

## The Terrible Legacy of Paul

Despite their dedication to raping women not of their tribes, the early Jews had a remarkably permissive attitude towards sex as a natural and pleasurable activity. Dying in the virgin state was considered unfortunate rather than desirable.<sup>1</sup> A man could have as many wives as he could manage and have consensual sex with as many unmarried girls as he wished. (“Adultery” meant having sex with another’s Jew’s wife; thereby violating that man’s property rights.) Some teachers even believed that, upon his death, a man would be called upon “to account to God for every pleasure he had failed to enjoy.”<sup>2</sup>

And then, along came a guy called Paul.

Influenced by the dualism of oriental religions, which were then spreading throughout the Roman Empire, Paul had an extremely negative, pessimistic view of mankind in general, and sex in particular. He believed that any physical pleasure interfered with spiritual health and that, since the cataclysmic end of the world was imminent, men should put away all things worldly to prepare themselves for that event.

At first, Paul’s extremist views earned some credence as others bought into the idea that the sky was about to fall, so they really hadn’t much to lose by sacrificing a bit of pleasure. By the time it became obvious that the apocalypse was not imminent, the Christian leaders were learning how much power and control they might gain by convincing the populace that their natural desires were sinful. Thus, Paul’s teachings were the transient event in the desexualization of western religion — the disturbance in the force that triggered an avalanche of repression, persecutions, killings, hysteria, and mayhem engineered by the Christian fathers.

“Increasingly, virginity became a cardinal virtue, marriage a concession to the weak . . . sex had become an evil necessity for the propagation of the race, to be avoided and denied by the spiritually

strong. . . . Even those who were ‘consumed with passion’ were urged not to marry, to discipline themselves, to mortify the flesh, for the flesh was evil.”<sup>3</sup> Such asceticism led inevitably to self-torture, as fanatical monks trekked to desolate locations to mortify their flesh, fasting, flagellating themselves, going without sleep and refusing to wash; some even castrated themselves in order to be freed from the torments of the flesh.

And if the view that women were the property of their fathers and husbands wasn’t repugnant enough, now they came to be considered as temptresses, who were responsible for opening the gates to evil. In general, “Christians of the first few centuries accorded marriage, family life, women, and sex the lowest status of any known culture in the world.”<sup>4</sup> Yet the problem wasn’t actually the sex act, it was the physical pleasure that might be derived therefrom; a pleasure that, as Mark Twain so succinctly points out is: “far and away above all other joys.”<sup>5</sup> So sex was the natural focus of early Christian attempts to protect the spirit from the evil body. The physical was the enemy of the spiritual, so any pleasure that derived from the body was a serious impediment to the soul’s progress. Or, at least, that was the rationale the priests taught the general populace. The true motivation for such teachings most likely had more to do with instilling debilitating guilt complexes throughout the population, the easier to dominate and control them.<sup>6</sup>

No matter the original intent, once the fire of sexual sin was ignited it has burned unabated to this very day as first the Catholics and then the Protestants fanned the flames.

Early on, the church began publishing a series of books known as “penitentials.” In some of these, fornication was declared a worse crime than murder. Any attempt to have sex, even kissing a potential partner was forbidden. Even worse, the mere act of *thinking about* having sex called for a penance

of 40 days. "Nor was intention a necessary requisite for sin, for involuntary nocturnal emissions were considered sinful: the offender had to rise at once and sing seven penitential psalms, with an additional 30 in the morning."<sup>7</sup> [As if having to change the bed linens wasn't punishment enough!] But, of all the sins of the flesh, the greatest emphasis in the penitentials was on masturbation. Even into the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, Thomas Aquinas claimed that playing with one's self was a greater sin than fornication. Being as wet dreams are extremely common, and masturbation even more so, virtually everyone fell victim to the guilt imposed by these taboos.

