



## HOW THEOLOGY CORRUPTS SEX

Religions have been concerned with sexuality and gender from the beginning. This is unsurprising given the importance of sexual and family relationships in human society. Among all highly social animals, in fact, such interactions are central to the well-being and success of individuals and groups. Among humans, the most social species on the planet, these interactions assume a crucial importance. Sigmund Freud famously held that sexual issues were at the root of virtually all psychological dysfunction.

Our ancient ancestors were conflicted about issues of gender and sex. The Trojan War was said to have been set in motion not just by the rape of Helen, but also by quarreling among goddesses as to which of them was "the fairest." Castration was widely practiced in those days on both living and dead men. The Bible sets forth all sorts of brutally restrictive rules concerning sexual relationships and practices, including the death penalty for homosexual acts. At the same time, its "men of God" had multiple wives and concubines and King David says of Jonathan that "your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women."

The New Testament has Jesus saying that "there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." [Matthew 19:12] In parts of Christian-dominated Europe, castration of young boys was carried out for the sake of maintaining their singing voices well into the 19th Century. Nor has the Catholic Church ever apologized for its role in that practice.

The Vatican is well-known for its obstinate opposition to all but "rhythm methods" of contraception. But Christianity generally has a long history of extremely negative attitudes towards sex. Saint Paul, arguably the real founder of Christianity as we know it today, wrote that it is best "to stay unmarried, as I do" and only to marry as a way to avoid "burn[ing] with passion." Early Christians connected "Original Sin" with sex and held that Eve was at fault in this. This is why Jesus had to be born of a virgin and not as a result of a sexual act. Accordingly, Justin Martyr taught that the only purpose of marriage was to produce children. Jerome said that marriage "is always a vice" and "He who is too ardent a lover of his own wife is an adulterer." Clement of Alexandria condemned sexual desire as sinful, even for one's spouse, as did others, including Augustine. Of course, if sex is a bad thing, homosexuality is far far

worse. These ideas are central to Christian theology, which accounts for the corruption of cultural ideas and attitudes about gender and sex in the United States.

Consider the recent smear campaign against Planned Parenthood, now targeted for destruction by religious political extremists. It's not just about abortion. People forget – if they ever knew – the role that such extremism played in maintaining Sunday-closing laws, bringing about Prohibition in the 1920's, and bans on birth control that were only struck down by the Supreme Court in 1965. Today there continues to be opposition to sex education, the inclusion of contraception in health insurance, and proven effective prevention of STD's. A major-party candidate for US President can even get away with lying about the content of publicly-available video because so many prefer the lie.

Monica Migliorino Miller is Director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society and an associate professor of theology at Madonna University, Livonia, Michigan. (Their athletic teams are known as "The Crusaders.") Last month, Miller said:

"even if Planned Parenthood didn't perform one single abortion, just the mere fact that its sexual ethic is corrupted means right there, should be the reason right there, that they should not receive any federal money. The kind of sexual ethic that Planned Parenthood promotes is sex for recreation, sex for mere pleasure. ... Unfortunately we live in a culture that believes in that sexual ethic and so Planned Parenthood gets \$528 million of federal tax money." [emphasis added]

This is not conservative opposition to the welfare state. Catholic Charities gets almost \$3 billion from the US government which clearly helps to promote Catholic doctrines concerning sex and gender. Isn't an almost 6 to 1 advantage enough to tilt the culture the way that Miller wants?

The problem is that the facts are not being heard. There are no voices effectively countering the hysteria. It's not just that no government funds are being used to pay for abortions. It's not even about the fact that Congress itself in 1993 authorized the use of human fetal tissue from voluntary abortions to be used in medical research. It's that sexual ethics in our nation is corrupted by the wrong and irrational notion that sex is something to feel shameful and

guilty about because it's intrinsically depraved and connected with "Original Sin." In fact – as a matter of objective fact, not having anything to do with religion! – sex is supposed to be a satisfying and enjoyable part of the human condition, a source of pleasure and, yes, "for recreation."

This is not to say that sex is without its dangers. Many things that people do are dangerous including competitive sports, skiing, rock-climbing, sky-diving, and so on. Eating is another human appetite, definitely engaged in for pleasure and recreation, but also one that comes with risks. Eating is connected with recognized major public health problems in our nation: obesity and its associated conditions. That some human activities carry risks is reason to take sensible and appropriate precautions, not to label them "sinful."

The chief dangers of sex, of course, for almost everyone as well as society generally, are unwanted pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases. These dangers are not, as so many deluded and thoughtless people suppose, a punishment for the sin of sex, any more than salmonella or botulism are a punishment for eating. Again, risks can and should be managed appropriately depending on the situation.

Consent is certainly the paramount consideration in sexual ethics. It seems embarrassingly obvious but it was not always so. Consent can be complicated by a variety of issues relating to one's ability to understand, "soft" coercion including harassment in the workplace and elsewhere, ulterior motives (think of Mata Hari!) and other situations where there may be asymmetry in power or information. Yet how often are these matters discussed outside of a context of outrage over what are or might seem unreasonable or exaggerated circumstances?

Sex does relate to religion insofar as it affects each individual's personal, emotional and subjective well-being. Sexual relationships can powerfully affect one's sense of self, self-worth, and one's ability to grow, develop and "self-actualize" as a person. An important part of maturity is also to exert rational judgment and control where sex is concerned. But like so many things, each person must learn these things for themselves. They cannot be imposed by coercive laws and religious doctrines that instill fear, guilt and shame. Augustine himself did not grasp the meaning of his prayer to "grant me chastity and continence but not yet!" He and his religion made it harder for people to sort things out and reach meaningful understanding where sex is concerned.

People like Miller are right to say that the culture is corrupted when it comes to sex and sexual ethics. But it is their own theological nonsense that is the problem. It is the board in their own eye, as it were, and not the mote in the eye of others that is the problem. It is well past time that facts and reason be looked to as the best way to begin sorting these things out.

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**- [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) -**  
**JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

**Freethought Salon:** Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-1st Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

**Game Night:** This is nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

**Freethought Book Club November 14th!** BOOK: Why We Believe in God(s): A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith by J. Anderson Thomson & Clare Aukofer.

**Communitas Dinner Group: Also planned for 11/14!**  
**Have Another Idea?** Email or call us about it!

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:**

**"MERRY MYTHMAS!"  
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