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## INTRODUCTION

You might agree that Australians on the whole have never been a particularly religious bunch. When church attendance was made compulsory in the 1790s, the early settlers responded by burning Australia's first and only church building to the ground.

Some people have referred to this church burning incident as symbolic of how Aussies have felt about religion right up to today. Part of me agrees with this. You've only got to read the mags, watch the TV and listen to the radio to learn that one of the most consistent pictures of a 'religious' person is a narrow-minded nerd who wears sandals over his socks, eats all his veges, and goes to bed by nine o'clock every night. This modern parody of Christianity is not as violent as torching a church but it is every bit as effective at keeping the average 'normal' Australian at arms length from religion.

And yet despite the apparent cynicism towards religion, there have always been real signs that Australians are not the 'church-burning pagans' they might at first appear to be. I'm always getting into conversations about spiritual things with people I meet at parties—and it's hardly ever me who brings it up. It usually starts with someone asking, "What do you do with your time?" I usually explain that I spend close to half of my year writing books about big things like 'faith', 'God', 'life' and 'death'. No sooner have I said this than the person tells me the story of their spiritual life. They tell me about the good experiences and the bad ones. They explain what they don't like about formal religion but do like about the 'bloke upstairs'. Suddenly, someone who doesn't normally talk much about spiritual stuff has told me his or her theory on life, the universe and everything. Nine times out of ten people admit to having a sneaking suspicion there's something 'out there'; they just aren't too sure what it is exactly. Perhaps you're the same. Perhaps you too have a 'hunch' that there is a spiritual side to life—a quiet feeling that what we see and hear in the media is not the whole picture.

The big question is: can we ever see the whole picture?

Is it possible to find a path through all the ideas, trends and religions in modern Australia? Can we hope to ever have more than a hunch about God? In a way, this book attempts to paint the picture from one angle: the Christian angle.

In multicultural Australia, Christianity is only one of many ways of looking at life, but each of the following chapters hopes to show that the more you compare the message of Christ with other ideas, the more convincing it becomes. A book like this is not going to change the world, but it may just help to confirm some of your own suspicions about life, love, sex, death and God. That's my hope, anyway.

*John Dickson*  
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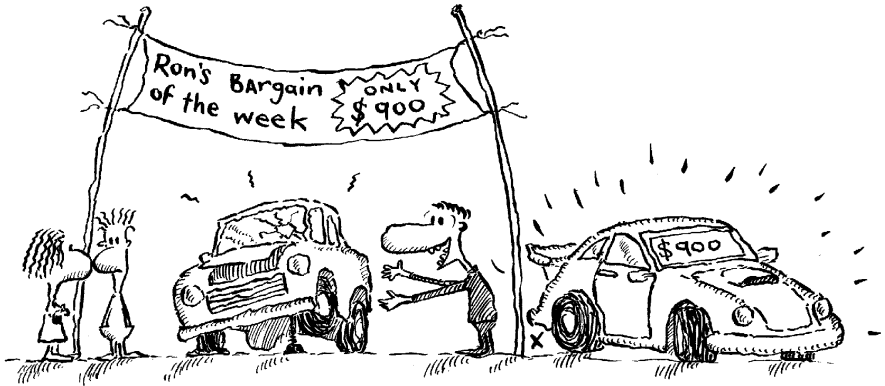
A SNEAKING SUSPICION

PART 1

# SOME SNEAKING SUSPICIONS

## THE SEX FACTOR

IS SEX MORE LIKE A PORSCHE THAN A DATSUN?



**I**T MIGHT SEEM strange to start this book by talking about sex, but it seemed to me that wherever I put this chapter, you'd probably have read it first anyway (I know I would). So to save you the trouble, I've put it first.

Before Madonna was the respectable mother-figure of the music scene, she put out a movie that was probably designed to shock. One scene of *In Bed With Madonna* was especially interesting.

During one of her onstage performances, a huge bed appears on stage. Madonna slips into sexual over-drive and begins rolling around the bed in a display of not-so-subtle sensuality. Her dancers also get excited, rubbing their bodies against hers and stroking the hot spots, so to speak. All this, to the words, “Like a virgin, touched for the very first time”.

