

# **Should Sex Have A Different Meaning For Humanists?**

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MANY YEARS AGO we belonged to a Los Angeles coalition organized to foster the dissemination of information about human sexuality. One of the things we did was to sponsor workshops for educators, therapists, and various professionals on such topics as sex and the handicapped, sex and the developmentally disabled, homosexuality, transvestism, adult child sexual interactions, sex and the single parent, and in short almost any topic dealing with human sexuality. There was a great need for information and for several years our weekend seminars drew large numbers of eager participants. We also ran workshops on our own, usually for health care professionals. And we conducted them for members of the Southern California ACLU, pointing toward the legal issues of human sexual conduct.

We were impressed during those years by the presence of large numbers of religious professionals as registrants. The answer for this seems obvious. Sexual problems, however defined, traditionally fell within the bailiwick of the religious professional. In fact, the richest sources of information about

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past human sexual conduct can be found in religious writings. It is a major theme of the writings of the Church Fathers.

Between 20 to 30% of canon law is devoted to questions of sexuality and intimacy, large sections of the Talmud are devoted to analysis of sexual cases and incidents, and the sacred scriptures of most of the world's religions wrestle with the problems of human sexuality. Some religions propose an asexual creation as does Judaism and Christianity, others speak of God's semen as does Islam, and some sects of Hinduism include sexual texts in the core of their scriptural writings.

Before Vatican II, and the relaxation of tensions between Catholics and non-Catholics in this country, it was common belief that Luther had broken with the Catholic Church in order to marry a nun. Indeed Henry VIII *did* break with Rome over the issue of Ann Boleyn and the legitimacy of her anticipated child. John Calvin's *Geneva* was devoted to establishing a new kind of utopia with rigid controls over sexual behavior. In America we have seen attitudes toward sex as a distinguishing feature of religious believers from the advocacy of coitus reservatus by the Oneida community, polygamy by the Mormons, and celibacy by the Shakers.

Sexual behavior still poses major problems to religious authorities beyond the use of contraception and the right of abortion. Three years ago some time was spent as a consultant to the Brothers of the Paraclete, a Catholic order devoted to rehabilitation of the troubled religious professional. Originally founded in the 1930's to deal with the problems of alcoholism among the clergy, the Paracletes soon found that the sexual problems of these religious professionals were even more troubling. The meeting with the Paracletes resulted in a conference and a book entitled *Pedophilia: Biosocial Dimensions*, edited by Jay Feierman (New York: Springer Verlag, 1990). One of the major sexual problems among "celibate" clergy is sexual child abuse. In 1990, an Archbishop in Canada was forced to resign because of his failure to intervene in a twenty year scandal of priests having sexual relations with children. His reaction had been typical of the past when the Church ignored such matters. If public pressure or outrage became substantial, the priest was reassigned to another parish and/or other duties, often it was to another diocese. Because of the growing shortage of priests and the public demand for investigation of incidents of child abuse, the Broth.

ers of the Paraclete have established retreats and treatment centers for religious. The Catholic Church has another "problem" which is being discussed openly now, namely the existence of a number of homophile priests, religious, and seminarians. It is not new although a distinction has to be made between a practicing homosexual and a homosexual or perhaps more accurately a homophile. Catholic Church officials became concerned in the eighties when it was estimated that a majority of seminarians were homophiles.

Sexuality is not a problem for Catholic religious alone. During our student days at Chicago in the 1950's, we became acquainted with a number of seminary students, including some from Meadville, the majority of whom have since left the ministry. Though they resigned their pulpits for a variety of reasons, sex proved to be a major factor. Some became involved with one or more parishioners through pastoral counseling sessions while others were unable to resolve sexual conflicts within themselves.

In the Los Angeles group one of the members was an Anglican priest who firmly believed that the solution to all the world's ills and life's personal problems was to have an orgasm. Sex to him was the totality of the religious experience. While we have not followed his career in detail, we do know that he left the organized ministry to become a sex counselor.

