

'Illicit Sex and The God Machine'

By A. Shaw

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What is 'illicit' sex'?

It is any sexual activity that is prohibited, forbidden or illegal.

It is all forms of *exploitative* or *forced* sex – child sex abuse, rape and forced marriage – that most people would agree should be unacceptable, illicit, illegal and appropriately treated and/or punished.

But there are many other forms of sexual activity that the religions oppose, and that have therefore been made illicit in the past and still are today in some countries - practices that are or should be legitimate sexual choices for adults. Yet the religions still strive to keep these practices 'illicit' - in Britain, the West and around the world - behaviours that they consider are deserving of often cruel punishment: -

- Homosexuality and other forms of sex not leading to conception.
- Prostitution – sex for money, male and female.
- Adultery and infidelity – sexual unfaithfulness (mainly of wives).
- 'Fornication' - all sex between unmarried people.
- All Sex before marriage especially for women.
- All sex for single, divorced, separated people, widows and widowers
- Sex for pleasure and not procreation & masturbation.

Which pretty well covers everyone except married couples not using contraception!

What is 'acceptable' sex?

Although many people in Britain and the West today have moved well away from the original Christian teaching on sex, and many of the worst effects of its strictures and punishments for non-compliance are less harsh, the Christian church and other religions still support and preach them. The Christian model of sexuality and family is still taken as the traditional wisdom that influences many of today's attitudes, that in turn influence voters attitudes to political decisions on sexuality, health and welfare, education and science.

According to the Christian church that has shaped our culture, mores and law for almost 2000 years the only legitimate sex is between one man and one woman, within holy matrimony, sanctified by the church, for the

procreation of children and not for pleasure. If this were asserted in these simple terms today, most of us would think it completely barmy!

Yet this is exactly what the religions, that are still supposedly supported by a majority of intelligent educated and otherwise rational people, believe, preach, teach. And want to see enforced with a whole panoply of sanctions to punish those who fall short of this notion of the 'ideal' of sexuality and family life.

One might wonder if the fact that so many adults have been and still are taken in by this nonsense contributes to the disdain that some young people have for their elders?

Why does it need protection?

The common pattern of heterosexual family life, monogamy, preferably with children being brought up with the support of the extended family is a pattern of family life that suits many if not most people in most parts of the world and there seems no reason to think that it will not continue to be chosen by most without coercion!

But there will always be some circumstances for some people, for whom this model does not suit, and they usually find satisfactory alternatives. For others it breaks down. We do not have the predestined patterns of life of swans, wolves or whales or other creatures that 'mate for life'. We do not have the limited choices of other creatures nor their limited sexual behaviours. But nor are we like Bonobo apes ready for a quick shag at every opportunity. In fact observation would indicate that for most people, most of the time, sex does not have anything like the high priority that the media and advertising industry (and the church) would have us believe.

And given the success of humans in populating the earth, there seems no reason to think that sexual activity that does not lead to the birth of babies is a threat to the human race! Quite the reverse. Nor does it seem likely that even if more people seek sexual satisfaction outside of marriage it will make any difference to the preferences of the vast majority.

So why do the religions to persist in trying to maintain this elaborate system of sanctions that make no rhyme or reason – and are simply cruel punishment for those who do not choose this model, or for whom it fails? Is the system of lifelong partnership so fragile that it is threatened by the

natural diversity of minorities unless there is punishment for non-compliance? I think not.

So what's it all about?

But of course it is actually nothing to do with sex or what little they, or their armies of theologians can find to interpret from their bible. It is about reinforcing their more pernicious ideas about the inferiority of women and their role in life. An attitude that allowed the church to keep women out of education and thus out of public life and the professions until modern times, with all that that has meant for the balance of society. It is about the ownership and control of a woman and her children by a man, and about his traditional right, as enshrined in law, to own her and her property on marriage – her transfer from her father to her husband. Transfer Fee or Dowry? It includes his right to chastise (beat) her, or worse, as is still the case in some religions in some countries. The relics of this system can still be seen in the mores of British culture, politics, law and the crime statistics.

