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Article: Book Review: "The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life" By Dennis P. Hollinger (Baker Academic, 2009)

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Book Review: *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* By Dennis P. Hollinger (Baker Academic, 2009)

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Is there any inherent meaning in sexuality, or does sex simply mean whatever we intend it to mean in the moment? Dennis Hollinger, president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, insists that there is meaning in sexuality—several meanings, in fact, which guide Christian thought and practice.

Hollinger writes for the academy, seminarians, pastors, and church leaders modeling the best kind of evangelical scholarship: the primacy of Scripture; careful engagement with other Christian perspectives, other religions and worldviews, science, and media; and a pastoral heart. According to Hollinger, it is this loving God who has created humans as sexual beings and established sex as a good gift for humankind. But he is far from naïve about the goods and dangers of sex: "[S]ex is a powerful force in life that can shatter dreams, destroy families, kill people, and break cultures apart. But it can also be a good and beautiful ingredient in building happy marriages, stable homes, secure individuals, and virtuous communities" (19).

Hollinger's is a refreshingly balanced voice: As good as sex can be, "Sexual intercourse is not the ultimate meaning in life, and it is not essential to our humanness, though it is a necessary part of married life" (76). "[L]ife without sexual intimacy and marriage is not a deficient life. Rather, life without intimacy with God in Christ is deficient" (15).

While he believes that non-Christians can recognize portions of the meaning of sex, full understanding is "found in the Christian worldview assumptions about marriage, the human body, and the purposes of the gift," which are "the consummation of marriage, procreation, expression of love, and pleasure" (14). This "meaning finds its fulfillment in the marriage of a man and a woman" (14-15).

Academics will appreciate his careful overview of ethical theory and theological frameworks in chapters 1 and 2. A wider audience will benefit from chapter 3, which lays down a specifically Christian worldview and ties sex and sexuality to the creation of humans in the image of God. Chapter 4 unpacks the four purposes of sex named above, while chapters 5 and 6 apply these purposes to differing contexts—unmarried and married sexuality. Issues such as pornography, masturbation, and ex...

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