

Review: Pure Sex

Unlike recent books on sex that I have read, which are based on psychology and some mild theology, *Pure Sex*, by Sydney Anglican stalwarts Tony Payne and Phillip Jensen is a solid historical and doctrinal look at the topic.



The negatives first. Firstly, it seems a bit dated – concentrating more on newspaper commentary more than the more relevant new media for instance – but we might forgive that as it was written in 1998 when it was still fine to refer to The Internet with breathless capitalisation. Secondly, it reads like an article in *The Briefing*. Again this is unsurprising as the authors are regular TB contributors. But it means that it reads like a stale academic essay being read by Kel Richards (“you may think dear reader” on page 93, groan) and covers the soft inner heart of application in half a mile of doctrinal concrete.

But these are just stylistic complaints. The content is basically fine stuff that by and large sums up my own thoughts on sexuality and helped me consider some different ways of articulating it. The second and third chapters are the best.

The second chapter is entitled “the search for nudity” and unpacks the beauty and bounds of sexuality in the Bible extremely well. Introducing the concept of nudity-without-shame that is part of God’s good creation we read:

“How do we hope that our lives will be better because of sex? Is it a case of simply accumulating orgasms, and the one who has had the most when he dies wins? Or is there more to it than that? What do we really want from sex?”

"It could be the answer is nudity.

"Is it possible that what we really want is a relationship not simply of physical nakedness and pleasure, but of deep personal nakedness as well?" (Page 18)

I found one of those gem-phrases of wisdom in this chapter: "Once a sexual relationship has begun, it cannot be ended without grief." (Page 30)

The third chapter is entitled "A brief history of sex" and unpacks some of the historical framework for the sexual revolution of the 1960s. I learned a lot here – particularly about the nature of Victorian moralism and the Freudian basis for the strangely axiomatic notion that repression of sexual expression is inherently neurotic.

"As this brief history has tried to demonstrate, the sexual revolution of the last 30 years has been a long time in the making... It was there [in the Victorian era] that the fuse was lit. Freud, Mead, Russell and Kinesy all played their part... It was in the mid-60's, when the conditions were right, that the bomb went off." (Page 45)

There are other things worthy of mention. The failure to talk about masturbation (apart from a wave off on Page 98) is unhelpful. The consideration of singleness in chapter 7 is very helpful. The appendix on homosexuality is a good overview. And why shouldn't they throw in a Two Ways to Live?

The book is short and to the point. If a person is enquiring, seeking, willing to unpack and engage then this book would be a valuable resource. Pastorally, this is a tool, not a substitute. There is very little (beyond the essential turn-to-Jesus gospel) by way of specific application and words of wisdom from other places would be needed. In this way they have not quite totally achieved their aim of having something to say, in practical terms, other than "Don't" (Page 16). But

it's good foundational stuff and a worthy read.