For centuries, this concept of the Christian family, as the only permissible model, has given the church massive control over the personal and family lives of individuals, as to who could and could not have a family life and children. It has shaped our culture and our attitudes and still lies at the root of many political and social attitudes today. It has caused endless suffering and death from suicide, poverty and violence. The lives of millions of men women and children have, over the centuries been blighted by the effects of these attitudes – fear, prejudice, discrimination and punishment - as have the lives of the unmarried, gay, trans-sexual, and mentally and physically disabled people for whom sex has been a taboo and to some, it still is.

Mixed Marriage

It also explains, if it needs explaining, why mixed marriage, ‘marrying out’ is considered such a heinous offence in some Christian sects and some other religions. Cutting across the religious divides, opens up comparisons between religions, and opens people’s eyes to the contradictions and fallacies of religious doctrine and certainty. It triggers the critical faculty and undermines the ‘mind control’ of the religions. It threatens to dilute the pool of unwavering devotees, and subverts the religion’s insistence that children must be indoctrinated at an early age

into their particular brand of belief. The church has never been above moral blackmail.

In Britain these are Christian attitudes, but they are also to be seen in the doctrines and attitudes of other religions. And in some parts of the world, under some religions, the cruel punitive attitudes and practices relating to 'Illicit' sex regardless of 'blame', that have only been overcome by increasing secularisation in the West - are still widespread.

The penalties for breaching these religious stipulations has been and still are in many communities, hateful disapproval, stigma and social isolation from family and friends. In some countries it can lead to terrible violence and death as male relatives take revenge to assuage their 'family honour'. And in some, punishment by imprisonment or death is still the law.

This control over people's personal lives, has been used to control society and community, and in collusion with other elites - political and military - made it easier for them to exert control over the populations they rule, and particularly to suppress criticism and opposition to religion that might have brought a more civilised society today. The evil effects can be seen from the top to the bottom of society but of course mostly to the mass of the population who cannot avoid its consequences by having wealth or status.

Although many people disregard the teaching of the church on sex, many seem to be in a state of denial when it comes to recognising the extent to which these attitudes persist in our culture and shape our political views.

It affects men women and children

Men

The men who have suffered most from the religious attitudes to 'Illicit' sex and the punishments, are male homosexuals, but not for supposed doctrinal reasons, for there is very little in their scriptures to justify their prejudices.

The reason that homosexuality, for most ordinary people, has been outlawed, is that same sex partnerships subvert the theory of male supremacy and men's ownership of women. Male sexual relationships based on mutual respect, sexual satisfaction and equality, without a

subservient female partner; undermine the church's dogmatic view of the family. As do female relationships without a man as 'head of household'.

Heterosexual partnerships are the *only* ones recognised by the church - a male and female partner- a superior, dominant partner and an inferior subordinate one. It's purpose - for the procreation of children and not for pleasure. So in addition to undermining their views on the roles of men and women, and not being for procreation, same-sex partnerships must be for pleasure - they must therefore be sinful and sin has to be punished. In the past at least in Britain, it was by fear of exposure or blackmail, and stigma. Even now it is the churches and mosques that are fighting the rearguard action against homosexuality, that is used to justify prejudice and discrimination, in schools, in preventing the validation of homosexual lifestyles for young and vulnerable gays, and recognition and acceptance of same sex marriages. What an absurdity!

We still harbour the attitudes from traditional Christianity, and gays still have to put up with public ribaldry, thuggery and playground bullying - but in its raw form is much more in evidence Muslim countries, where homosexuality is still illegal, and punished by imprisonment or death.

The religious strictures on sex education contemplating anything other than the Christian view, and discussing contraception and condom use have affected the health of men as well as women, particularly in hindering the prevention of the spread of venereal disease (STDs - Sexually transmitted diseases), It's worst and most widespread effect of recent times has been on the attitudes and efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among gay men. Even such a short time ago, there were public expressions that the 'plague' was God's punishment and gays and drug addicts deserved this fate. And furthermore, hatred was stirred up, calling them a threat to the 'innocent' God-fearing majority.

The only exceptions to the seriously punitive attitudes to 'Illicit' sex by men are heterosexual men. They are alone in not suffering the strictures and traditional punishment of the church. Though it might be frowned upon by those who are directly affected, this is balanced by the camaraderie of other men who condone and justify the macho, 'stud' mentality.

