

AN INSIGHT INTO THE FALLACIES OF CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM
(With an Emphasis Upon Sexuality and Body Perception)

by Gordon Gill (Revised September 2001)

To Readers

The purpose of this paper is to enlighten interested persons relative to a most unhappy period of religious association I experienced in 1998 at what I belatedly discovered is a "fundamentalist" church parish. This parish is located in northern Virginia (in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area) and is affiliated with the national Episcopal Church.

I have long been--and remain--uncomfortable with the concept of Christian fundamentalism. My concerns primarily involve the negative tone the adherents thereof typically ascribe to most forms of sexuality and the perception they commonly accord the human body. After satisfying my one-year financial obligation to the parish in question, I felt compelled to transfer to a new one.

This set of material consists of certain explanatory data (viz., listings of Biblical passages cited on the succeeding pages, and of named scholars and others whose various writings are deemed supportive), followed by three numbered attachments:

Attachment I

Observations on key fundamentalist issues.

Attachment II

Scholarly writings exposing the fallacies of fundamentalism.

Attachment III

Pertinent portions of a letter to my former parish explaining in detail the nature of my discontent.

The author expresses his appreciation to The Rev. Canon C. Frederick Barbee (of the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, and editor of *The Anglican Digest*) for advising of a valuable article analyzing fundamentalism.

Also, sincere thanks go to Shawn McDermott of the library staff at Virginia Theological Seminary for assistance rendered in locating sources needed to document the findings and conclusions.

BIBLICAL CITATIONS HEREIN

1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:9 & 15-16
1 Corinthians 5:11
1 Corinthians 7:3-6, 8, 9, 29, 33-34, 36
1 Kings 11:3-6
1 Peter 1:22
1 Peter 3:3
1 Timothy 2:9
1 Timothy 3:2 & 12
1 Timothy 5:14
2 Samuel 6:20-22
Deuteronomy 5:21
Deuteronomy 22:13-17
Deuteronomy 22:22
Deuteronomy 25:5-6
Deuteronomy 25:11-12
Exodus 20:17
Exodus 20:26
Exodus 22:27
Exodus 28:42-43
Ezekiel 22:10
Ezekiel 23:7
Galatians 5:19
Genesis 2:24
Genesis 2:25
Genesis 3:1-10
Genesis 3:16
Genesis 3:18
Genesis 3:21
Genesis 9:23-24
Genesis 38:8-10
Hosea 4:10-12
James 2:15-16
Job 24:7
Job 31:19-20
John 8:11
Leviticus 15:14-15 & 29-30
Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18
Leviticus 20:10
Luke 14:26
Luke 16:18
Luke 20:28

Matthew 5:8
Matthew 5:28
Matthew 5:32
Matthew 11:37
Matthew 22:24
Micah 1:7
Numbers 25:1-3
Philippians 1:3-6 and 2:12-13
Proverbs 2:16-17; 5:3 & 20; 6:24-35; and 7:4-27
Revelation 2:20
Romans 13:11
Song of Songs 4:16-5:1
Titus 1:6

INDIVIDUALS NAMED HEREIN WHOSE VIEWS ARE CITED IN SUPPORT

Note: These names are listed below without title or association. However, such data are shown within the text in the specific locations where the names appear.

Allan, Frank K.
Barr, James
Bawer, Bruce
Bearman, Peter S.
Brückner, Hannah
Coats, William
Cole, William Graham
Collins, Raymond F.
Countryman, L. William
Fletcher, Joseph
Gary, Richard E.
Goldwater, Barry
Hahn, Celia Allison
Hamilton, Eleanor
Harper, Robert A.
Harvey, A.E.
Hefley, James C.
Hettlinger, Richard
Holloway, Richard
Huwiler, Elizabeth
Kinsey, Alfred C.
Koch, Leo
Kramer, Samuel Noah
LeBacqz, Karen
Lehrman, Nathaniel S.
Lipton, Lawrence
Mace, David R.
McClintock, Karen A.
Mencken, H.L.
Murphy, Roland E.
Pope, Marvin H.
Powers, Edward A.
Rhymes, D.A.
Rowley, H.H.
Roy, Rustom and Della
Sapp, Stephen
Shinn, Roger
Spong, John Shelby

Stuart, Elizabeth
Taylor, G. Rattray
Thatcher, Adrian
Tribble, Phyllis
Wescott, Roger W.
Wink, Walter
Wood, Frederic C., Jr.

