

Doing it by the book: Evangelical sex manuals

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [May 3, 2005](#) issue

Expect to see banners with “Song of Solomon 2:6” or “Genesis 2:25” unfurled in sports stadiums along with the customary “John 3:16” signs. Expect these, that is, if the annual multimillion-dollar sale of evangelical sex manuals continues to grow apace. Those two scriptures are cited in such texts, many of them written by Tim and Beverly LaHaye.

Now you may wonder how I ran across them. I did so in my scholarly reading. It happens that the once-staid journal *Church History*, the official publication of the American Society of Church History, published “Evangelical Sex Manuals,” by Ann DeRogatis, in its March 2005 issue. I know that the journal was staid because I was its staid coeditor for 35 years, and my staid colleague Jerald C. Brauer and our associates would never have printed anything unstaid.

DeRogatis cites Herbert Miles’s *Sexual Happiness* on wedding night rituals. “Find a private motel, lock the door, draw the shades, and open . . . Bibles . . . [then] kneel by the bed and pray.” Undress each other slowly, examine each other’s naked bodies, in harmony with Genesis 2:25: “and they were both naked and the man and the woman were not ashamed.”

As for Song of Songs 2:6, “Let his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me”—the LaHayes quote this as a “guide for the literal mechanics of clitoral stimulation.”

During my sexually squeamish years as editor, our scholars did research on various branches of Christianity in musty libraries and dusty archives. DeRogatis thanks Allison Andre for conducting research at Christian bookstores. She found that nine out of ten manuals had a section on the wedding night. And they contain “precise instructions about how to achieve orgasm.” LaHaye leaves behind the conservative Protestant demand to be procreative: “Many pleasurable side effects arise from love-making, but we should not lose sight of the fact that the ultimate objective is

orgasm for both husband and wife.”

“What would Jesus do?” DeRogatis asks. “This is a dilemma,” she notes, since in this area Jesus did not set the example. He is “often characterized in terms that are deeply at odds with the construction of masculinity presented in the sex manuals. He is not characterized [as all other men are] as visually aroused, sexually explosive, or needing to orgasm in order to succeed in the material world. . . . This is a tension that is not resolved by quoting the Song of Solomon and Genesis.”

Professor DeRogatis turns literal and says that those who would biblically answer the question, What would Jesus do? could find themselves wondering if celibacy is the path to holiness.

Secular academic and liberal elites have been puzzled to learn that conservative Christians have, or claim to have, the best sex. The elites have homework to do. LaHaye again: “God has never put a premium on ignorance, and that includes the matter of sex education.”

Aggressive men especially will profit from these books, even though women are the main purchasers. Says James Dobson: “God designed man to be the aggressor, provider, and leader in his family. Somehow that is tied to his sex drive.” Dobson supports this view by taking readers on a tour of “the hypothalamic region, located just above the pituitary gland in the mid-brain,” a couple of feet above the area attractive to the author of the Song of Solomon and Tim LaHaye.

And there we leave you. If you want more, go out and buy *Cosmo* or *Maxim*—or subscribe to *Church History*.