All of this is prologue. In general we have been reluctant to deal with sexual issues. Several years ago we edited an issue of a magazine that had devoted that issue to human sexuality. There was more negative comment received over that issue than any other. Yet the articles were heavily cut but the complete articles later appeared in a book. Conditions have improved slightly since then and a group of Humanists including ourselves prepared and signed a new *Bill of Rights and Sexual Responsibilities*. Humanists in general have never come to terms with the meaning of sexuality in today's world. The Unitarians for their part took the lead in a sex education project for their Church schools, and have taken a positive stand on having homosexual clergy - among other issues. Some of the more traditional religions have done more than Humanists.

What should a Humanist position on sex be? What ought we to teach our students in the Humanist Institute about sex and sexuality? Is there a new sexual ethic? How much attention should Humanists be giving to sexuality? What limits

should be placed on sexual expression? These questions among others are important to raise although we may not have definitive answers to all of them. As Humanists we must work on answers for ourselves and the answers for us today may not be the answers that humanists 20 years from now will want or accept. We have been challenging traditional Christian (and to a lesser extent Jewish) attitudes on human sexuality without examining the basis of these ideas and pointing up the false premises on which they were built. Though some among us have argued that the Bible can be interpreted differently than it has been by traditional Christians, it is important to emphasize that Christian attitudes are not based upon Biblical passages but upon assumptions that were current in the first four centuries of the modern era.

These assumptions made Christianity a sex negative religion, which distinguished it from traditional Jewish attitudes. Christians held that sexuality was something dangerous, preferably to be avoided, but if engaged in should be done for the purpose of procreation and not for pleasure.

Where did such ideas come from? They represent assumptions of the intellectual community of early Christianity. Though it is part of our historical consciousness that there was a Roman Empire which fell, and Gibbon emphasized the sexual foibles of some of the emperors and the mass disenchantment of many of their subjects, the intellectual climate of the first four centuries was increasingly ascetic and even other worldly. This was due to increasing influence of stoicism and neo-Platonic ideals which were absorbed into Christianity through the teachings of St. Augustine.

Essentially the Augustinian view held the ideal life to be one of celibacy but that God had also recognized marriage as long as it was entered into for the purpose of procreation. Sexual intercourse was permissible if procreation was the intent, the correct orifice and instrument were to be used (vagina and penis), and in the proper position namely, with the male on top. It is these assumptions which still dominate Catholic teachings about sex; and thusly lead to their opposition to the use of contraceptives, the importance of celibacy, and their attitudes on abortion. These ideas to a lesser degree still permeate all of western Christendom, including the liberal churches and perhaps even some segments of the Humanist Community.

## **Stoicism**

The Stoic view of sex recognized sex as a special type of pleasure and felt that men (and women) made poor use of their time if they occupied their minds with such matters. Though sexual enjoyment in itself was morally indifferent, sex, like wealth, was not a worthy goal for reasonable adults to seek, and the pursuit of sexual pleasure was not conducive to a healthy morality. 1 Sex, however, was not bad *per se* because if reproduction took place the soul as well as the material body was involved. The resultant seed then was partly divine, a fragment of the soul plasma torn from the spirit of our ancestors. Reason was not present in the embryo but developed only after birth.

In this sense, human beings were like other animals, but ultimately distinguished from them by their ability to control their desires and impulses and to govern themselves by reason. Sexual intercourse belongs in the category of the "lower appetites" in which the wise man refrained from indulging. The truly wise person cultivated a sober and reserved demeanor, and only indulged in the lower concerns of the body such as eating and drinking and sexual activity to the minimum essential for bodily health.2

Stoic watchwords were nature, virtue, decorum and freedom from excess. Immoderation in bodily activities was irrational because it made a person dependent on his or her own body. Marriage was recognized, but passion in marriage was suspect, because the only justification for marriage was the propagation of the race. The first century A.D. Stoic teacher Musonius Rufus went so far as to teach that marital intercourse was permissible only if the purpose was procreative. Intercourse for pleasure within the confines of marriage was reprehensible. Since homosexual activities were for pleasure alone, they were condemned as unnatural.3 Seneca, the first century A.D. Stoic rhetorician and statesman, was cited by St. Jerome as claiming that a

Wise man ought to love his wife with judgment, not affection.