ATTACHMENT I - Observations on Key Fundamentalist Issues

NOTE: Discussed in Sections A & B below are two matters of core concern to persons commonly depicted as "fundamentalists."

A. Sexuality

1. Introduction

To explain their perception of sexual conduct appropriate for Christians--e.g., none at all for unmarried persons--fundamentalists usually claim they can detect language in the Biblical epistles of St. Paul that justifies the narrowness of their position.¹ Therefore, let us examine the role of this celebrated apostle and ascertain whether he really propounded the ideas which the fundamentalists attribute to him.

In the years following Jesus's ascension, Paul ministered to new church congregations in the Eastern Mediterranean area. He forthrightly chided a number of them for various infractions, although one escaped relatively unscathed (Philippians 1:3-6 and 2:12-13). However, it took him twenty-nine chapters to put the bad people of Corinth in their place!

Paul--writing in Greek--identifies in 1 Corinthians 5:11 a wide variety of ongoing evils. These include greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, swindling, and certain sexual acts (commonly characterized as "fornication" in the traditional rendering of the English-language translation, i.e., the original King James Version or KJV).

¹ Here are three samples of fundamentalist writing: (1) *The Other Side of Morality* (G/L Publications; Glendale, California; 1969; pages 119, 121): "Paul points out that ... every person is basically made for God, and that includes a person's sex drive.... Christians are to avoid *any kind* of sexual looseness, *any kind* of fornication, *any kind* of premarital ... sex." [Emphasis in original.] (2) *Our Corinthian Contemporaries* (Zondervan Books; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1971; page 59): "Paul sets forth ... aspects of the Christian doctrine of marriage.... Outside of marriage no one has the right to use his sexual powers...." (3) *Sex for Christians* (Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1976; pages 127-8): "Paul [outlaws] intercourse for unmarried people ... it is a life-uniting act [reserved for marriage]."

The text in Section A--coupled with extensive support provided in Attachment II--will show that the above quotes are inconclusive.

Significantly, however, the new KJV eliminates the word fornication and divides the variously described activities between two separate components, viz., sexual immorality and adultery. (A quick check of the Life Application and new Revised Standard Version bibles reveals that fornication has been excluded from them as well). Professor William Graham Cole--well known authority on religion at Williams College and, later, president of Lake Forest College--explains that this change resulted from an improved interpretation of the original Greek.²

The uniform rejection of fornication in the text of each of the modern Bible translations mentioned above presents a powerful argument that the rendition of Paul's epistles now proffered by the editorial scholars is more likely than before to reflect his true message. That all of these Bible authorities are in firm agreement with each other in this respect speaks volumes!³

The modern translators have also established (as is evident from the current versions of Paul's writings set forth in 1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:9 & 15-16) that the particular kinds of sexual behavior troubling this apostle consisted of incest, adultery, and prostitution.⁴ Because the negative perception of incest seems not to have changed in any material way since ancient times, further discussion here of that category would likely not be productive. But let us analyze Paul's other two concerns, both of which are more complex.

2. Adultery

In order for us to understand Paul's concept of "adultery," we must recognize that in his era the Greek-equivalent of such term conveyed a very different meaning from that which commonly

² In his book *Sex and Love in the Bible* (Association Press, New York, 1959) Professor Cole states on pages 247-248 that, "Fornication means to us sex relations between unmarried persons, but its Latin root *fornicare* meant to patronize a brothel, or whoredom. The verb was derived from the noun *fornix*, meaning arch or vault, and as Roman brothels were located in underground vaults, the connection is clear."