Male prostitution can be, like all prostitution, part of normal sexual activity, but only if it is an entirely voluntary activity that is carried out with regard to the health and well-being of the individuals concerned, and is not in any way exploitative. The making of such activity illegal and the

stigma that is attached to it, leads to it being driven into the realms of violence and organised crime and puts prostitutes and anyone else they have sex with, in danger of violence, coercion and contracting STDs

A key punishment for all forms of sexual pleasure outside the religious model is not physical at all, but the instilling of fear, and not just for sex itself, but for thinking of sex and experiencing sexual pleasure outside of homosexual intercourse. How many young people, boys and girls have been frightened at the threats made by the religions when they discovered masturbation? And how many adults, who are convinced by their religious beliefs, still, today, harbour secret fears about their sexual lives, however harmless.

Women

As you might expect, it is the lives of women that are most affected by the attitudes, exploitation and the punishments for all forms of illicit sex. It is on married, divorced and unmarried women alike, pregnant girls, rape victims, lone mothers and prostitutes that the wrath of church and society falls. Any woman who infringes the narrow band of legitimate sexual activity recognised by the religions can expect a range of punishment, from social disapproval, stigma, poverty, and even cruel physical punishment, maiming and death in some countries. The attitude that a woman is 'Better Dead than Defiled' is still widespread in many countries. And the killing of women for the confused and contradictory male hatred of women and especially prostitution is still a major concern. The fear of sexual attack by men still blights the lives of many women, and it is not an unfounded fear, for the killing of women as part of sexual attack is widespread, and is far from being *less* prevalent in the most religious countries.

Prostitution

Above all the religions are against prostitution, though it is hard to see that that has had much effect on this age old profession, other than to keep it at the heart of the sleazy underworld of crime and poverty. Their opposition has not been just to the exploitative aspects of prostitution - for those women (and men) who resort to it for economic survival, but because it challenges the attitudes towards sex outside marriage and sex for pleasure.

The disgust and often pathological hatred, often driven by feelings of guilt, towards prostitution and prostitutes has disturbing consequence. It makes them - women and boys - vulnerable to violent exploitation and STDs and the risk for women of infertility from infection and disease in later life such as cervical cancer from early contraction of Human Papilloma virus. Their clients are likewise in danger from these diseases, as are their partners and babies born to women with some STDs.

It has also prevented the use of prostitutes to relieve sexual frustration for those people who for whatever reason are unable to have satisfying sexual relationships.

The attempts to take the pleasure out of sex for women is responsible for the practice of female genital mutilation around the world. It is estimated that there are between 100 and 130 million girls now alive in some 28 mainly Muslim countries who have undergone this painful and dangerous procedure.

HIV/AIDS

The worst scourge of modern times has been the HIV/AIDS pandemic, that has taken a terrible toll - made worse by the activities of some religions in opposing 'safe sex' messages and the use of condoms. Although men, women and children are affected it has affected more heterosexual women than men, because of the easier male to female transmission, and the tendency for older men to infect younger women and girls. Superstitious myth also drives the idea in some parts of the world that to have sex with a virgin is supremely desirable, also puts young girls at risk.

Reproductive Health

The old saying '*You've made your bed, now must lie on it*' sums up the harsh attitudes common in our society, against pregnancy and motherhood outside marriage even today.

It is the religions that oppose birth control, condom use and abortion – ways of avoiding unwanted pregnancy or motherhood or giving birth to babies that may have to be given up for adoption. Or preventing catching STDs, which are seen by some devoted 'believers' as the punishment for 'Illicit' sex. Safe sex and abortion are ways of avoiding 'God's wrath and punishment'. Youthful ignorance, unwise liaisons, and unplanned or

accidental sex, even rape in some religious cultures are seen as no excuse for girls, women and their children, not to suffer the consequences. Their excuse being that it may deter others!

What other reason could there be for putting the rights of the embryo even in its earliest stages as a cluster of undifferentiated cells, before the rights and well-being of women and their families?