As you can well imagine, everyone is having a great time—Madonna, the dancers, the concert audience and those watching the film. Everyone except the Canadian police. In the film, we watch the men-in-uniform rock up to the 20,000 seat concert hall with a demand: cut that naughty scene or be ‘shut down’. Madonna’s promoters are genuinely worried and scurry up to her dressing room and tell her the bad news. She thinks for a moment and decides to ignore the police demands for ‘decency’ and go on with the show as planned. In this case, the ‘express yourself’ mentality wins the day.

This scene in the film illustrates two directly opposite attitudes toward sex.

1. Sex is naughty. Ban it.
2. Sex is wonderful. Flaunt it.

I’m assuming you’re an average human being like me, so we don’t really need to spend any time discussing the flaws in the first view. It’s negative, boring and denies the obvious fact that humans are sexual creatures.

But to be honest, I’m concerned that the ‘flaunt it’ approach is dangerous, cheap and is ultimately a rip off (so to speak). Let me explain.

## SEXPERTS

The ‘experts’ on sex, or ‘sexperts’ for short, are everywhere in our society, all of them offering advice on this important topic. You’ll find them on TV, on radio and, if the number of pages is anything to go by, teen mags would have to be the expert of the lot. And what’s the message of the mags? Although the photos change from article to article the main point never changes—if you want to do it, just do it, but do it safe!

Then there’s Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Surely if anyone knows how to bring sex to the masses it’s these guys and gals. It’s the largest annual ‘cultural’ event in Australia, and it’s all about sex. There’s

groovy music, bright costumes, risqué choreography, and a message that booms out loud and clear to the whole country—sex is about the freedom to do and be whatever you want!

And of course the movies can bring us the closest thing to the real thing in full technicolour and surround sound. In fact, with the help of gorgeous actors, stirring background music and the big screen, what they deliver is even better than the real thing. And what is the message of the movie sexperts? The best sex happens when you're beautiful and not married (at least not married to the person you want to have the best sex with)!

Take the movie *The People Vs Larry Flynt* as an example. Larry Flynt was the editor of *Hustler*, one of the world's top selling men's magazines. He is also rated as one of the great sexual 'heroes' of the twentieth century. In the movie Larry is this heroic businessman who has to fight against the intolerance and self-righteousness of some sections of American society. Larry has a life full of excitement, pleasure and most of all, freedom. That's until some closed-minded bigot shoots him. Our hero now has to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair, paralyzed. Larry is more than a hero. He's a martyr—someone who sacrifices so much in his fight for sexual freedom. That's how the movie goes, anyway.

But if you scratch beneath the surface of all the hype you find some pretty interesting facts. Turns out the real Flynt was by many reports just a greedy businessman with an insatiable sexual appetite; an appetite that has led to all sorts of allegations against him concerning sleazy, oppressive and demeaning sexual activity. His own daughter was protesting outside the opening night begging people not to believe the lie presented in the film.

Finding this out made me realize that the Larry Flynt story is a good example of what's true of nearly all our modern sexperts. On the surface they seem to be the great promoters and freedom-fighters for sex, but when you scratch beneath the beautifully glossy surface, it's just the opposite. The promoters turn out to be demoters; their fight doesn't bring freedom, it sets a trap, which many of us fall into.

The teen mags aren't really interested in giving advice that will lead to the best sex life. They tell us what they think we want to hear, so that



we'll keep buying the magazine, so that advertisers will keep buying advertising space, so that they'll keep making money (remember, many of these magazines have more advertising managers than writers on their staff). If they thought you wanted to hear, "Be celibate!", that's exactly what they'd be saying. Although they go on and on about sex, they don't appear to value sex at all, except as a way of selling magazines.

Kevin Williamson, a major TV and movie producer (*Dawson's Creek*, *Scream*, *Cursed*), claims: "We present sexual issues without any judgments, we don't preach, we just show teens talking about what's important to them". In reality though, most TV shows (including his) do preach; they just do it in a slick and subtle way. Beneath the expensive exterior, people like Williamson are just peddling the same cheap message: If it feels good, do it! Just do it safe!

The same is true of the movies and the Mardi Gras. On the surface they look like they're fighting for sexual freedom, but beneath the gloss and volume it turns out that they're really promoting sexual selfishness, triviality and unfaithfulness.

Here's some examples of what I mean.

One of those attractive blonde 'singers' (whose name we easily forget) had a hit single some time back in which the key lyric said: "Do to me what your eyes say you want to do. Do it, read my lips."