³ The matter of translation presents a major problem for literalists who persist in avowing Biblical inerrancy (i.e., the fundamentalists). For example, the quotation attributed to Jesus in Luke 14:26--originally written in Greek--is commonly translated into English as a warning that persons seeking acceptance as a disciple must "hate" their parents. A more realistic interpretation of Jesus's intent appears in Matthew 11:37.

Also in this regard, Rev. Raymond F. Collins--professor at The Catholic Universities of America and Leuven (Belgium)--states on page xi of his book *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament* that, "Even those who can read the Greek of a Mark or a Paul are hard pressed to capture the precise nuance of the author's words."

⁴ Paul also mentions "homosexual offenders." This category is excluded herein because only a small minority of the population is involved, and to deal with the inherent complexities would detract from the principal thrust of this paper.

prevails today. That is to say, whereas we generally think of adultery as disloyal sex (by either spouse) that threatens continuing conjugal affection, in the highly patriarchal society of Biblical times the word consistently referred to violation of a male's property right in a woman. Paul's references to adultery would necessarily have been in such context; hence, we are governed by that interpretation of the word in our readings of his work.⁵

A manifestation of the updated view of adultery held by contemporary society is reflected in the general lack of concern nowadays with the admonitions expressed in Matthew 5:32 and Luke 16:18. Such passages warn that a man contemplating marriage with a divorced woman risks committing adultery against her ex-husband.

Interestingly, Deuteronomy 22:13-17 describes a test which a man may employ to assure that a marriage partner is chaste (such determination being seen as helpful to him in establishing his paternity of any children born in the near term following wedlock). Thus, a seepage of blood from

⁵ There is abundant evidence that patriarchalism permeated the lifestyle of that era and that wives did not possess marital rights as we know them today:

Nathaniel S. Lehrman (psychiatrist practicing in Great Neck, New York, and clinical instructor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine) observed in the July 1962 issue of the *Journal of Religion and Health* at page 368, that "The Mosaic standard of sexual morality was distinctly a double one, in which the categorical insistence upon premarital virginity and extramarital fidelity for Hebrew women was not demanded of Hebrew men."

In *Human Sexuality*--edited by Edward A. Powers (United Church Press, New York and Philadelphia, 1977)--pages 35 & 36 reveal that, "Where woman does appear in the legal codes [of Israel], she has the role of a dependent and normally an inferior.... Her sexuality was the exclusive property of the male [and her infidelity] merited the death penalty.... The husband's sexual infidelity was not ranked as a crime [and divorce] was an exclusively male prerogative."

That the Biblical adultery references pertain to the violation of men's rights only, is reinforced by language in the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21). Accordingly, any coveting by women of other women's husbands was *not* embodied therein, i.e., by its terms, the spouse-coveting sanction incorporated into the Tenth Commandment was structured so as to apply solely to men.

Note also that the incident leading to Jesus's declining to condemn (see John 8:11) a married woman who had engaged in sex with a stranger--thus making herself a party to an adulterous act deemed injurious to her husband--arose out of an interpretation of Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. Both passages were intended to foster the sexual exclusiveness of "another man's wife."

Similarly, Jesus's admonition in Matthew 5:28 against lustful glances was limited to the actions of men only.

the genitals of a woman at the time of his first penetration of her would strongly indicate a state of virginity. Although such a test applied to a menstruating woman could be inconclusive because of doubt as to the blood source, laws set forth in Leviticus 18:19 & 20:18 and Ezekiel 22:10 (flatly forbidding intercourse during menstruation) constrain the man to postpone it until her flow has dissipated.

Another kind of third-party sexual involvement relates to the law of levirate (Deuteronomy 25:5-6 in the O.T.; Matthew 22:24 and Luke 20:28 in the N.T.). Under its terms, the brother of a deceased husband is obligated to impregnate the widow. When Onan defied the edict by prematurely withdrawing from Tamar, he was put to death (Genesis 38:8-10).