For women to be able to indulge in and enjoy sex outside marriage, without the fear of being 'found out' by pregnancy, unwanted motherhood, lone parenthood or STDs – or being called a 'slag' - removes the fear of those sanctions and the stigma of having 'Illicit' sex. In removing this fear, it also removes the ability of the church to limit their sexual freedom and control people's family lives, and for women to protect themselves.

The church is not in the business of building self-confidence and the self-esteem of women and girls. Whether they fall short of the church's strictures, by accident or design. Women who choose not to comply with the narrow views of the church on sexuality and safety, and the subservient role of women, are a threat to one of the church's fundamental purposes of control, as well as the dominance of men in society.

Physical, Mental and Psychological Health

Much suffering and ill health is attributable to the punitive attitudes to sex generally and 'illicit' sex in particular. Prudery and stigma towards the human body run deep, and are still responsible for preventing or delaying diagnosis and treatment of many 'embarrassing' conditions that affect the usually private parts of the body and include early diagnosis of STDs in men and women, and pregnancy in young girls. It also prevents or delays the contact tracing that is a necessary part of preventing the spread of infectious disease.

Guilt and fear of exposure to ridicule or disapproval of family and friends and social isolation, can be a cause of stress that can undermine self esteem and self confidence. Especially for young and vulnerable people who may not, themselves, understand their own sexuality, and the normality of diversity. These unwarranted feelings often cause or add to, emotional disturbance and relationship problems and are particularly difficult for people with mental illness, who may already be depressed or severely confused about their own identity and sexuality.

Social Punishment

As well as the reproductive health issues and the punishments implicit in unwanted pregnancy and motherhood or adoption, there are the sanctions on lone mothers, foremost of which is the poverty of lone parenthood. Someone has to pay the price of 'Illicit' sex – and one doesn't have to look far to see who it is!

Throughout history this price has been paid by mothers and their children – in poverty and stigma, reliant only on their families, the Poor Law or the Workhouse. Many had to give up their babies to institutional care, or submit to the exploitation of others willing to take advantage of their 'fallen state'. The stigma of having children out of wedlock has been one of the most persistent causes of prejudice and discrimination against women and has caused suffering and hardship on a huge scale for them, their children their families.

The worst of these effects have come to an end due to the change in attitudes of our more liberal, more rational, humane, secular society. But still today, there are deeply embedded attitudes that affect the lives of women in many ways.

Reconciling caring responsibilities, for children and other family members, with work outside the home is still problematic, particularly for women without partners or family support, or who work in the many low paid jobs (women's work that many still think should be done for free).

The desire to devote time to the family, while wanting to be independent or more often *needing* to be able to earn their own living, is a perennial problem for many women. As are some of the attitudes of society to working mothers and what is *good* child-care and what is not.

Today's Political Attitudes & Social Policy

Many of today's political attitudes have been shaped by centuries of Christian domination and indoctrination of their attitudes to women and family life. Relevant to this issue are the attitudes to welfare. Family policy- child support, income and family support schemes, women's pay and pensions schemes, that are based on the assumption that a man - father or husband is *responsible* for the upkeep of his wife and children. He must look after them like all his other possessions; they are not looked

upon as autonomous individuals with equal rights of their own based on citizenship.

These very deeply ingrained attitudes affect the political attitudes to the hours and pay rates of women in the workplace, social insurance - their pension entitlement, and the needs of children. As dependents, they have had to rely on an individual man to provide for their upkeep, in work and in retirement and if he defaults there is anger and resentment from some people towards women, that they need support from the community.

The idea that women and children should be dependent on their good or bad luck, in choice of husband or father for their children, and their financial prospects, is so ingrained, that to many if not most people the very idea that there could be other ways of providing support for children and child rearing is unthinkable. Yet the needs are the same, as are the financial resources. And when this system fails as it often does, it causes poverty and discrimination over and above the personal heartache that family breakdown causes.

And it is mothers, elderly women and children who are most often disadvantaged and suffer most by the effects of the petty wrangling over who is responsible for basic support.

Children

The effects of the idea of 'illicit sex' on children can be direct or indirect.