I've often wondered what would happen if this young woman went to a few high schools I know and said to the blokes, "Boys, do to me what your eyes say you want to do". Most girls wouldn't dream of letting blokes do even half of what our hormone-blurred eyes say we want to do—sorry blokes!

Or then there's the effort by Justin Timberlake, 'Take me Now'. In it he sings, "I'm hungry for your loving; You got me working, honey; I'm hot just like an oven; So take me now". Here 'loving' is reduced to being 'taken'. I reckon if I said this to my wife, after laughing at me she'd probably hit me. So she should.

And as for the song by Nickelback I have in front me ... well maybe we shouldn't lower the tone any further.

Anyway, I expect these 'singers' don't really mean everything they

sing, but it makes me wonder why they'd bother with such obviously cheap words. I guess you can justify anything if it sells a few CDs.

The Family Planning Association of NSW once sponsored a diary called the *Fact and Fantasy File*, which they said was designed to make you "better informed about your own body, sex and relationships". The diary, and an associated sex-info telephone 'hot-line', was banned by the government. But not before a couple of thousand copies of the book got out to school students, nurses and me.

I think I read it with a fairly open mind, but I must say I was under-impressed. It wasn't the explicit details that concerned me (I am a married man). It was the cheap picture of sex that the authors painted. For a group that wanted to promote sex, they did a very poor job. For example, how's this for a poem about sexual intimacy?

**Love is great**

**Love is golden**

**Love is made**

**In the back of a Holden**

And the handy sex tip for March 13th is sure to please your partner:

**If you find sex boring, thinking about other things that make you sexually excited during intercourse can heighten the experience.**

Imagine your reaction when, during an intimate moment, you discover that your partner is fantasizing about someone other than you. I don't know about you, but I'd feel pretty humiliated and jealous, and any sense of intimacy would be lost in an instant. This sort of fantasizing may 'heighten the experience' of the orgasm but not of the whole sexual encounter nor, more importantly, the relationship of trust between two people.

One episode of the TV *Sex* series gave similar advice. It encouraged us to fantasize as much as we like during sex but just keep it to ourselves so as not to hurt our partner's feelings. Sounds fine if you're only in it for the physical encounter. However, most of us agree that sex is meant to be the expression of a relationship. Relationships are built on loyalty and honesty, not mental unfaithfulness and deceit.

Unfortunately though, some of us are influenced by these views. In a *Girlfriend* magazine article entitled, “Let’s Talk About Sex”, a survey was conducted asking teenage girls about their sexual views. One worrying point in particular was made. It read that in deciding when to have sex, 66% of the girls surveyed said “they came to a mutual decision ... they both felt it was the right thing to do”. The magazine then concluded by saying this was “a very sensible decision”. The problem with ‘feeling’ it’s the right thing to do is that many blokes feel it’s right any time! The warm fuzzies of new love, combined with the strong drive of the sexual urge, are not reliable indicators for such important decision making.

These are just a few of the many, many examples in modern society where sex is discussed without mention of relationships. It’s as if an orgasm is all that there is to sex. As soon as we accept the advice of these ‘sexperts’ we’re heading for a hollow, confusing and even harmful view of sex—one that threatens to ruin our relationships. We’ll end up wondering why on earth we can’t hold down a romantic friendship, and why commitment, trust and honesty are so foreign to our relationships. It’s an undersell—a rip off.

#### **PORSCHE OR DATSUN**

In all the wide discussion, debate and argument about condom machines in schools, AIDS, abortion and homosexuality, I’ve been amazed at how little is being said about the intimate side of sex.

In the *Girlfriend* article just mentioned they also reported that, after having sex, most girls in their survey “felt really close to their boyfriends”. This is not surprising.

Any psychologist, sex therapist or average person on the street will tell you that a sexual encounter is often a ‘whole person’ encounter. By this I mean that there is an emotional and psychological impact which accompanies sexual intercourse. It’s not just a physical act, like going to the toilet. It touches deep emotions. It is this ‘deeper’ dimension to sex that many of us are being conned out of.