Research to determine the extent to which the sex rules identified in this section may currently be observed must await another day.

In closing our discussion on adultery, it is vital that we recognize the distinction between the old and new meanings, so that we do not receive an erroneous message from Paul's writings.

3. Prostitution

Let us now consider another sexual item listed above as concerning Paul, viz., "prostitution." This activity is usually seen today as sex in exchange for money. As we shall observe, however, the Biblical connotation of the term is considerably different.

That is to say, Bible annotators have shown that Paul's prostitution reference in 1 Corinthians alluded to priestesses who employed sex as a form of worship ritual in the temple of the love goddess Aphrodite, in effect repudiating God's omnipotence. He likely saw a parallel between such horrific behavior and the egregious conduct recorded in Numbers 25:1-3 (where we are told that early Israelites engaged in intercourse with heathen Moabite women as a ceremonial sacrifice to the latter's deities) and in Ezekiel 23:7 (where we learn a woman turned merrymaking with dashing young men into lustful prostitution involving idol worship). Moreover, Paul must have been outraged by Hosea 4:10-12 (which the annotators explain refers to prostitution rituals in the temples of the Canaanite fertility gods Baal and Asherah) and Micah 1:7 (which denounces conniving Samaritan women for soliciting money to dally in prostitution with idols).

The above incidents should suffice to show that the portrayal of prostitution in the Bible does not conform with our contemporary use of the word.

4. Miscellaneous Words

We should also note an additional area of the Bible in which sexual language has recently been modified. Accordingly, compare published translations of a portion of another of Paul's epistles, viz., Galatians 5:19. In the early KJV account, he addressed four delineated subcategories: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. However, more recent Bibles (e.g., Life Application [LA] and New International Version [NIV]) not only reduce the number of

subcategories to three, but they also alter the descriptive terminology through adoption of the terms sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery. We have already expended considerable effort in discussing "fornication" and "adultery," but let us now analyze the other above-listed words.

"Debauchery" and "lasciviousness" are expressions characterizing sundry uncouth or vulgar acts typically associated with persons of general disrepute. (In clarification, no woman who willingly and enthusiastically engages in sexual relations would complain, concerning her experience, that she has been debauched by a lascivious man.)

The word "impurity" is the opposite of purity (and its adjectival form, pure), one celebrated Biblical reference to which appearing in the famous Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:8 records Jesus as saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," which signifies that a holy lifestyle requires believers to coexist in mutual harmony (see 1 Peter 1:22); in the context of the discussion here, the maintenance of purity dictates that each participant in a sexual act proceed with fitting regard for the other's well-being.⁶

The term "sexual immorality" is broad enough to embrace acts seen by virtually everybody as sordid, in ancient times and/or today. Incest, bestiality, pedophilia, and coercive exploitation come to mind. Surprisingly or not, polygamy seems to have been excluded from this category in the O.T.; accordingly, the criticism of Solomon in 1 Kings 11:3-6 for his having 700 wives was directed not to their number but to their non-Israelite origins.⁷

That leaves sexual "uncleanness" still to be explored. A reading of Leviticus 15 makes the meaning of this word obvious, i.e., it refers to the spillage of male and female bodily fluids. Uncleanness (or derivations thereof) in such context appears thirty-four times in this 33-verse O.T. chapter. However, whereas the older KJV account of Paul's epistle to the people of Galatia brings the uncleanness concept into the N.T., the more recent LA and NIV Bibles do not.

Apparently, modern translators have determined that Paul did not really use the Greek equivalent of uncleanness in his epistle. This, in turn, may mean that followers of the Lord who suffer such spillage are no longer required to tender two doves or pigeons to a priest for sacrifice, as is directed in Leviticus 15:14-15 & 29-30. It would not be unrealistic, however, for us to presume that passionate fundamentalist clergy currently demand adherence to this Biblical command (or, if they don't, to ask them why not).