Let him control his impulses and not be borne headlong into copulation.

Nothing is (more) foul than to love a wife like an adulteress. Certainly those who say that they united

themselves to wives to produce children for the sake of the state and the human race ought, at any rate, to imitate the beasts, and when their wife's belly swells not destroy the offspring. Let them show themselves to their wives not as lovers, but as husband.<sup>4</sup>

Note that the Stoic ideas were essentially based upon rational, one might say "humanistic" thinking. Obviously they were based on assumptions which we would no longer accept, but which came to be so influential in Christianity.

### **Neo-Platonism**

Almost equally influential were the Neo-Platonists who modified and then adopted the ideas of Plato. Particularly influential upon Christian thinking was the Alexandrian-born Jewish philosopher, Philo. As a Jew, Philo accepted belief in the divine command to procreate and replenish the earth. From this belief it follows that marriage is blameless and worthy of high praise. But Philo, heavily influenced by the ascetic philosophy of his time, held that sex in marriage could only be justified if the goal of the couple was the procreation of "legitimate" children for the perpetuation of the race.

Philo described as mere pleasure lovers those who mated with their wives, not to beget children, but like "pigs or goats" in quest of sexual enjoyment.<sup>5</sup> His hostility to sex without progeny led him to state that those men who mated with barren women deserved reproach, for in their seeking after mere pleasures, "they destroyed the procreative germs with deliberate purpose."<sup>6</sup> Predictably all kinds of non procreative sex were condemned by those adopting Philo's reasoning. He regarded the male homosexual as enslaved to irrational passion and infected with the female disease:

In former days the very mention of it was a great disgrace, but now it is a matter of boasting not only to the active but to the passive partners, who habituate themselves to endure the disease of effemination, let both body and soul run to waste, and leave no ember of their male sex-nature to smoulder... These persons are rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey the law, which ordains the man-woman who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish unavenged... And

the lover of such may be assured that he is the subject of the same penalty?

The most influential of the Neo-Platonists was Plotinus who lived and worked in the third century. After studying in Alexandria, he moved to Rome, where he had influence on the Emperor Gallienus and his wife, Salonina. Plotinus was a religious mystic and Plotinism or Neo-Platonism is a theocentric form of thought.

Porphyry, the pupil and biographer of Plotinus, recounted how four times while in a state of ecstasy, Plotinus was made one with God. Plotinus is said to have been so ashamed of his body that he considered his parentage and birthplace of no importance. His mysticism and piety, however, were - in his thinking - dependent on reason and intellectual balance.

So determined was Plotinus to retain his intellectual independence that he refused to affiliate himself with any organized worship on the grounds that the gods must come to him, and not vice versa. He differed from Plato in his stress on religious and mystical orientation, going so far as insisting that the nature of the Real was attainable in a state of mystical ecstasy from which the last trace of sensibility and intelligible experience has been erased. He did not believe in immortality; rather, the goal of human life was to merge with the universal spirit. The path of redemption was long and gradual, taking aeons of reincarnation to traverse and this required long and careful training.<sup>s</sup> Though Plotinus believed that the body and its needs were not to be despised, the body had to be disciplined in such a way that nothing distracted the soul from the contemplation of higher things. The way that nothing distracted the soul from the contemplation of higher things. The core of human virtue was in detachment from worldly goods. Such indifference to worldly goods was essential to put an individual out of reach of the caresses and stings of material life. By implication, it was important to become indifferent to sex. This is especially noticeable in the writings of his pupil Porphyry, who went so far as to condemn any kind of pleasure as sinful, including horseracing, theatergoing, dancing, eating meat, and of course, sexual intercourse under any condition.<sup>9</sup>

