

Erotica for the evangelical set

Religious-themed sex guides are flying off the shelves - some even give believers permission to enjoy a good romp

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Richard Davies was reading The New York Times books section when he spotted a full-page advertisement for sex guides.

A spokesman for Victoria-based online book retailer Abe Books, Mr. Davies wondered what kind of guides his customers were ordering, and ran a search of the company's database.

"I knew there was demand for collectible erotica, things like *The Pop-Up Kama Sutra*," he said. "But we put together our bestselling list and, lo and behold, a Christian guide was No. 1."

Of the top 10 sex guides ordered by Abe Books users, five have religious or spiritual themes, ranging from Christian how-tos to "Taoist methods for male sexual revitalization."

The most popular guide is called *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfilment in Christian Marriage*, by married couple Ed and Gaye Wheat.

"I knew we had a lot of Christian buyers getting things like *The Purpose Driven Life* and rare Bibles," Mr. Davies said.

"Christians are big readers, big book collectors; but I didn't realize this."

In the years that *Intended for Pleasure* has been flying off shelves, the publishing industry has discovered the demand for faith-based material that speaks specifically to a purpose-driven sex life.

On The New York Times bestseller list, a book called *It's All About Him* is currently No. 4 for hardcover non-fiction.

Written by Denise Jackson, wife of country music star Alan Jackson, the book describes how religious faith restored passion and dedication to her marriage.

Lonnie Hull DuPont, director of acquisitions at Revell, which publishes *Intended for Pleasure*, said the book has sold more than a million copies since its release 30 years ago, and has never gone out of hardcover.

The book is an at-times-surprising combination of faith and fact.

Passages of Bible Scripture and earnestly romantic tributes to married life are scattered between straight-up explanations of the birth-control pill and illustrations labelled "positioning for premature ejaculation training session using squeeze control."

"I think this was the first in the Christian book industry to be so specific about sex," Ms. Hull DuPont said of *Intended for Pleasure's* enduring popularity.

"Many parts of daily life are full of feelings of guilt or pleasure that I think some Christians don't really know what to do with. This book gives readers permission to enjoy sex."

Other faiths also have sex guides tailored to their beliefs. *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy* is a bestselling guide by American Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, and includes chapters titled: "Is Oral Sex Wrong?" and "What about Pornography?"

Various publishers have also released sex guides capitalizing on the *Kama Sutra* craze, promoting the link between sexual satisfaction and eastern mysticism.

The titles include *The Tao of Sexology*, *Taoist Secrets of Love*, *The Sexual Teachings of the Jade Dragon* and *The Sexual Teachings of the White Tigress*.

On amazon.com, the Christian living category reveals an abundance of erotica for the evangelical set, including *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality*, *Bad Girls of the Bible and What We Can Learn from Them*, and *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of Sexual Intimacy*.

Mr. Davies said it is Internet retailers such as Abe Books and Amazon that are most likely responsible for the growing popularity of these titles.

"Sex manuals are very easy to order on the Internet," Mr. Davies said. "There's less of a taboo about them now."

Internet orders are also affecting the popularity of religiously themed erotic fiction.

Steeple Hill, a Christian imprint of Canadian publisher Harlequin, releases a variety of "wholesome" novels to its direct-mail subscribers, who receive a new book each month.

"It's incredibly popular," said Megan Lorus, a spokeswoman for Steeple Hill.

"That customer base is very demanding for more titles."

"You have God's permission to enjoy sex within your marriage. He invented sex; he thought it up to begin with. You can learn to enjoy it, and, husbands, you can develop a thrilling, happy marriage with "the wife of your youth."

Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfilment in Christian Marriage, by Ed Wheat and Gaye Wheat

"This type of penis is of medium thickness and length, and tends to be bent to the right. It is six inches or more in length, with a girth of four inches or less. It is represented by two yang lines and one yin, meaning there is strength in the Dragon Body but weakness in the Dragon Tail and the Dragon Head."

Description of the K'an/Water Jade Stem in The Sexual Teachings of the Jade Dragon: Taoist Methods for Male Sexual Revitalization by Hsi Lai

"Other sexual positions are flawed ... in that they principally bring together genital and other erogenous zones but never a complete orchestration of the entire body. The lovers have connected, but only on one plane. They have had sex, but they have not made love."

In defence of the missionary position, Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy, by Shmuley Boteach.