Sex within the marriage union was hardly free of religious restrictions. The insistence by today's Catholic church on religious wedding ceremonies, might obscure the obstructionist attitude of its founders. At first the church, not wanting to open any door to happiness, refused to perform marriage ceremonies at all. When that policy was reversed, and it insisted that only a church ceremony was valid, it began implementing a series of policies designed to make participation in such events more difficult. One approach was to limit the available candidates. Most cultures frown on marrying close relatives, but in the 11th Century, the church "extended the ban to first, then to second, and finally to third cousins. But this was not all. So strongly was the notion of sympathetic contagion embedded in the collective psyche, so intense were the anxieties concerning incest, that godfathers and godmothers were included in the ban; next, even the relatives of the priests who had baptized or confirmed an individual were included; finally, even the two adults who had been sponsors to the same child in baptism or confirmation were restrained from ever marrying one another. In some small villages, it is not too farfetched to imagine that these regulations sometimes eliminated every available candidate and condemned individuals to a lifetime of celibacy."<sup>8</sup>

Those fortunate enough to find a suitable partner, could find picking a date problematic, as the church refused to perform ceremonies during

various holy days and other times — which could occupy as many as half of the days in the year. Not only the dates, but the church likewise restricted the times, first to daylight, and then by defining "daylight" as between 8 a.m. and noon.

Once a couple had managed to overcome all obstacles to wedlock that the church could raise, they were free to enjoy their conjugal bed, right?

Wrong! The church realized that it had to allow for some sex, lest it run out of parishioners, so it tried to limit opportunities while dampening sexual pleasure to the bare minimum the act requires. At one time in the Dark Ages, "the church forbade sexual relations between man and wife for the equivalent of five months out of every year."<sup>9</sup> And on the permitted days, there was to be no foreplay, no fellatio, no cunnilingus, no anal, and no coitus in any but the "right" and "natural" missionary position.

"The Church's obsession with sex created a self-perpetuating chain reaction that continued to increase through the centuries until it finally burst in the holocaust of the inquisitions, leaving mangled, bloody corpses spread all across the face of Europe."<sup>10</sup>

Today, people sometimes use the label "witch hunt" to denigrate an investigation they feel improper. This is the grossest hyperbole. The social hysteria that swept Europe from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in the name of hunting witches and heretics may be the most horrendous series of events in human history, certainly the worst undertaken by a religious organization. In the name of ridding the world of witches, persons young and old, of both genders, and all social strata were accused, questioned, examined, and tortured, generally while naked. The latter condition is likely the reason that the biggest group of victims consisted of young girls in their teens. They were generally charged with having sex with devils. The handbook used to guide the hunters was the *Malleus Malleficarum*, which revealed the startling premise that "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable."

The gory details of betrayal, false witness, torture, imprisonment, and murder are easily found in other sources; but, for those unfamiliar, here are some sample statistics.

“In the German community of Lindheim, which in 1664 had a population of 600, 30 persons were executed. In 1589 at Quedlinburg in Saxony, a town of some 12,000 inhabitants, 133 were burned in a single day. In Toulouse the number burned in one day was 400. It was claimed that in some towns there were more witches than houses. According to H. C. Lea, ‘a Bishop of Geneva is said to have burned 500 persons within three months, a Bishop of Bamberg 600, a Bishop of Würzburg 900.’ Eight hundred were condemned, apparently in one body, by the Senate of Savoy. Paramo, in his *History of the Inquisition*, boasts that in a century-and-a-half, from 1404, the Holy Office had burned at least 30,000 witches.

“Nicholas Remy (1530-1612), an inquisitor from Lorraine with 800 executions to his ‘credit,’

stated, ‘So good is my justice that last year there were no less than 16 killed themselves rather than pass through my hands.’ H. Williams, in *The Superstitions of Witchcraft*, writes that in Spain, Torquemada personally sent 10,220 persons to the stake and 97,371 to prison.”<sup>11</sup>

All this because Paul had a vision of impending cataclysm and recommended that his followers forego the physical and concentrate on the spiritual until the day of reckoning arrived. Perhaps his fearful visions, in fact, portended the cruel repressions, persecutions, and massacres that his new religion was to inflict upon our weary globe. A religion, by the way, whose anti-pleasure campaign was and is completely foreign to the teachings of Jesus.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lehrman, Nathaniel S., *Journal of Religion and Health*, October 1963, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, G. Rattray, *Sex in History*, Vanguard Press, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, William Graham, *Sex in Christianity and Psychoanalysis*, Oxford University Press, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> Reis, Ira L., *Premarital Sexual Standards in America*, Free Press, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Twain, Mark (Samuel Clemens), *Letters From the Earth*, HarperCollins, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> See The Most Insidious Lie number 1, “The Physical Is Inferior to the Spiritual.”

<sup>7</sup> Hefner, Hugh M., *The Playboy Philosophy*, Part III, Installment 14, HMH Publishing Co., Inc., 1963, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Hefner, *The Playboy Philosophy*, Part I, Installment 9, HMH Publishing Co., Inc., 1963, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 8.