Sex with children is exploitative and quite rightly illicit. It is a manifestation of disturbed or distorted sexual feelings of either physical or psychological origin. The extent of recent scandals involving Roman Catholic priests, and the attitude of the church in shielding the perpetrators, leads one to consider to what extent the distorted thinking on sexuality and the role of enforced celibacy by the church, contributes to this phenomenon. It may be sexual frustration, the attraction that the priesthood has for men with these sexual appetites, or the opportunities it offers for access to children.

The desire of some adult men to have sex with young girls is institutionalised in some religious cultures even today, by lowering the legal 'age of consent' as was done in 2005 in Pakistan to that of a girl of 12. In many countries it is still 14, while the average is now 16 years.

This means that given the benefit of any doubt, many men will get away with underage sex.

Children along with their mothers have also paid the price, often a very high price, for the 'Illicit' sex that produced them. They paid by being taken away from their mothers, even deported to populate developing dominions, suffering the traditional stigma of illegitimacy, poverty, or the fear of exposure, that followed them throughout their lives.

For some it was a serious financial price in being physically excluded from family, and from inheritance. The lack of practical care and support for lone mothers has blighted the lives of many children. For most the poverty over the centuries in which the 'charity' of Christian Britain was severely limited to the deserving poor. And those whose poverty was caused by illegitimacy could expect no mercy from the decision makers of the Christian community.

Illegitimate children even in living memory have been demeaned, bullied and exploited. Many, for lack of adequate family care, have found themselves in what passes for 'community care' in the supposedly civilised 'Christian West' - in children's homes, Many that have been run on a shoestring by cash strapped local authorities, and some by religious communities - some of which have been proved to be places of neglect or physical or sexual abuse, such as 'The Magdalen Laundries' and 'Industrial Schools' in Ireland in the last century.

Traditionally Christian Britain does not want to pay for good quality community care for children, very many of whom have been born as a result of what the churches regard as sinful sex.

<http://www.paddydoyle.com/historyofneglect.html>

<http://www.workshop3.freeuk.com/ChildrenandReligion.htm>

Education & Science

Health Education

The distorted thinking of the 'great' male dominated religions on women and human sexuality, have coloured our attitudes to health and sex education. Fear of the 'uncontrollability' of human sexuality that they think needs suppressing, and fear of exciting 'Illicit' sex has resulted in prudery towards the human body and reticence in discussing sexual

health and behaviour other than the ‘no sex outside marriage’ message. It has stifled the need to understand human anatomy and physiology and led to a deplorable state of ignorance of the nature of humanity and its diverse range of natural sexual behaviour.

The exclusion of women from education - from the professions and decision-making in health, education and science, - by the church that controlled the schools and universities in Britain, has had a profound effect on the development of our society; and on the priorities in relation to health care generally and sexual and reproductive health in particular.

Research, necessary in the field of human health and welfare has also been woefully unbalanced by the lack of female perspectives and experience. These issues are in turn compounded by the concept and attitudes to ‘Illicit’ sex.

The prudery and fear of having anything to do with it – has also stifled research into homosexuality, transgender experience, STDs and other areas of human sexuality. Only now that there is an insatiable demand by commerce and the media to exploit sexuality to sell its products, has the pendulum swung to the extreme of today’s equally distorted view as sex as the most important thing in life. Though no doubt in time this will result in much more understanding and acceptance of diversity.

Now, technology that could result in the demotion of sex and its importance to procreation – within or outside of marriage is also being opposed by various religions, as ‘unnatural’.

Sex Education

It is the religions, churches, clerics and religious parents and teachers who oppose meaningful sex education in schools. Too many prefer to preach only the ‘abstinence’ message, and they rely on the views of religious parents to prevent independent evidence-based consideration of all the issues in schools. Information needed by young people if they are to avoid the unnecessary pitfalls of carelessness and ignorance.

Sex education designed to explore the wide diversity of human relationships, give health information and teach sexual health, responsibility and choice is called ‘explicit’ and therefore dangerous. ‘No sex’ not ‘safe sex’ is the preferred message of the religions, a message that keeps intact all the fear of sanctions that arise from ‘Illicit’ sex, that

can drive young people to dangerous experimentation, or make them so fearful of sex that they become sexually disabled.

