

Chapter 16. Sexuality.

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*¹ The Bible

Religion has dug its claws into human sexuality and it will not let go. Perhaps at one time religious preoccupation with sexuality was functional. When a male priest wrote, “God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply”² around 600 BCE, the world population was less than 100 million³ and the “tribes of Israel” were a minority that could gain strength by increasing their numbers. But times changed. By 1500 CE, the world population grew to 450 million; by 1800, 813 million; by 1900, 1.5 billion; by 1950, 2.4 billion;⁴ by 1980, 4.5 billion; by 1999, 6 billion, and today, there are 6.8 billion people living on earth. By 2050, the world population will be 9.4 billion⁵ (see Figure 14). Unbridled reproduction has gone from helping to preserve mankind to endangering mankind’s existence by overburdening our natural resources. Even once plentiful resources like water are threatened.⁶ But religious scriptures, written by men and fixed in time, are unable to adapt to changing human conditions.

And even if religion’s preoccupation with sexuality had a functional origin, it has morphed far beyond its original purpose. Perhaps religion has gained power by attempting to harness the human sex drive and yoke it to the church. Religionists go as far as claiming that all sexual activity is a sin, unless it is for procreation.⁷ Up until the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v.*

*Connecticut*⁸ (extended to unmarried couples by the 1972 decision in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*⁹), religionists succeeded in denying American couples access to birth control in many states. They had forced their ancient dogma that sex is for procreation not recreation on everyone, whether religious or not.

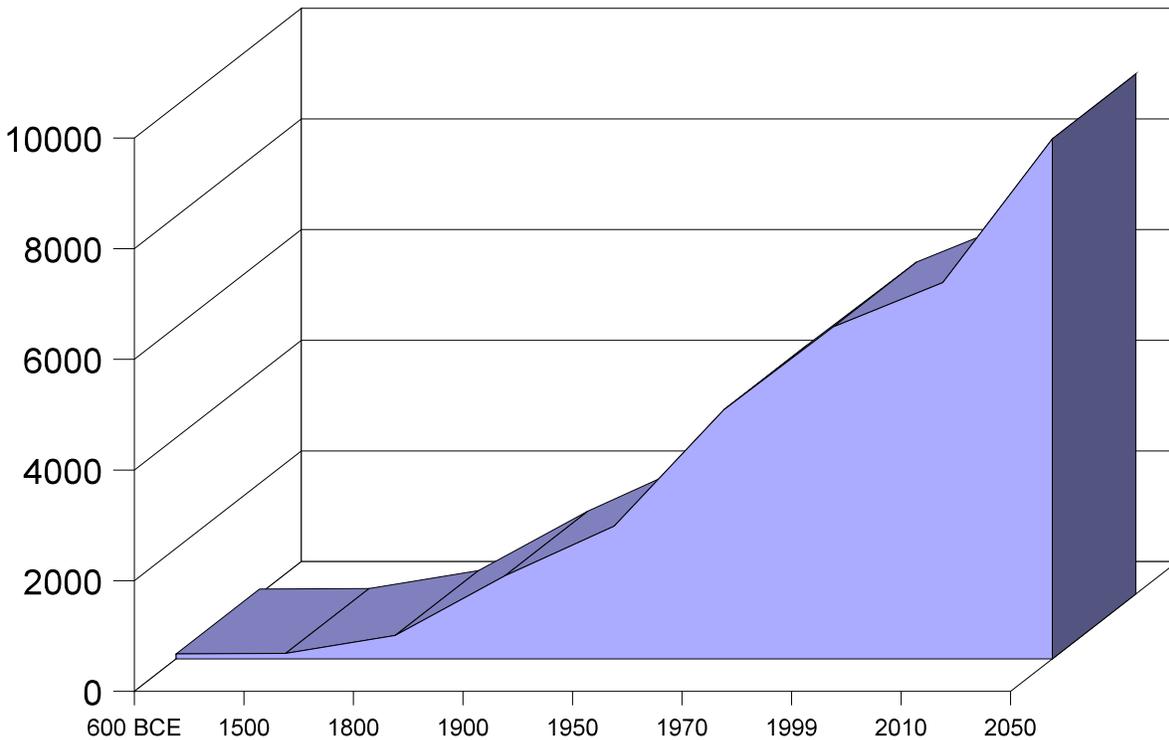


Figure 14. World population growth (in millions) since 600 BCE.

Religionists promote their procreation-only policy not only to the exclusion of pleasure, but even at the risk of death. In sub-Saharan Africa 22 million people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. However, the Pope, an allegedly celibate man, condemned the use of condoms, even though they have been demonstrated to limit the spread of the virus.¹⁰ The Vatican's head of the Pontifical Council for the Family went even further, saying condoms are not effective in blocking the AIDS virus because they are full of tiny holes, and that condoms help spread AIDS through a false sense of security.¹¹ This application of Catholic doctrine against birth control subjects millions to the risk of death from disease—bizarrely claiming to protect life by causing death.

