

Sex, Dating and Relationships: A fresh approach

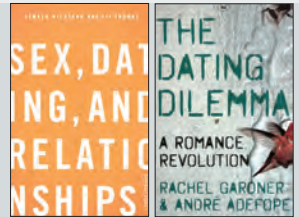
Gerald Hiestand & Jay S Thomas

(Crossway, 2012 RRP £7.55, but only £5 as part of the *Take + Read* scheme)

The Dating Dilemma: A romance revolution

Rachel Gardner & Andre Adefope

(IVP, 2013 RRP £8.99)



One certainty of the CMF student conference bookstall is that anything on relationships sells. Why should this be? Marriage, relationships and singleness often dominate students' lives – inside the church perhaps even more than outside. Yet the questions asked at this year's student conference seminar on relationships were almost all ones that I or my friends had struggled with as students. Little had changed. Both these new books are helpful. Though they come to mostly similar conclusions, the approach taken differs markedly.

Sex, Dating and Relationships could be recommended on the strength of its opening chapter alone. An exposition of sex as an expression of the gospel is challenging and refreshing, setting the tone for the rest of the book. Arguing that the Bible defines three 'categories' of relationship – family, marriage, and neighbours, the rest of the book places dating relationships firmly in the 'neighbour' category, and suggests principles that follow from this, leading to advocacy of a 'dating friendships' approach. Much is helpful, particularly the consideration of sexual desire. Some may however find the answers arrived at so radically different from usual Christian practice in the UK that they are difficult to consider – not that a challenge is a bad thing!

Much is built on the 'three categories', which I felt was the one weakness; there can be a risk of

assuming a biblical example (which these categories definitely are) always constitutes a biblical command (which I was not fully convinced these categories do).

The Dating Dilemma is on the surface more supportive of modern society's view of dating and relationships, seeing current practice as something to be redeemed and improved, rather than torn up entirely. It is intensely practical, directly addressing a lot of common questions. It is strong on putting God at the centre of all the things we do, and encourages us to date differently. 'Date stronger, deeper, clearer and wider' is the underlying message. Although the theological approach is quite different to *Sex, Dating and Relationships*, the underlying 'answer' reached is not so different once the very different terminology used is stripped away – perhaps reassuring to those who say different books always seem to give different answers!

If *Sex, Dating and Relationships* might be too radical for some, *The Dating Dilemma* may be too 'soft' for others. Sometimes clear biblical commands are treated gently – I'm sure from a well-founded motivation to engage and be grace-filled. This is welcome in an area which so often causes guilt, but someone looking for a 'get-out' clause might be able to convince themselves they had found it. The use of *The Message* for many Bible quotations was not helpful; a true translation rather than a paraphrase would have been better.