how things are supposed to be,” he says in his book.

That sense of connection to something greater than oneself is the spiritual state people seek in sex, Bell asserts. It’s a desire to restore the harmony people felt with each other, the earth and their creator when God first

made people, he says.

Bell calls it “God’s dream for the world.”

In fact, you don’t necessarily need to have sex in order to be sexual, Bell insists. He writes about a celibate friend who focuses his sexual energy on helping the oppressed, adding, “Some of the most sexual people I know are celibate.”

He presents sex as a powerful human urge that should neither be denied as an unclean thing, nor enslave people as lust and addiction.

And in startlingly graphic imagery, he compares the objectification of women in U.S. culture to the dehumanization of Jews in concentration camps.

Asked if the comparison is extreme, Bell shoots back, “Have you see any beer commercials lately?”

“Think of the large-scale dehumanizing of women through ads, but nobody ever says this is insane. I think (the culture) is the water people are swimming in, and you have to drag them out of the water onto the beach.”

He does not harp on abstinence programs as a cure for teens’ sex problems. But he criticizes those who mock them as unrealistic, writing, “Who decided that kids—or anybody else for that matter—are unable to abstain?”

Bell also does not touch on homosexuality because, he says, it’s too big and volatile a subject for this book.

“The church has significant work to do in the area of homosexuality,” he said. “That’s another book for another time.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.