Understanding Diversity

The attitudes towards any sexuality outside the narrow confines of Christian marriage, and the outlawing of behaviour outside this conventional model, has suppressed open discussion, investigation and understanding of other sexual orientations, gender identity and distorted sexual behaviour, to the detriment of the individuals concerned, and the society. Any attempt to understand child sex abuse or other violent perversions and fetishes, aimed at preventing their destructive effects, is attacked as ‘justification’ or “making excuses”.

It has helped to keep destructive perversion and sexual depravity under the grubby carpet of ignorance. And left it to be used only by the sex industry and gutter press, to titillate and exploit, unhindered by any attempt to understand and address the problems that it causes for both perpetrators, victims and their families.

From the innocuous choices of nudity, celibacy and homosexuality and the acceptance of natural diversity of human sexual desire, to violently distorted behaviour, sexual abuse, rape and child pornography - rational consideration has been stifled by the indiscriminate condemnation of all ‘illicit’ sexuality.

For many people what has been labelled as ‘Illicit’ sex, is their natural sexual behaviour that does no harm to them, or anyone else.

In the field of trans-gender conditions, congenital abnormalities and the way they have been approached, it has been to see them as necessarily unacceptable, without reference to the feelings and identity of the individuals concerned. In the absence of research, many mistakes have been made by trying to exert pressure in line with traditional sexual conformity and although there is much more open minded and sensitive treatment of these problems by psychologists and doctors now, the struggle for the recognition of a person’s right to determine their own preferred gender identity is still having to be waged against those who oppose changes in the law.

As we are learning now, it is better to accept the diversity of human sexuality than trying to squeeze people into a single pattern dictated by religions for purposes other than human happiness.

Conclusion

Many of the church's ideas relating to the nature of humanity are distorted by doctrine based on superstition. And they have over time distorted the thinking that shapes many of our attitudes on the role of gender and sexuality as well as politics, social policy, education and health in our society. Their attempt to control family life, and sexuality, in order to reinforce religious attitudes towards women has been particularly damaging.

It also has to be understood that sexual pleasure is a form of human happiness, in religious eyes an inferior human form, compared with the 'only true happiness' offered by the church - religious ecstasy. And like other forms of physical pleasure is frowned upon as sinful by the devout. This colours their attitudes to other forms of human happiness, the euphoria due to mood altering drugs or alcohol, and partying, as well as sexual pleasure, and especially with the added spice of being 'illicit'. They are considered sinful. The "No Drugs", not "Safe Drugs" and "No Sex" not "Safe Sex" - attitudes have much more profound implications than these simple messages would suggest.

If lifelong partnership is the norm for human beings, then that is what most people will find satisfying and it will be the model enjoyed by most people and it will remain so for most people - the pattern of life in which they hope to find lasting love and friendship. For many it will provide the most stable pattern of family life in which to raise children and in which to look after and in turn be looked after. But it is not the only valid model.

Christianity, being basically punitive, contrary to their claims, has led it to think that punishing sexuality outside of its narrow doctrinal confines will preserve its prejudiced view of gender roles. But with increased knowledge, rationalism and secularisation, has come a greater understanding of human behaviour, and a demand for more liberal and humane attitudes.

Undoubtedly as sanctions are being swept away, there will be a period during which people have to learn to recognise that diversity, freedom and autonomy in sexual activity, does not have to lead to suffering and hardship. Nor does it threaten the family lives of most people. On the

contrary, it enhances the choices open to people to enjoy satisfying sexual lives outside the conventional strictures used by the powerful male-dominated, monotheistic religions to keep their influence and control society.

Trying to make people believe that they are 'spiritual beings' and that they can be controlled by appeal to the concept of soul, personal or religious power over good and evil – that basic human urges can be safely overridden, by punishment is a cruel and dangerous fallacy.

Essay I - on Rape – 'Better Dead than Defiled'

From time to time the idea that the law should recognise degrees of rape, surfaces fleetingly, only to be immediately attacked from opposite directions by the disparate forces of feminists of the 'Women against Rape' tendency and those who think rape is all in the mind (women's minds of course).

