

# The Soul of Sex

## BETHANY TORODE

It may have been Victorian prudishness, although I was looking forward to lovemaking and had enjoyed a number of open discussions with my fiancé. Or maybe it was my romantic sensibilities.

But when someone gave me the classic evangelical sex guide *Intended for Pleasure*, I could skim only a few pages before setting it aside.

Looking at similar books (Tim and Beverly LaHaye's *The Act of Marriage*, Dr. Cliff and Joyce Penner's *The Gift of Sex*) confirmed my dislike of the genre. When I was engaged, the notion of having a Christian sex manual in my bedroom seemed analogous to landing on a beautiful deserted island, only to be met on shore by a previous explorer with a detailed map. I didn't want to

read the books because I didn't want to kill the joy of discovery.

Now that I've been married a few years, and have also listened to the struggles of married friends, I've mellowed out a little. I see the need for Christian sex therapy, and I respect the courage of those authors who have braved offending the CBA market by writing about sex.

Still, most of the evangelical sex guides lack soul. They focus mainly on technique (at times reading like *Cosmo* columns with Bible verses tacked on) at the expense of the deeper realities of which sexuality is an expression. I doubted that any such book could aptly capture the meaning of lovemaking — until I read *When Two Become One*, by Christopher and Rachel McCluskey.

The McCluskeys understand and speak to the inextrica-

ble connection between body and spirit. "There is a world of difference between having sex and truly making love," they write. "The phrases are used interchangeably and, indeed, the acts themselves are the same. But the spirit of making love is entirely different from simply having sex." They view sex as a form of communication, an exchange between persons (hence the term "intercourse"). So it's natural that they focus on what's being communicated. It's at this deeper level, they contend, that most sexual problems and frustrations begin. And they can only be cured at the source — in the soul.



WHEN TWO  
BECOME ONE  
MAKING LOVE IN MARRIAGE  
CHRISTOPHER & RACHEL  
MCCLUSKEY

Most of the book is devoted to discussing the spiritual state of your marriage, which becomes manifest, for good or ill, in physical intimacy. The McCluskeys primarily address communication problems and sexual and theological misunderstandings. They also suggest some beautiful ways to increase intimacy. "Many people find it extremely difficult to look into their spouse's eyes as they kiss, and even more difficult as they actually begin to make love.... But if we are willing, we can peer into the soul of our mate through their eyes as we become one."

Their language is candid without being

crude (unlike another of the evangelical sex guides, which relies on terms such as "Mr. Happy"). They avoid the degrading lingo that most people, Christians or otherwise, default to in discussions of sex. While mechanistic language has invaded discussions of all areas in life, including sexuality, the McCluskeys protect the dignity of the person as a physical/spiritual whole.

Although they comfortably use medical language when needed, the McCluskeys' words are mostly reminiscent of the poetic-yet-explicit imagery in the Song of Songs. Showing their own romantic sensibilities, they conclude the book with a lengthy and beautiful quote from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, part of which reads: "It is impossible that this sacred festival of destiny should not send a celestial radiation to the infinite.... When two mouths, made sacred by love, draw near each other to create, it is impossible that above that ineffable kiss there should not be a thrill in the immense mystery of the stars."

Christopher is a licensed counselor and sex therapist, so at times the book feels like a counseling session (in a good way). Each chapter begins with a character sketch of a marriage from Christopher's caseload, and the stories resonate, touching on issues all couples struggle through. My cheeks flushed as I saw my own mistakes woven through others' experiences. But the book's gentle tone makes this bearable.

My one quibble is that I wish the McCluskeys had discussed fertility. An overview of the female fertility cycle (and its effects on moods and desire) can be invaluable for both husbands and wives. Also, some discussion on how hormonal contraceptives alter a woman (and hence affect the marriage relationship) would be a plus. Many of my young Christian friends have gone on the Pill, and it's been the source of unnecessary (and sometimes extreme) emotional, physical, and marital problems. As Dr. Richard Fehring of Marquette University writes, "Fertility is a good, being a whole person is a good, and integrating one's fertility is an essential component of wholeness." In my own marriage, grappling with my fertility (instead of suppressing it) has tremendously helped my husband's verbal and sexual communication skills.

"Christians ought to be the most sexually fulfilled people on the planet," the McCluskeys write. "That doesn't necessarily mean the most sexually active or the most sexually varied in their practices, but simply the most sexually fulfilled." Their book will help this become a reality in many marriages. It's an invaluable resource for pastors and priests doing marital counseling, especially since it lays a clear, solid theological foundation in the first few chapters. I've been giving it as a wedding gift (though, like me, I suspect most couples won't fully appreciate its wisdom until they've had a year or two to allow problems to surface).

With this book, the McCluskeys have set a new standard for the genre. Much more than a manual, *When Two Become One* speaks to and about the holy longing in each of us, a longing for God in our physical experience of each other.