Religionists of the past made American children feel frightened and guilty about masturbation, and to this day some religious groups condemn this widespread and harmless act.¹² Perhaps during ancient times when children married at 14, prohibiting masturbation encouraged marital reproduction, but in the modern world marriage is discouraged until after 18, and the median marriage age in the U.S. is 27 for men and 25 for women.¹³ Once again the scriptures have not kept pace with modern life.

Further, religion for some reason even attempts to make the way we were born, naked, a prohibited

status. Although appalling acts of violence, both actual and dramatized, are regularly shown on television, a fraction of a second glance at Janet Jackson's nipple during the entertainment at a football game netted a \$550,000 fine,¹⁴ a penalty cheered by religionists.

In part influenced by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who tried to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner with explosives hidden in his underwear, aviation officials have begun using "body scanners," which electronically strip away a person's clothes to search for explosives. A group of Islamic officials has issued a religious ruling that says going through a body scanner violates Islamic rules prohibiting nudity. They say, "It is a violation of clear Islamic teachings that men or women be seen naked by other men and women . . . The Quran has commanded the believers, both men and women, to cover their private parts."¹⁵ Similarly, the Pope has warned that when using body scanners "the primary asset to be safeguarded and treasured is the person, in his or her integrity."¹⁶ Jumping aboard, Orthodox Jews say the scanners violate religious law and conservative Christians have voiced modesty concerns.¹⁷ Through some twisted logic, religionists think they are entitled to prohibit and create guilt about nakedness, humans' natural state. I think the body scanners are a waste of money because anyone who is going to blow up themselves (and their fellow passengers) will also be willing to hide the explosives in a body cavity to avoid detection. However, beyond that I have no religion to make nudity anything other than a natural state and therefore I have no objection to body scans.

Christians have gone even further than limiting sexual behavior, they attempt to make thinking about sex a sin. The Bible bizarrely quotes Jesus as saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. . . . if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."¹⁸

Perhaps the guilt true believers feel when their thoughts wander to sex binds them closer to their church. Atheists, in contrast, are free to think about sexuality without religious prohibition. For example, a survey found that only 15% of evangelical Christians found it morally acceptable to have sexual fantasies about another person, compared with 78% of atheists and agnostics.¹⁹ No doubt evangelicals have fantasies, they just feel guilty about them.

A bit of twisted motivation involving youth, sexuality and religion is found in the tale of the Detroit underwear bomber. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the man who tried to blow up a plane landing in Detroit in late 2009, blogged about the conflict between his sexual desires and his duty as a Muslim to lower his gaze in the presence of women. He said fasting was not helping him to overcome his desires.²⁰ Ironically, the same religion that denied him the pleasure of looking at women (considered a veritable sport in some countries) promised to reward him with the services of seventy-two virgins at his death.²¹ Interestingly, some feel the correct translation is seventy-two white raisins,²² not virgins, which would be quite funny if this lie did not influence lonely young men to kill themselves and others.

The Muslim religion is not as anti-sex as its brothers of the book, as long as you are a heterosexual male who does not mind treating women as property. Besides the seventy-two virgins promised to martyrs, heaven is supposed to be full of food, wine and full-breasted women: "Verily, for the

Muttaqûn,²³ there will be a success (Paradise); Gardens and vineyards, And young full-breasted (mature) maidens of equal age. And a full cup (of wine).²⁴ Heaven is a male's paradise: "They will recline on Carpets, whose inner linings will be of rich brocade: the Fruit of the Gardens will be near (and easy of reach). . . . In them will be (Maidens), chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or Jinn²⁵ before them has touched."²⁶ Of course, the concerns of women, who make up about one-half of the world's population, as well as the concerns of gays, are nowhere mentioned.

The problem with the "one size fits all" approach of religion to sexuality is that it leaves lots of people out of the happiness equation. For example, even accepting Iranian President Ahmadinejad's statement that there are no gay men in 98% Muslim Iran, it is highly unlikely that more than half the population (the men, that is) is satisfied with the sexual roles and relationships dictated by the Koran. At least some of the men must be looking for a full and equal partner, not a piece of property. Assuming that the women are unhappy and a portion of the men are unhappy too, who is their religion serving? Certainly not the majority. It is simply a carryover from another time that should be discarded.

In the Christian model, if you are a heterosexual, monogamous person, you might be happy. But what about the person who has no interest in sex? Conversely, what about the person who is interested in a series of partners? He is rejected by the Christian model. And woe to those that do not want a traditional heterosexual relationship. The Christian model denies happiness and equal rights to gays and lesbians, as well as to a myriad of other variations and inclinations that exist.

Without religion, people are allowed to own their sexuality. If a person has little or no interest in sex, he can go through life without coupling and be free of condemnation. Alternatively, if a person wishes to experience a wide range of partners, as owner of his own sexuality, he can do so. What consenting adults do in the privacy of their home is of little concern to me. For example, I have read that some people have a sexual preoccupation with feet. If a couple up the street shares a foot fetish, I could care less. I am much more concerned with whether they mow their lawn and paint the trim on their house, than what they do behind closed doors, and that is whether they are a gay, lesbian or heterosexual couple. Religionists, on the other hand (or foot), would likely condemn the relationship as sinful—not based on whether it affects them or not, simply based on the antiquated rules of their religion.

