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Posted on Mon, Jan. 24, 2011

The Rev Bev preaches the goodness of sex

When she was single between marriages, Beverly Dale would sometimes stop at a bar for a nightcap. When she told men that her two favorite topics are God and sex, she caught their attention pronto, and usually got an earful.

Mention of God caused the men to unload about the failures and abuses of the church. Mention of sex led some to assume that she was, in her words, "an easy lay."

Dale is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and she continues to talk openly, passionately, and joyously about both God and sex. Her gospel can be reduced to a trinity of beliefs:

Pleasure is good.

The body is good.

Sex is good.

Her mission is to reconnect the body and spirit, to heal the sexual wounding she believes has been fostered by organized religion and its tendency to denigrate the body as carnal, hence evil - something to be ashamed of and repressed.

The Christian church is "afraid of sex, passion, and pleasure," Dale says. "These are very powerful forces and can get people in trouble if they're not careful. But rather than dealing with them in a moral or ethical way, we put a lid on them."

For 21 years, Dale was a campus minister at the University of Pennsylvania, teaching students that healthy sexuality is about more than plumbing, lust, and penetration. She encouraged them to be proud of their bodies, to become independent moral agents (deciding if, when, and how to have sex), to resist the hookup culture's potential for exploitation, and to experience sexual pleasure and intimacy in a state unadulterated by alcohol. Along the way, she earned the affectionate nickname "Rev Bev."

A farmer's daughter from Illinois, a former submissive wife who married the first time at age 18, the Rev Bev describes her evolution in her one-woman performance piece, An Irreverent Journey From Eggbeaters to Vibrators. She has participated in literary salons with an erotic theme, held discussion groups in bars and taprooms for young adults about sexual decision-making, and next month she'll lead a workshop called "Clear Conscience: Morality and Polyamory" for those considering opening their intimate relationships to more than one partner. (Dale, 61, lives in Mount Airy in a committed relationship with a college professor.)

She calls herself a "consultant on body justice and sexuality ministries" and is eager to share her gospel of sensuality at small gatherings and through Webinars. Her sermons contain such lines as:

"When we denigrate the erotic impulse to create and to connect, we fall in love with the power of violence."

"We have chosen agape [Platonic, selfless love] as the model . . . to the exclusion of eros."

"Of all people, Christians could be and should be the sexiest religious people out there."

She wants Christians to do more dancing, less warring; more sharing, less accumulating; forget multiplying, she exhorts, go forth and make love.

Her preaching makes some people gasp and squirm. She's been called "the whore of Satan." But her grateful acolytes and disciples are numerous.

"It's refreshing to hear someone who cares about humanity so much talk about sex in such a positive manner," says David Lynn, 43, a Philadelphia database programmer who has seen Dale's autobiographical performance. "She's filling a huge void."

"People tend to separate their sexuality from their religious faith," says Andrea Durham, 44, a



DAVID M WARRENStaff Photographer

Beverly Dale, ordained minister, says: "Of all people, Christians could be and should be the sexiest religious people out there."

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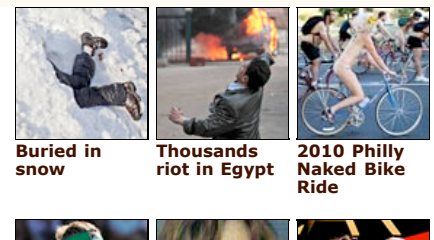
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Philadelphia lawyer. "She's not only bringing them together but showing that healthy spirituality includes the entire human being, body and soul."

In the Bible, sex and women are problematic from the get-go. In Genesis, Satan, in the guise of a serpent, seduces Eve, who seduces Adam, ruining mankind's prelapsarian innocence and bliss.

"The early church fathers were ambivalent about sexuality and the body," Dale says, "and oftentimes misogynistic."

Proof that God gave the gift of sex to be cherished and enjoyed is his incarnation in Jesus, argues Dale, who earned a doctorate of ministry at Chicago Theological Seminary. "Incarnation means God in flesh, not floating around with angel wings," Dale says. No ascetic loner, the son of God savored the sensual. "I come to give you life in all its abundance," Jesus declared. He broke gender norms, speaking to women in public, touching menstruating women. He attended parties, drank wine, and consorted with outcasts and lowlifes.

The Rev Bev would like to see sexuality taught not only in schools but also in churches. In the meantime, she offers this advice: Embrace your beloved as a sexy partner. Bring laughter into the bedroom. Loosen up and speak truth about what's not working. Engage in a daily activity that is sensual, that stimulates the senses, that brings pleasure through the body. (Example: lighting candles and taking a bubble bath, or for me, spraying myself with WD-40 and lying under a jeep.)

"There are many ways to give ourselves pleasure," Dale says, "and we should employ all of them."

For more information, visit www.beverlydale.org.





Contact columnist Art Carey at 215-854-5606 or acarey@phillynews.com.

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How refreshing to see a bona fide Christian minister recognizing that sex is a good thing. If I had been blessed with this minister as a child I would probably be a bible toting devout Christian today. But I'm not. Actually Unitarian. The Christian Church needs thousands of ministers like Rev Bev to reverse the negative image sex has gotten over the past 1500 years (give or take a few hundred). As an activist promoting open and honest sexual relationships I have come across many who have lives have been much troubled because of sex negativity. Bravo Rev Bev.....

— Ken Haslam

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