## Relation To Christianity

The ascetic and philosophic concepts of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism had great influence during the first four centuries, the formative period of a number of would-be world religions. Rivaling Christianity, other religious groups adopted these ideas, particularly Gnosticism and Manichaeism. The influence of these rival redemptiveness cults upon Christian sexual ethics is evident. The fact that these competing groups had many of the same ideas about sexuality as Christianity is indicative of how persuasive such ideas were. Some went to greater ascetic extremes than others. The relationship with the philosophies was obvious even to their contemporaries. Galen, for example, in the second century observed that the Christian community in Rome included men and women who, like the philosophers refrained from "cohabitating all their lives."<sup>10</sup>

Gnosticism, an early major rival and in many ways a variant version of Christianity, had many different strands. It both influenced traditional Christianity and was influenced by it. Key to Gnostic belief was the conception of dualistic worlds, one evil and material, the other good and spiritual. Humans had elements of both good and evil; their purpose on earth was to seek redemption a saving knowledge secretly revealed to their predecessors and transmitted to the initiates only. This knowledge concerned the supreme God, superior to the creator, known only to the initiates as spiritual beings; they had originally emanated from this One. Recognition of the One and of the initiates would save humans so that after death they could escape the alien world of their Creator and join with the supreme God. Temporarily their spirits had been imprisoned in flesh. The key to One's salvation was to free the body from its bondage resulting in extreme ascetism. A true Gnostic could express rejection from human existence only by adopting an ascetic lifestyle, and by abstaining from sex. In a sense, Gnosticism was, as one modern commentator has stated, a mixture of "Christian theology and sexual morality."<sup>11</sup> Not all Gnostics were ascetics, however. Some demonstrated their indifference to the pleasures of life by rejecting sexual ascetism. Two different and contradictory arguments were put forth to justify such conduct. Some said that human actions could never be subject to moral law since it represented the mortal or earthly side of the individual and not the soul; oth-



ers argued that actions usually considered sinful were not sinful for true believers. Unfortunately, most of what we know about the gnostics come from Christian writers who tried to point out their errors and might well have exaggerated their arguments. In recent years, however, we have recovered and begun to edit some of the Gnostic scriptures and these present but do not change the overall picture.

One of the gnostics we have learned about was Marion, originally a Christian but excommunicated in 144 A.D. Marion set up a competing group which taught that nature was evil having been created out of evil matter. Since his followers were urged not to fill the world with other evil matter, they were to abstain from sexual intercourse and from marriage.<sup>12</sup> According to Marion, Jesus came to earth as a life giving spirit to manifest a new revelation as well as a new way of life. But his message had been distorted by false apostles under the spell of Judaism. Only Paul and Luke had understood the true gospel but errors had even crept into their teaching, errors that Marion said he was able to eliminate. To Marion, sex was evil, as was reproduction and growth. Jesus, he said, had descended from heaven as a fully formed adult without undergoing birth, boyhood, or temptation. All Marcionites were to remain celibate.<sup>13</sup> Sharing the ascetic outlook of Marion was Julius Casianus who taught that Jesus had been sent to earth to stop individuals from copulating.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of these Gnostic views upon what came to be main stream Christianity is still debated. Some indication of its influence is the case of Justin Martyr, convert to Christianity. He approvingly described a Christian youth who asked the surgeons to emasculate him as a protection for bodily piety. Justin also pointed with pride to those Christians who renounced marriage to live in perfect continence.<sup>15</sup> Justin was so committed to the belief that sex was evil that he could not believe that Mary had sexually conceived Jesus. Instead he argued that Mary had been undefiled and had conceived as a virgin. He made here the antitype of Eve with whom he associated sexual intercourse.<sup>16</sup> Some of these ideas carried over to Clement of Alexandria who advised those Christians who married for the sake of conceiving children to control their will and be chaste when conception was not possible.<sup>17</sup> In short, ideas penetrated deeply into orthodox Christianity, undoubtedly because such ideas were widespread throughout intellectual circles in the Roman Empire at that time. Undoubt-