⁶ There is good authority for the above-stated interpretation of "impurity." Professor L. William Countryman (Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley) writes on page 141 of his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988) that "[The N.T.] authors shift ... between two quite different areas of purity language: the literal and the metaphysical, in which it points to various applications of the Christian 'purity of the heart.' When the N.T. writers insist on purity as a standard of Christian conduct, they intend the latter, metaphysical sense."

⁷ In the N.T., Paul advised church bishops and deacons to limit themselves to one wife (see 1 Timothy 3:2 & 12 and Titus 1:6).

5. Marriage

Paul addresses the subject of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Actually, he discouraged it (verse 8) because he believed that our Lord's return (the Parousia)--with the concomitant onset of our salvation--was imminent (verse 29 and also Romans 13:11); thus, entering into long-term earthly relationships seemed pointless. Moreover, he recommended that the people dedicate their available time and energy to Church affairs, an easier task for single men and women than for married persons distracted by the special demands of such a relationship (verses 33-34).

Nevertheless, Paul did not rule out marriage for those whose devotion to their beloved ran so deep that not uniting together would bring unrelenting heartache (verse 9), or for an engaged couple in which the man comes to realize he has unfairly delayed offering to finalize a life-long commitment, and the woman has been loyal and loving to him for a lengthy period (verse 36). For persons who do marry, he praised the value of a mutually satisfying sexual relationship (verses 3-6).⁸

In ancient times, Israelite girls were expected to wed--actually, to be sold by their fathers--soon after attaining puberty.⁹ The scarcity of unmarried adult women that resulted from such a practice may account for the apparent dearth of Biblical references to non-idolatrous and non-commercial sexual coupling of single males and females acting with mutual consent. On the other hand, the explanation may simply be that Paul and others saw no reason to comment upon such conduct. Anyhow, author Stephen Sapp informs us on page 33 of *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977) that with respect to the effect upon society of unattached women engaging in sex, "no harm was done."

⁸ Curiously, language in Deuteronomy 25:11-12 is negative toward a woman touching a man intimately. Professor Cole states in this connection--see page 383 of his aforementioned book--that the admonition in these passages "served as a warning to any and all women that the private parts of a man are taboo." If the fundamentalists' idea of Biblical inerrancy were to be accepted as controlling (i.e., if the professor's words are taken as binding Christians forever), countless female sinners would be among us today.

Happily, women should be relieved to know that the Episcopal Church leadership (to name one example) typically rejects fundamentalist interpretation. In a commentary on pages 12-14 of *The Anglican Digest* for Advent 1999, the Rt. Rev. Frank K. Allan (Bishop in Atlanta) notes that "Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments ... point to and witness to Jesus as the Word made flesh.... At the same time, Scripture ... was written by human beings who had their own prejudices, biases, cultural limitations, and pre-scientific world views.... No ethical person [nowadays] would countenance executing a disobedient child or stoning an adulterous wife...." So it appears then that today's women, positioned to benefit from the fruits of modern psychological research, are blameless when they follow their urges to fondle the men in their lives.

⁹ See page 32 of *Sex Sense and Nonsense: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Sex* by James C. Hefley (David C. Cook Publishing Company; Elgin, Illinois; 1971).

Paul accepts the notion that young widows may desire to remarry (1 Timothy 5:14). He avoided delving into the minutiae of prewedding courtship, but notably, he did not counsel these widows and their male lovers to refrain from sex during such period. Had nonmarital sex been as opprobrious to Paul as the fundamentalists like to claim, he hardly would have passed up such a golden opportunity to castigate people who might have been engaging in it, particularly since he exhibited no hesitation in reprimanding several church congregations for myriad transgressions. Fundamentalists who put words in Paul's mouth (like "life-uniting act" in footnote 1) are merely expressing what they wish he had said.¹⁰

As information, Proverbs 2:16-17; 5:3 & 20; 6:24-35; and 7:4-27 warn married and marriageable men to be wary of unscrupulous women on the loose who seek to seduce them for nefarious reasons. Also, Revelation 2:20 tells of Jezebel--wife of King Ahab of Israel--who mercilessly enticed the household servants into the royal conjugal bed.

