

Conflicted Megachurch Pastor Resigns Over Book's Hyper-Spiritualization of Sex

Joshua Butler says he found himself and his church in “an impossible situation.” And it was that situation that he says forced him to resign as the co-lead pastor of Redemption Church in Tempe, Arizona, this week.

“The impossible situation” centered around the publishing and backlash from his book, “Beautiful Union: How God’s Vision for Sex Points Us to the God, Unlocks the True and (Sort of) Explains Everything.” The description of the book on Amazon reads: “A powerful call for Christians to understand sex as a window into God’s story of redemption, and a validating guide to living with authentic love in a changing culture.”

An excerpt from Butler’s book titled “Sex Won’t Save you (But it Points to the One Who Will)” was published on the website of the Gospel Coalition, a union of evangelical and Reformed churches in March, and his book was officially released in April.

The excerpt related to sexual intercourse in spiritual terms and, as one media outlet put it, “characterized as a man granting a holy gift to a woman and comparing it the relationship between Jesus and the church.” The excerpt also stated that “Sex is an icon of salvation. Generosity and hospitality are both embodied in the sexual act. ... You give the best you’ve got to give, lavishly pouring out our time, energy and money.”

Prominent pastors, including founding pastor of Saddleback Church’s Rick Warren and his wife, Kay, along with others, such as Kevin DeYoung and Rich Villodas, pastor of New Life Fellowship in New York City, urged TGC to remove the article

and issue an apology. It did so later on both accounts.

In place of its previous link to order Butler's book, TGC has now posted a letter giving context for Butler's resignation as a Keller Center fellow and discontinuance of planned TGC speaking here.

The excerpt led to public outcry, claiming Butler's writing contained not only bad theology but an oversexed view of religion centered on male pleasure.

reported that "While the excerpt did quote from the New Testament's Letter of Paul to the Ephesians, theology professor Beth Felker Jones, among others, argued Butler had missed the point of the passages he addressed."

"But the piece does not dig into Ephesians, paying close attention to the text," Jones wrote. "Instead, it turns into a rhapsody over a very male-centered experience of sexual intercourse."

Because of the backlash, Butler wrote that he had no other choice to resign his position in a social media message to his congregation.

"I am resigning as co-lead pastor of Redemption Tempe," he wrote. "I have processed this with our elders and am writing this together with them, with a desire to share my reasons for resigning with you. We have found ourselves in an impossible situation. On the one hand, I feel called to step more into these public conversations. I desired to be humble, charitable, winsome and wise. There are some mistakes I've made I wish to own, but also deep convictions I hold that I wish to contribute to broader conversation.

"On the other hand, I don't want to drag Redemption into that public conversation with me. The toll of this controversy on many of our staff and leaders this month has been intense at both Redemption Tempe and other Redemption Arizona

congregations. While they have borne that burden well, I am concerned that my continuing to step into this public conversation would generate distraction from the primary ministry God has called us to as a local church. As elders, we have affirmed this assessment together.”

Butler’s photo and bio no longer appear on the church’s website. {eoa}

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