edly these ideas became a part of church thinking because most of Church Fathers were bachelors, and those such as Tertullian who were married, tended to denigrate marriage. Tertullian, in fact, came to feel such a deep remorse over his lapse into matrimony that he joined the Montanists, a heretical Christian sect that emphasized celibacy. <sup>18</sup> Tatian, a disciple of Justin Martyr, converted to Gnosticism after the martyrdom of his teacher. It was logical then for him to join the Gnostics since his teachings were the same: that sexual intercourse had been invented by the Devil, and thus anyone attempting to be married was trying to do the impossible by serving two masters, God and the Devil.<sup>19</sup>

At the other extreme of Gnosticism were the followers of Nicolas, an early Christian, who drew condemnation from the author of Revelations for his *antinomianism*.<sup>20</sup> He, or his followers, taught that there was no obligation to the moral law and that women were to be regarded as common property and that believers could have intercourse as they chose and with whom they chose,<sup>21</sup> and that only faith was important for salvation. Still another group of Gnostics were accused of regarding sexual intercourse as sacred religious mystery, the knowledge and practice of sexual intercourse as a sacred religious mystery, the knowledge and practice of which would bring initiates into the kingdom of God. Such teachings were based on a scriptural passage not now found in the Bible:

All things were one, but as it seemed good to its unity not to be alone, an inspiration came from it, it had intercourse with it, and it made beloved.<sup>22</sup>

In general, the Gnostics seem to have emphasized asceticism, rather than antinomianism. Some of the accusations against them might well have been Christian rhetoric but it matters little to us today what they taught, only in how it continues to influence us.

Christians became victims of this rhetoric and it had influence on Christian attitudes. By the end of the second century Gnosticism was declining. Scholars argue that it was the organizational ability of the orthodox Christians that won out against them. They emphasized the importance of community as opposed to the individual and adopted many of the Gnostic ideas which were not contrary to scriptural injunctions.

The Christian Church became thoroughly imbued with neo-Platonic and Stoic ideals. Its attitudes on sex were influenced more by the ascetic Gnostics than the more earthly Jews or the words of Jesus.

This emphasizes that the temper of the times, whether Gnostic or Christian or pagan, favored continence emphasized by the writings of Soranus of Ephesus, probably the most renowned medical writer of the second century, Soranus said that virginity was the most healthy of all states, since

Even among dumb animals we see that those females are stronger which are prevented from having intercourse. And among women we see that those who, on account of regulations and service to the gods, have renounced intercourse and those who have been kept in virginity as ordained by laws are less susceptible to disease. If, on the other hand, they have menstrual difficulties and become fat and ill-proportioned, this comes about because of idleness and inactivity of their bodies... Consequently permanent virginity is healthy, in male and female alike; nevertheless, intercourse seems consistent with the general principle of nature according to which both sexes consistent with the general principle of nature according to which both sexes [for the sake) of continuity [have to ensure) the succession of living beings.<sup>23</sup>

Orthodox Christians emphasized sexual asceticism. Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, dismissed marriage as a sad tragedy.<sup>24</sup> St. Jerome (d. 420 A.D.) emphasized the inconvenience and tribulations of married life<sup>25</sup> and summarized his views in an oft-quoted passage:

I praise marriage and wedlock, but I do so because they produce virgins for me. I gather roses from thorns, gold from the earth, and pearl from the shell.<sup>26</sup>