My first car was an orange Datsun 1200. It got me from A to B, but it really was a rust bucket. It only cost me a thousand bucks, so I didn’t treat

it too well and had no problem lending it out to any of my friends. I figured that if they crashed it, it was no big deal. Suppose though, I owned a Porsche 968. I can assure you, I'd care for it with my life and certainly wouldn't lend it out. In my mind, such a valuable machine deserves the utmost care. But what's this got to do with sex and relationships?

The media 'sexperts' can fool us into believing a Datsun view of sex. Lend it out. It's not that special. But in God's eyes, sex is more like a Porsche. It is valuable. It demands care. It is something precious to us (and to him), not merely the machinery by which we get about and enjoy ourselves.

If humans were just glorified apes who wear Nikes, then it probably makes sense to live entirely by our 'natural' instincts. However, if there is something different about us humans, if relationships are a vital key to our fulfilment, if there is a God who has carefully designed a plan for our sexual lives, then it makes sense to preserve our expression of sexual intimacy until we find a partner with whom life-long commitment, loyalty and trust have meaning.

Far from being against sex, God is very much for it. It's not as if Adam and Eve discovered sex one day and thought, "Oops, let's not tell God. He's bound to get annoyed". Remember, the Creator is creative. He could have invented a method of having kids that involved spitting on each other's big toe, if he had wanted to. But instead, he invented sex—fantastic, enjoyable, intimate and exciting. And because sex is so valuable, God has given some very smart guidelines and rules for its enjoyment and to keep us from getting hurt and from hurting others. The so called 'sexperts' usually say these guidelines are restrictive and boring, but that might just be because they have been tricked into thinking that the 'Porsche' is a 'Datsun'.

Actually, God's insistence that we enjoy sex in the context of a life-long relationship of loyalty and trust is the most liberating and meaningful sexpert advice around. When you're in bed with someone who has promised to devote their life to you for keeps, the experience is so much better. For a start there is a deep, mutual trust—something that is essential for great sex, and near impossible to find in a casual sexual

relationship. More than that, because you're with your life-time partner, you have all the time in the world to get better and better at enjoying each other physically. The desire to get what you want while you can (a very selfish and unsatisfying approach to sex) gives way to a desire to give all you can for as long as you can (a very satisfying approach to sex). The pressure to 'perform' (something that often hinders 'performance') gives way to mutual acceptance and enjoyment of each other (something that often heightens 'performance'). The list of the benefits of God's rules about sex could go on and on.

### THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Unlike today, in first century Palestine (when Jesus was alive), sexual immorality was a very big deal. A true story is recorded in the Bible about a woman who was known to have "lived a sinful life in that town". There are no prizes for guessing what people meant by that phrase. One day Jesus happened to be in town having a meal at the home of a prominent religious leader named Simon and this woman turned up. Now, it was bad enough for a normal person to turn up without an invitation, so imagine what it was like for a woman with her reputation. To make things worse, she came into the room, fell down at Jesus' feet and burst into tears. Imagine the scene now. Here was this woman in all her fear and shame in a room full of self-righteous religious people. As you'd expect, Simon was furious, not only with the woman but also with Jesus. He thought to himself, if Jesus really was a man sent from God he'd be able to tell what kind of woman she was and would tell her to back off. But the point is this: Jesus did know what kind of woman she was and still welcomed her. In fact, Jesus even defended her in front of all these important guests. To top it all off, he then turned to her and spoke what must have been the kindest words she had heard for a long time: "Your sins are forgiven". I'm sure she could hardly believe her ears. She had been used to guilt and rejection, but here was someone offering her acceptance and forgiveness. These words marked a new beginning in her life.

I suppose some of you are aware of the big rip-off that robs sex of intimacy and leaves us with a cheap substitute. Some of you have expe-

rienced it first hand. When I read this story and others like it (the Bible is full of them), I am strongly reminded that in Jesus' mind there is no such thing as a 'point of no return'. No matter what we've done or become, the great news is that there can be restoration, forgiveness and a new beginning.

**FOR SUSPICIOUS MINDS**

1. What attitudes about sex do you think you've absorbed from movies and the media? Do you think these are accurate?
2. Would you describe your attitude to sex as a 'Porsche' or a 'Datsun'?
3. Does God's attitude to sex make sense to you?
4. Try reading the story about Jesus and the sexually immoral woman. You'll find it in Luke, chapter 7, starting at verse 36. If you were this 'sinful' woman, what impact on your life would this meeting with Jesus have?