6. Conclusion

There are scattered references to sexuality elsewhere in Paul's various epistles, etc., but they are repetitious of passages we have already examined.

It is important to note that, whereas Paul directed his attention to the whole panoply of shameful deeds in which he had found the people of Corinth (and some other places) engaging, public utterances by today's most notorious fundamentalists¹¹ indicate that they harbor an irrational preoccupation with sex.¹² Not only that, this group and their less-known followers go beyond the

¹⁰ To avoid misunderstanding here, it should be noted that the third fundamentalist writer quoted in footnote 1 specifically asserts that his phrase "life-uniting act" is based upon Genesis 2:24, which holds that a husband and wife "shall become one." Unfortunately for that writer's credibility, the subject of such passage pertains to the departure of newlyweds from their respective parents' homes in order to establish a separate household; the passage is not directed toward sex. Also, the same writer hypothesizes that the recognized evil of sex involving temple prostitutes (1 Corinthians 6:15-16) equates with tender relationships between caring partners; a critical analysis of these verses fails to validate any such nexus.

¹¹ It is not essential to name them here. Anyhow, informed people generally already know who they are.

¹² I am not alone in observing the fundamentalists' curious attitude toward sex. In his book *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalists Betray Christianity* (Three Rivers Press, New York, 1997), Episcopalian layman Bruce Bawer states on page 212 that when fundamentalist preachers address male-female interaction, "they almost invariably focus on sexual acts."

Even intellectuals tending to sympathize with the overall fundamentalist cause remark that such preachers are on shaky ground. For example, James Barr) at various times a lecturer at the
(continued...)

specific aforementioned categories of behavior that disturbed Paul by stretching their sex fixation to criticize sundry acts of intimacy widely practiced by men and women, both married and unmarried.¹³ Most ominously, fundamentalists have sought to impose restrictions on the rest of us, sometimes by lobbying legislators to enact or retain criminal statutes designed to forestall certain everyday sexual practices.¹⁴

An example of a church ministry accomplishing genuine good was touched upon in a recent sermon called to this writer's attention. It seems that a man--having lost his spouse and children through alcoholism--pitifully cried out, "My whole life is broken." What a heart-rending tale! Fortunately for this man, a loving church congregation took him under its wing. Channeling efforts toward helping people deal with this kind of dilemma would seem to advance the interests of humankind more positively than harboring, as fundamentalists typically do, an accusing obsession with amorous undertakings conducted by mature people within caring relationships.

Additionally, it should be noted in connection with sexuality that (1) a standard confirmation-preparation workbook [i.e., the Episcopal Church manual authored by Lambert and Fender and published by Morehouse-Gorham Company] says nothing whatsoever about it, and (2) "An Outline of the Faith" [*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 845-862] discloses but a single oblique mention secreted amidst an abundance of other material.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from an examination of these key official sources is that--contrary to the fundamentalists' agenda and notwithstanding certain national resolutions suggesting otherwise--issues of sexuality (at least heterosexuality, the focus of this section) are not on the Episcopal Church's front burner. And they should not be, except perhaps for the limited

¹²(...continued)

University of Chicago, Princeton University, Union Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt University)reproaches them on page 328 of his book *Fundamentalism* (Westminster Press; Philadelphia; 1977, 1978). He states, "[It is often said] that fundamentalists maintain pathologically censorious and puritanical attitudes towards such matters as sex and marriage, women's dress, and so on.... [Such a position] does not seem to be essential to fundamentalism, and I do not think it should be stressed very heavily."

¹³ Analyzing the motivations of male fundamentalists in their quest for wives, Dr. Roger W. Wescott (associate professor of social sciences at Michigan State University, fellow of the American Anthropological Association, and contributing scholar at the Realist Association) has noted that "the determined virgin-hunter [praises] the magical virtue of the unruptured hymen."