St. Ambrose (died 397 A.D.) called marriage a "galling burden"<sup>27</sup> and urged all those contemplating matrimony to think about the bondage and servitude into which wedded love degenerated.<sup>28</sup> Derek Sherwin Bailey summed up the statements of these early Church Fathers as one of monotonous regularity in arguing that wedded "bliss" was not equal to be-

ing single. Though most of the orthodox could not bring themselves to say that marriage was evil, they were willing to count it as only thirtyfold as compared to the sixtyfold of widowhood and the hundredfold of virginity.<sup>29</sup>

We know there was opposition to this growing cult of virginity, the works of the three most vocal defenders of marriage - Jovian, Helvidius, and Vigilantius - have not survived, an indication of the hostility of Christianity to their thinking. Their arguments are known only through their opponents, particularly St. Jerome, one of the formulators of the western Christian belief system. Jerome went to great lengths to refute their ideas although he was careful to point out that he did not quite condemn wedlock itself. He admitted, however, that he had great difficulty in understanding why anyone would want to be married.<sup>30</sup> With such cavalier dismissal of the advocates of marriage, celibacy - at that time - was seen as the ideal state for a Christian. It became common practice among some Christian groups to forbid marriage after ordination to the priesthood, though there was at first general agreement that a man might be married before ordination. Inevitably, an attempt was made to suggest that matrimonial cohabitation disqualified a person entirely for priestly administration. The Council of Nicea specifically rejected an absolute rule of clerical celibacy,<sup>31</sup> but later Councils particularly that of Trullo in the seventh century returned to the subject. By the fifth century, the Western Christian tradition held that bishops, presbyters, deacons and others employed before the altar were to refrain from sexual intercourse, although mitigating circumstances occasionally might allow for exception.<sup>3</sup> The Eastern Christian Church, however, never adopted such a position.

As Christianity became controlled by tradition and organization in the Eastern Church, there was a tendency to deal with the reality of bodily needs. This process failed to occur in the West primarily due to the influence of St. Augustine (died 430). Augustine came not only out of the Stoic and Neo-Platonic tradition, but was also a convert to Christianity from Manichaeism, a religion which for a time grappled with Christianity for domination of the Mediterranean world.

Manichaeism was based on the teachings of the prophet Mani (217-277) who had lived and been crucified in southern Babylonia. His religion incorporated various aspects of Gnosticism, Stoicism, Christianity, Neo-Platonism, and Zoroastrianism. Before his death his teachings had become influential

in Egypt, Palestine, and Rome. From these centers, Manichaeism spread throughout the Roman Empire. There was a canonical scripture (the seven books of Mani), claimed to be a universal religion which had a hierarchy and apostles to preach the "truth." In short, it had the attributes of Christianity. Like Muhammed after him, Mani taught that he was the last prophet in a chain of prophets. Like Christianity, it was a missionary faith combining science, philosophy, and religion into a dualistic synthesis. Although claiming the authority of revelation, the Manichaeans also paid great deference to reason. The universe was divided into the kingdoms of Light and Darkness in juxtaposition to each other, with each reaching out to infinity. Light and Darkness were both eternal and uncreated powers in everlasting opposition and conflict, although the God of Light alone was able to know the future. Eventually, Light would overcome Darkness, but the ultimate victory depended not on the defeat of Darkness, but on the withdrawal of Darkness.

Originally the two realisms existed separately but - as the story goes - the Prince of Darkness, attracted by the splendor of Light invaded the territory of Light and vanquished the forces of Light and then ate them. This had happened in Greek mythology to Dionysus and the Titans. The result was that Light was imprisoned in Darkness. The God of Light then sent forth his word, or the Living Spirit, into the Cosmos to create the earth, the moon, the sun, the planets, and 12 elements or the universe.

