

A Pioneering Book About Sex

Review by Larry M. Lewis

God Invented Sex

by Charles Wittschiebe

Southern Publishing Association, 256 pp., \$5.95

One purpose of the Anvil Series, according to the publishers, is to “push back the frontiers of Adventist thought. . . .” Charles Wittschiebe’s *God Invented Sex* certainly is such a pioneering work. When, before, have we had on the shelves of the local Adventist Book Center a book that touches on abortion, adultery, masturbation, homosexuality, contraceptives and the most intimate sexual problems between husbands and wives?

Sexuality is so critically related to our life experience that we may well wonder why we have for so long abandoned the topic to the publishers of sex manuals and other assorted erotica. Whatever the reasons, it is a pleasure to read this book, which deals with so many delicate subjects in such a candid and balanced way.

When I was a student of Charles Wittschiebe, I generally found him at his best in informal give-and-take. Perhaps this is why he chose to use the question-and-answer approach in this book. Since the questions are from real people who ask things most of us would like to know about, the book makes fascinating reading. You may even find yourself wondering what will come next—will it possibly be about. . . ? Often it is, and Wittschiebe’s answer is as unblushing and direct as the question.

The question-answer format does have hazards, however. Perhaps others will wish as I did that the author had included one chapter

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outlining his basic assumptions in a comprehensive way. This would have been a good balance to the bits and pieces which sometimes even seem to contradict each other. For instance, in one place Wittschiebe argues that human anatomy vindicates the legitimacy of sexual passion. If God designed men and women to have a sexual relationship, how then, he asks, “Can one question the drive and emotional force that motivate it?” Yet, elsewhere he criticizes sexuality that becomes a mere biological outlet for the release of sexual tension, and adds that “plain passion reduces marriage to its lowest terms, a situation intolerable to any sensitive spouse.”

It seems contradictory to use the argument from design to justify sexual relationships and then say that a married couple should not give way to sexual passion. Moreover, if it is intolerable to let sex be a mere biological outlet for the release of sexual tension, why does he encourage the use of fancy nighties, perfumes, music or “anything that increases the pleasure of the sexual experience”? Is it not possible that such aphrodisiacs could increase sexual tension and encourage a rather elemental sexual passion?

In several sensitive areas, Wittschiebe, with rather disturbing results, juxtaposes the counsel of Ellen White alongside that of modern writers. An example is the section on masturbation. He quotes extensively from Ellen White as well as from other writers of her time who strongly opposed masturbation. Then he gives the opposing thinking of more recent and very credible authorities. He sides with Ellen White, of course, but since he can give no supporting data for her position, the reader who wishes to harmonize modern scientific thinking with the inspired writings is left in a dilemma. Wittschiebe con-

cedes there is a problem and makes an appeal for more study of the topic. But the overall result is to bring into question Ellen White's counsel.

The most disturbing aspect of the book is the author's penchant for making statements without giving support from other literature. One example is the discussion of sexual differences between men and women. Men, according to Wittschiebe, more easily detach sex from love, desire it more often (and in unusual places and at unconventional hours), and seemingly are more given to animal passions. Women are supposedly lower-g geared in sex, adjust to marriage easier, are less often tempted to abandon their children, and generally less sexually aberrant. References for these observations would have been useful since they seem to be contradicted by some recent research. Examples of other questionable statements are his assertion that men who beat their wives were spoiled when they were children, always getting their own way, and that children almost always do better when they have at least one brother or sister as they grow up.

There are other troubling things about his book, such as the stories of almost miraculous cures of serious marital problems after a single counseling session. Nevertheless, we can be grateful for a book that cautions against either embracing a too-liberal standard or retreating into a puritanical stance that denies any place for sexuality in the life of a Christian.

Here-and-Now

Review by Charles Scriven

Calculated Goodness

by Sakae Kubo

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In this book (another in the Southern Publishing Association's Anvil Series) the writer offers brief, readable meditations on 16 Bible passages. The book has an ethical tone—as suggested by the

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title—though it is by no means a treatise in ethics, nor even limited to that field. This is a collection of pieces, an anthology whose unifying element is not a subject matter so much as a form: each chapter begins with a New Testament text, then explains, in simple, nontechnical prose its meaning for today.

The author of the book succeeds just where (for Adventists) it is so easy to fail: in relating the Gospel to the here-and-now as well as to the then-and-there. Perhaps the best evidence of this is chapter six, entitled "In Christ There Is No East or West." Here Sakae Kubo, who is seminary librarian and professor of New Testament at Andrews University, ventures into largely uncharted territory. I mean largely uncharted by us: with remarks on "the equality of the races" he strays into social ethics, an area of Judaeo-Christian thought we are usually admonished to stay away from.

What Kubo says specifically about race belongs to what tradition we do have in this field: from our denomination's beginnings there have been some (including Ellen White) who opposed racism and slavery from the conviction that all are one in Christ. But in developing the theme of the chapter, Kubo finds it necessary to ruminate on the broader subject of the role of the church in society. Hence these sentences, which, for a book produced by a denominational publisher, are, it seems to me, striking:

"The church must serve as the conscience of society and the nation."

"How sad that the church cannot speak out boldly on the Biblical message of love and brotherhood for fear it might be political!"

"If the gospel does not deal with social relationships, then it is an emasculated gospel."

I take these sentences to be a call for "prophecy" in the classical Hebrew sense, that is, for religious criticism of those values and institutions that perpetuate suffering and oppression in the world. In America, where the praise of flag and ruler is practically required etiquette, it is infinitely easy to pass over such sentences without even noticing what they say. It will be too bad if readers of Kubo's book do this, since the "spirit of prophecy"—what we feel proud to possess—must surely become a style of life among us, not just a memory of Ellen White. The ancient prophets thundered against commonplace injustices and pain, and in the fine, long chapter