Religionists give ownership of their sexuality to an institution mired in the past. Atheists are free to own their sexuality. As long as sex involves consenting adults who do no harm, atheists have no reason for concern. However, when an atheist exchanges mutual promises of fidelity, he is more likely to keep them.²⁷ It is a personal contract, enforced by him, with no expectation of deviation. In contrast, a religionist is expected to sin. The religionist enters into a contract written by an imaginary god, enforced by an imaginary god, for which there is no consequence for violation. Consider again the "morality matrix" from [Chapter 7](#). The matrix provides some explanation of why religionists espouse morality but act otherwise. Keeping this in mind, the next chapter looks at the real life sexual conduct of a famous religionist.

Abortion and abstinence.

Many religious groups in the United States make abortion a cornerstone of their religious and political lives. Religionists label the people who get abortions “sinners” and the abortion providers “monsters.” But the religionists themselves are frequently responsible for creating the conditions that make abortion common. Think about it, young people are denied education about contraception. They are denied the tools needed to prevent pregnancy. Young people, already inclined to be sexual, are raised in a sexually charged society where, by 12th grade, 62% of American school children acknowledge engaging in sexual intercourse.²⁸ Until religionists provide youths with the knowledge and tools to prevent pregnancy, they should not be allowed to make political hay with the issue of abortion.

A much more enlightened approach is taken by the Olympics, where at the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, 100,000 condoms were provided free to the athletes during their two week stay—about 15 per participant.²⁹ Until condoms and accurate information about contraception, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are freely available to American youths, religionists should not be allowed to claim the moral high ground on the issue of abortion. But of course, abortion is not really the issue for religionists, control is. Religionists do not want people to own their sexuality, they want sexuality to belong to the church, temple or mosque.

If ceding their sexuality to an imaginary bearded man in the sky was the sole act of religionists, I would not be concerned. However, they are trying to force others to follow the same standard. Religiously based limits on access to birth control are one example. “Abstinence only” education is another. From 1994 to 2000, the United States spent \$500 million on childhood “education” programs that encouraged abstinence but did not teach about contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.³⁰

I remember seeing a billboard near a high school paid for through this program. It said, “Only abstinence prevents pregnancy.” Of course it is true that abstinence prevents pregnancy, but that is not what the sign said, it said “*Only* abstinence prevents pregnancy.” The first thing I thought when I read it was, “oral sex prevents pregnancy.” But on second thought, I figured it could also say, “same-sex encounters prevent pregnancy.” It is silly to lie to our youths. They are not ignorant. These crazy programs divert money that could be spent equipping young people to make intelligent choices in the modern world. Instead, they are provided patently silly catchphrases like “only abstinence prevents pregnancy” that cater to the powerful religionists and their unscientific myths. A fact ignored by religious mythologists is that 97% of Americans who have had sex, do so before marriage.³¹ Failing to educate youths about reproduction, contraception and sexually transmitted disease prevention is like putting them on the road in cars without teaching them how to drive and then blaming them when collisions inevitably occur.

A review of abstinence only programs’ effectiveness in 11 states concluded, “Abstinence only programs show little evidence of sustained (long-term) impact on attitudes and intentions. Worse, they show some negative impacts on youth’s willingness to use contraception, including condoms, to prevent negative sexual health outcomes related to sexual intercourse . . . none of these programs demonstrates evidence of long-term success in delaying sexual initiation among youth exposed to

the programs or any evidence of success in reducing other sexual risk-taking behaviors among participants.”³² Another study confirmed that teens in abstinence only programs were just as likely to have sex as others, but were less likely to use condoms and other forms of birth control.³³ Despite years of funding abstinence only programs, the United States has the highest teen birth rate³⁴ and one of the highest levels of teen sexually transmitted disease infection rates in the industrialized world. As many as one in four teenage girls in the U.S. has a sexually transmitted disease.³⁵ The ineffective and expensive abstinence only programs serve religious fictions, not the needs and realities of the modern world. That abstinence only education is funded through 2015³⁶ is a tribute to the power of religion and demonstrates the harm caused by religionists forcing their myths on others.

The cruel application of ancient prohibitions against gays is discussed more in [Chapter 18](#). The way religionists apply their rules to sexual minorities is also hypocritical. Gay sex and adultery are subject to the same penalty in the Bible: death.³⁷ Yet religionists work hard to deny rights to gays while they welcome the 20-50% of their members³⁸ who have been divorced³⁹ and the more than 21% of married men who have had extramarital affairs.⁴⁰

Absent religion, what reason is there to be guilty about sexuality? Religionists promote dysfunctional beliefs about sex, create guilt about sex, and behave no differently when it comes to sex, they just make themselves feel bad about it. Religion’s attempt to own and control its adherents’ sexuality is a significant problem. This problem is compounded when religionists use political power to force their myths about sexuality on others.

[Contents](#)

[Home](#)

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