According to Manichaeism, Adam and Eve were the result of a union between a son and daughter of the Prince of Darkness who still retained a modicum of light. Adam had more light than Eve, thus males have more than females. Recognizing their miserable fate, Adam and Eve begged help from the God of Light who thereupon sent Jesus, the Incarnate Word. He warned Adam that Eve was a tool of Darkness and urged Adam to reject her advances. Adam did not but Eve copulated with an earth Archon (a son of the God of Darkness) and gave birth to Cain, Abel, and two daughters who married each other. Abel's wife became pregnant but Abel knowing that he had not impregnated her accused his brother of having sexual intercourse with his wife. In the ensuing argument Cain killed Abel. Eve, grieving over the loss of her son, learned witchcraft from the earth Archon, and seduced Adam. This resulted in the birth of Seth. He was so filled with the great ele-

ments of light that the Archon conspired to destroy him. Adam managed to save Seth by taking him away. In due time the God of Light sent his Word, the Christ, this time to accomplish the redemption of the Elect.

This rather complex mythology of creation proved reasonable to many of the intellectuals of the time. Sexually it was important to the development of Christianity. Procreation as regarded by the Manichaeans was seen as an evil because it continued the cycle of the imprisoning of light. The purpose of man was to gain the light. This could be done through the eating of bread, vegetables, or fruit containing seeds. The growth of light could be hampered by sexual activity - or giving away of seed - the seed of man also contained light. Those entering the Manichaean religion were supposed to have control over their lust as well as their covetousness and their greed - and to remain celibate, but also to refuse to eat flesh or drink wine. Though Christianity rejected the dualism and specific mythology of Manichaeism, it accepted the sexual asceticism primarily because of St. Augustine. Manichaeans divided the world into three classes: (1) the Adept or Elect who believed and followed the teachings of Mani by renouncing private property, practicing celibacy, observing strict vegetarianism, and refusing to engage in trade; (2) the Auditors, men and women of good will who could not yet fully contain their material desires and who earned money, owned property, ate flesh, married and had children, but who ultimately sometime before they died would become an Elect, and (3) all others, the completely sensual members of society totally lost in wickedness who rejected the teachings of Mani and who at death were doomed to eternal and irrevocable suffering in the three Manichaean Hells. The Elect for their part went directly into the Paradise of Light, while the Auditors who had not yet reached Elect state spent a period of purification in purgatory before proceeding on to Paradise. <sup>33</sup>

St. Augustine had been a convert to Manichaeism and for 11 years served as an auditor trying to rid himself of the concupiscence which kept him from the Elect. During this time he lived with his mistress (who also gave birth to a son) but as time passed he grew more and more uncomfortable about his inability to control his lustful urges. His own ambivalence about the matter is evident from his constant prayer: "Give me chastity, and continence, but do not give it yet." <sup>34</sup> Ultimately and reluctantly he decided that his sexual

desires could be satisfied only through marriage.<sup>35</sup> He dismissed his mistress and son, and engaged himself to a girl not yet of age (12 was the legal minimum, 14 was the custom). But while waiting for her to become of age, he took another mistress. At this point he faced a personal crisis ending in his conversion to Christianity - the religion of his mother. On becoming a Christian he was able to adopt a life of celibacy. His crisis was precipitated by the reading of the following passage in the New Testament:

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.<sup>36</sup>

Augustine interpreted this as a call to celibacy. Conversion for him came to mean the rejection of sexual intercourse.

So thou converdest me unto thyself, as that I sought now no more after a wife, nor any other hopes in this world.<sup>37</sup>

Having accepted continence as the most desirable model for life, Augustine became particularly offended by the act of intercourse. He wrote that he knew nothing that brought "the manly mind down from the heights (more) than a woman's caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife."<sup>38</sup> He was particularly upset that generation or procreation could not take place without - what he felt was - a certain amount of "bestial" movement<sup>39</sup> and violent lustful desires.<sup>40</sup> In short, he adopted most of the sexual teachings of the Manichaeans. Sexual lust, he argued, was the inevitable result of the expulsion of Adam and Eve when genitals which had been obedient to the dictates of their will and never stirred except at their behest.<sup>41</sup> Adam and Eve had never engaged in sexual intercourse before their expulsion. If they had chosen to do so, they could have managed the affair without lascivious heat or unseemly passion.<sup>42</sup>

After Adam and Eve had fallen from Paradise, they became conscious of their new physical impulses generated by the act of their rebellion and the knowledge that was awakened in them. This drove them to an insatiable quest for self satisfaction. Augustine termed this impulse *concupiscence* or lust.