### When Two Become One

Enhancing Sexual Intimacy in Marriage

CHRISTOPHER AND RACHEL MCCLUSKEY • REVELL, 2004 • 192 PP. • \$19.95

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gling of continuity and change defined

Reformation-era worship practices. The editors, Karin Maag and John D. Witvliet of Calvin College, take particular pains to show that Protestants were not the only ones to introduce innovations. Catholics also added new elements to services, and both confessions retained large bits of older styles of worship.

The authors' sustained attention to continuity and change helps to unify the essays. At typically for an edited volume, these pieces work together to advance a central argument: Protestant Reformation and Catholic Renewal altered much, but central practices endured. Drawing on detailed work with primary sources, and ranging geographically from Spain to Sweden, the essays consider such diverse subjects as the pre-Reformation unity of private devotion and corporate worship in Rheims, pre-Tridentine forms of the Catholic Breviary, changes to Lutheran liturgy in Sweden, the survival of worship instruction in Genevan school ordinances, alterations to Lutheran baptism ceremonies in Breslau, confessional similarities in marriage ceremonies throughout Europe, changes to church decoration in Haarlem, and Martin Luther's contributions to vernacular service music.

Only rarely in this book do we get the laity's viewpoint. Instead, we learn how the organizers of church services wanted their worship services to run. Worship as seen from the altar is different from worship as witnessed from the pews, but the studies gathered here at least diminish the gap between ecclesiastical authorities and individual congregations in local churches.

While the essays are uniformly readable and informative, a number of them do a particularly good job at opening up the worshiping lives of 16th- and 17th-century Christians. Among these, some emphasize changes in worship practices. Robert Kingdon, for example, draws on the records of the Geneva consistory to show how charges of "muttering" (a loose translation of *barbarement*) during Protestant services revealed a switch from a Mass-centric to sermon-centric worship service. Previously in Catholic services the congregation occupied the time that the priest took to celebrate communion by saying their own prayers from a prayer book. Reformed emphasis on the

Calvinists, certain that only behavior explicitly ordered in the Bible was acceptable, changed church decorations more often. In Reformed thinking, the probability that Christ had celebrated the last supper at a table with his disciples meant that his 16th-century followers should also hold communion at a table and not around a box.

At times, the emphasis on continuity and change becomes tedious. Finding new things in the 16th and 17th centuries is hardly surprising, while identifying enduring patterns in a time when so much did change can seem like grasping at straws. But even if the theme is belabored, this attention to continuity and change yields insights both for current discussions of worship and for historical studies of the early modern period.

For those concerned with contemporary worship, remembering that previous generations simultaneously did things the same and did things differently can serve to temper disputes. Worship changes slowly; worship is always changing. If John Calvin was willing to accept less frequent communion services than he desired, surely contemporary worshippers can accept transforming their church services more slowly or more rapidly than they desire. For historians, balancing continuity and change provides a more nuanced view of the early modern period, making it easier to study the 16th and 17th centuries on their own terms and not merely as staging grounds for later developments. The Protestant Reformation did not immediately produce the 19th century and its strict confessional boundaries.

For those who are intrigued by the complications of the early modern period, *Music and Religious Identity in Counter-Reformation Augsburg, 1580-1630* offers an opportunity to delve further into the subject of continuity and change in religious practice in a particular context and medium. The study is bounded by the opening of a Jesuit house in Augsburg, which introduced vibrant Counter-Reformation Catholicism to Augsburg, and battles in the Thirty Years' War, which destroyed the city. Unlike *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, which seems to have been written for both historians and church people, Alexander Fisher's book is intended primarily for historians and musicologists.



Alexander J. Fisher



Taken together, *Music and Religious Identity in Counter-Reformation Augsburg and Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* amply support the argument for change and continuity that is explicitly laid out in the latter book. The changes are almost too numerous to count; the continuities are easier to enumerate. One continuity is the multiplicity of causes for change. As expressed in *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, theological reflection spurred changes in worship practice. *Music and Religious Identity in Counter-Reformation Augsburg* demonstrates how political realities defined acceptable religious music.

An even more basic, yet also contradictory, continuity is visible from a bird's-eye view of the past. From the two books under review, the armchair historian can glean that worship is central to Christian life and that worship itself is varied. Perhaps inevitably a practice that expresses central tenets of Christian faith is prone to controversy (so much so that controversy should probably be included among the continuities of worship). Nonetheless, when congregations gather to praise God and learn from him, they express their enduring belief that worship—whether in set prayers or spontaneous utterances, in venerable hymns or contemporary choruses—is integral to their lives.

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## Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Change and Continuity in Religious Practice

KARIN MAAG AND JOHN D. WITVLIET, EDs.

UNIV. OF NOTRE DAME PRESS, 2004 • 376 PP. • \$30. PAPER

## Music and Religious Identity in Counter-Reformation Augsburg, 1580-1630

ALEXANDER J. FISHER • ASHgate, 2004 • 345 PP. • \$119.95

Mary Noll Venables recently received her Ph.D. in Early Modern European History from Yale University and is now living in Ireland.

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