I think that there *are* degrees or categories of rape just as there are of murder and assault. In the same way that we do not equate violent killing during a robbery or on the street, with killings for which there may be mitigating circumstances, similarly we differentiate assaults & we should be able to discriminate between rape as part of violent attack, and an incident, perhaps sordid or unwanted sex after a party, later regretted, or date during which one or both parties under the influence of alcohol or drugs let the 'fooling around' go too far. The law should recognise this difference.

If all killings regardless of the circumstances attracted the maximum penalty, many killers would go unpunished for fear of injustice. We accept murder, causing death, and manslaughter, the Americans have degrees of murder. As the situation is at present, with no differentiation between 'proper' rape and 'date' rape many rapists are given the benefit of the doubt & walk free, the women accusers branded as liars. The current conviction rate is a deplorably low 5.3% (2003).

What is interesting for secularists is the degree to which the issue of rape in general is coloured by cultural attitudes, engendered and reinforced by religions. That a woman's worth depends on whether she is a virgin, a

mother, has sex inside or outside of marriage, is called a 'spinster' a 'slut' or a 'whore', has ten children or is childless, must be challenged

Traditional religious ideas of chastity, virginity and the worth of women in relation to fertility and sexuality are still reflected in, and dictate current attitudes to rape and raped women, (not to say women in general).

Women are expected even encouraged to feel guilty, sullied, dirty & worthless when they have been raped.

The popular picture painted by the media accentuates this view (to its own ends) and women are encouraged to wallow in trauma & at least some must feel that there is something wrong with them if they feel angry, humiliated for a while, then get on with their lives.

Forced sex is in no way acceptable whatever the situation, but certainly it in no way compares, even as a weapon, with other serious personal attack maiming and killing! *These extreme attitudes seem to me to be putting the sex act itself out of all proportion to its real importance.*

The media obsession is another aspect of the same lack of proportion & feminists who take on this view uncritically, are in my opinion playing along with the notion to the detriment of most women.

The most serious manifestation of this idea that rape is worse than death, is the fact that there are whole cultures in other countries and cultural groups in this country today in which *a woman is considered better dead than defiled.* Fathers and brothers will pursue and kill daughters or sisters for disobeying or being forced to disobey their cultural rules. Marital or sexual 'crimes' can lead to women being beaten, imprisoned, maimed or outcast from their families.

Once again the reluctance to seriously examine the roots of these attitudes in order not to upset the religionists, and the unwillingness to criticise aspects of culture, however harmful for fear of being called racist by upholders of these cultural-religious values is preventing discussion in the wider media. As usual politicians are unwilling or unable to address these issues, for fear of the political clout of the organised religions.

http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1539646,00.html
<http://www.cambridgeapecrisis.org.uk/rcf-archive/statistics.htm>

Essay II – on ‘Celibacy - The New Taboo ?’

Earlier this year I read a refreshing and uplifting letter in defence of celibacy - and regardless of ones individual views on sex his letter was courageous enough to point out that celibacy is a valid and acceptable state - a view not often heard. I concur with this sentiment and would like to expand the argument to look at why this is necessary and how it has come about.

The previous article in 'Better Dead than Defiled' highlighted the dangers of the traditional religious, and current commercial, elevation of sex as the most important thing in life. Advertising exploits sex for its own purposes, as does the media and business, to sell anything and everything, from soap to cars. The emphasis and all pervading use of sexual imagery, which is out of all proportion to its real place in many people's lives, (far more people than are willing to admit) and the emphasis that is given to it leads to a distorted notion of its value even above life itself, especially women's lives, and causes cruelty and violence of the most extreme kind.

One of the results of this obsession has been to make celibacy at once abnormal, a sign of failure, a punishment and even a perversion.

While much has been said and written about all forms of sexuality, homosexuality, transexuality, impotence and frigidity, celibacy as a choice remains largely undiscussed. It is associated in the public mind with 'oddness', sexual repression, sexual assault, child abuse and Catholic nuns and priests!