Their genitals had lost the docility of innocence and were no longer amenable to the will of the person. In this, he was also following Manichean thinking. Mani had taught that sexual sin consisted not only in the overt act of sex itself but also in the impulse. Inevitably Adam and Eve had felt shame in their desires and attempted to cover their genitals. Concupiscence still manifested itself through the sexual impulse stronger and less tractable than other passions and satisfied only through orgasm engulfing the rational faculties in sexual excitement. Mentally conceived coitus was regarded as good because it came from God. The concrete act of intercourse was evil, with the result that every child was seen to have been conceived in the sin of its parents.<sup>43</sup> Though Augustine tried to distinguish between matrimony and sexual intercourse, his answers were rather contradictory. He concluded that lust could not take away the good of marriage, and that marriage mitigated somewhat the evil of concupiscence. He summed up his argument by stating that we

ought not to condemn marriage because of the evil of lust, nor must we praise lust because of the good of marriage. What marriage did was transform coitus from a simple satisfaction of lust to a necessary duty.<sup>44</sup>

Sex when employed for human generation lost some of its inherent sinfulness though it still remained the channel through which the guilt of lust was transmitted from parent to child.<sup>45</sup> This guilt was only removed through the rite of baptism though the impulse to lust and the sense of sexual shame still remained.<sup>46</sup> Augustine recognized that not all acts of intercourse lead to procreation, though the intent of procreation should be present since it was only in this way that intercourse could be justified. There ought to be no attempt to frustrate the natural consequences of intercourse (Le. pregnancy).<sup>47</sup> Let us repeat; all intercourse is to be effected with the instrument and orifice - the bodily parts - designed for that purpose by God, i.e. the penis and vagina; in the proper position, i.e. the male superior position. Intercourse between the unmarried was without ceremony. Thus the only justification for intercourse was procreation and it was only to take place between husband and wife. Celibacy was the highest good. Intercourse per se was merely an animal lust, but in



marriage, and only in marriage, was it justified for the process of procreation.<sup>4S</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We have spent much time in elaborating the historical sources of today's hang-ups about sex in order to emphasize that what we need is a new basis for sexual ethics. Sexuality ought to have a different meaning to Humanists than it does to traditional Christians. When one examines the myth and pseudo science which form the basis accept these ideas for man-made laws. Many do, however, particularly the Catholic hierarchy. Some of the liberal Christian denominations have attempted to modify them by official action. We repeat, a few Humanist sexologists joined together to publish *A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities*, but so far as we know, this has gone no further.

We hold that the boundaries of human sexuality need to be expanded and that Humanism both officially and unofficially ought to play a leading role in doing so. We hold that there be equity between the sexes, that repressive taboos be replaced by more objective views, that family planning is desirable, and that children should be wanted and loved. Sexual morality should come from a sense of caring and respect for oneself and for others not from some long ago hostility to sex. We need to recognize that physical pleasure has moral value, and that all of us at all ages are sexual beings. The limits which ought to be imposed on sexual activities should be done in terms of age and consent and the consideration of harmfulness to others. Individuals differ from one another in their needs and desires and we ought to recognize this as a fact of life. The asceticism of the Stoic is attractive to many of us but it is only attractive when it is not imposed but freely chosen and only for those in society who freely choose it. Sex and our way of living cannot continue to be based on the premises and pseudo premises of 2,000 years ago. Modern science and technology allow us to give sex a more meaningful role in life than it once had and unfortunately still has among a large number of people.

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