While *enforced* celibacy may well distort a person's sexual development and lead to sexual problems, if it is a freely chosen lifestyle it is likely to be an enhancement for those people who choose it. It is a valid option in the diversity of human sexuality. While sexual activity may for some, be a very high priority throughout their adult lives, and for most at some stages of life, for many its real priority is somewhat lower down in the scheme of things. As I read somewhere recently, "When did you last hear a bloke say, '*When I get home I'm tired, I just want a meal a good book and a good nights sleep?*'" .The more usual image most men seem to prefer is the youthful "*up for it any time*", as often and for as long as possible and even with as many people as possible.

It is the combined and competing forces of religion and commerce that fuels this distorted image.

Although at first it may appear contradictory, a strong contributory factor has been the religious, especially the Christian religion's, attitudes to sex and procreation and the guilt and shame that it has engendered about sexual activity and the human body.

Their attitudes to sex are themselves contradictory, at once sinful if indulged in for pleasure, acceptable for the expression of love but only within marriage, but really desirable only for procreation. The very notion of a religion dedicated to the worship of an asexual god, born to a virgin mother, administered by celibate men and women, priests and nuns (Brides of Christ) whose celibacy is supposedly the highest sacrifice and yet the purest form of life, is odd to say the least and says a lot about its attitudes to sex, and the social problems they cause on divorce, contraception and abortion.

The church's sexual symbolism and doctrines have had a profound effect in shaping our cultural attitudes, mores, etc. In fact the more they preach against it, the more people are likely to react with 'equal and opposite' behaviour, now that there is less susceptibility to guilt caused by belief in that all-knowing, all-seeing god, and fear of divine retribution.

So once again religion distorts life at a personal and social level, creating confusion and problems where there could and should be choice for individuals and couples to decide for themselves how best to order their personal lives, for their own and the greater good!

This confusion over contradictory messages leads to an inability for many people to discuss the subject in a rational way, and impedes the free flow of ideas and information about it, which in turn hampers the widest understanding of all the emotional, physical, psychological and health aspects. This is mirrored in the way the drug debate has been hampered by religious attitudes to pleasure and happiness being something that can only be achieved through religion and 'spirituality', earthly pleasures being only a poor substitute! Sexual pleasure being only one of these second rate pleasures.

As is often the case, during the process of breaking away from all the gobbledegook of superstition, for some people the confusion and internal conflict leaves a vacuum, which may encourage the taking up of perverse reactions. Promiscuity and exploitative sex, can be even more harmful if taken on with the same zeal; jettisoning values, ethics, morals and mores that have been learnt devoid of their rationale.

Like every other aspect of human psychology and physiology people vary in their need for and desire for sexual activity. The problem now is that it has become almost impossible for anyone to 'admit' that sex is not all that it's cracked up to be and that they can 'take it or leave it', and that for some, many even, their lives are full enough with better things. This is the new heresy. *The new taboo.*

It is as unacceptable that people should have to feign sexual feeling that they do not have as that those whose sexual needs and desires are not fulfilled. Compulsory sex is as bad as no sex when it is desired, and it is time we got away from both, in both the pulpit and the press. The days should be long gone when women have to fake orgasms, succumb to unwanted sex for fear of being called 'frigid', when men have to make up or exaggerate their sexual prowess or number of conquests.

When every relationship is judged on the sexual attractiveness of the partners, people are from a very early age driven to a distorted view of the importance of appearance, already important enough at puberty. Excessive emphasis on looks leads to today's obsessive and widespread consumerism, design labels, alcohol to enhance an attractive view of oneself, despair for those who feel unattractive, acceptance of underage sex, anorexia and so on and so forth.

From young children through childhood and adolescence and adulthood the concentration on sexual activity and attractiveness as the 'be all and end all' of human life, blights lives, and at the other end of the spectrum is a major part of the ageism of modern western society. Once one's sexual attractiveness declines, one's value is seen to decline to zero, and women are the first and most deeply affected by this devaluation of them as people with characteristics and attributes separate from their use as sexual partners.

So much human misery has been caused by the twin Gorgons of the value of virginity, abstinence and prudery on the one hand, and promiscuity, exploitation and prostitution on the other it is time to expose some of the roots of more of our attitudes to the harsh light of criticism of religion and the softer light of humanistic rationale.

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