¹⁴ For example, Virginia's so-called Sodomy Law (Title 18.2, §361A) prescribes up to five years of imprisonment or a fine of \$2,500 for persons engaging in specified bedroom activities of a nature regularly suggested in marriage manuals. Indeed, this felony statute applies to married couples as well as to singles. Other meddlesome sex statutes deal with subjects labeled fornication, cohabitation, etc.

purpose of emphasizing that the fundamentalists have not justified their position (most probably because they can't).

The discussions hereinabove of adultery and prostitution are not intended to suggest that the modern versions thereof should be regarded as desirable pursuits, but merely that they are not the kinds of conduct referred to by these names in the Bible.

To restate an assertion appearing above in the subsection on marriage, there is an "apparent dearth of Biblical references to non-idolatrous and non-commercial sexual coupling of single males and females acting with mutual consent." Unless somebody can find such references, it must be presumed that they are nonexistent.¹⁵

¹⁵ Southern Baptists--often associated in the public mind with fundamentalism--spearheaded beginning in the 1990s the concept of "virginity pledges," wherein adolescents are urged to abstain from sexual intercourse as long as they remain unmarried. (Apparently, the Baptists do not acknowledge non-intercourse manifestations of sexual behavior.) Responsible people are likely pleased to learn of innovative means to dissuade our very young from activity for which they may not be emotionally or otherwise prepared. However, a study by Peter S. Bearman (Columbia University) and Hannah Brückner (Yale University) of adolescents attending 80 representative U.S. high schools--published in the January 2001 issue of *American Journal of Sociology*--suggests that measured against the Baptist's stated goal (i.e., no sex prior to marriage), the virginity pledge experience has largely been a failure.

That is to say, adding together (1) the generally accepted age of sexual maturity of 12-14 years, and (2) the average number of years between such occurrence and marriage as disclosed by these researchers [males-12.5; females-11.8] reveals that persons of both sexes are on average marrying in their mid-20s. Based upon a finding by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that 65% of all adolescents transition from virginity to first intercourse by 12th grade, i.e., while still in their teens (see *The Washington Post* for July 13, 2001; page C8), the 30 to 38 extra months of virginity which the university researchers report that male and female pledgers, respectively, accrue over nonpledgers is insufficient to carry most of the former to a mid-20s wedding day.

The researchers note that a substantial number of pledgers either break their pledges by relinquishing their virginity before marriage, or marry hastily--and unwisely--in an effort to keep their pledges. Neither alternative is what the Baptists had in mind. And because those breaking their pledges commonly do so on impulse, they rarely have available to them the birth control protection that nonpledgers can be expected to arrange for in advance.

B. Body shame

Let us now address another phenomenon frequently associated with fundamentalists, viz., their obsession with coercing others to keep their bodies mostly clothed, most of the time. These people tend to become unhinged at, e.g., the thought of persons discreetly pursuing recreational activities that do not by nature require a body covering, and they recoil in revulsion upon encountering undraped human images in the world of art. Notably, they harangue legislators to enact sweeping prohibitory statutes and harass innocent souls over whom they have some measure of control.¹⁶ Although fundamentalists generally cite various O.T. and N.T. passages in attempting to justify their position, the discussion to follow demonstrates that the arguments they advance consistently fail to stand up under analysis.

Turning our attention first to the Garden of Eden, it can readily be seen in Genesis 2:25 that nakedness had traditionally been the norm for Adam and Eve. But we learn from Genesis 3:1-10 that this pair's serene life would change for the worse following their disobedience of God through their eating of forbidden fruit. Realizing soon afterward that they were about to be rebuked, they felt vulnerable and tried to hide from God's wrath by fashioning fig-leaf attire allowing them to blend in with the natural greenery of the garden.¹⁷

The fundamentalists allege there is a message for us in this story, viz., that we should share the couple's shame and accordingly restrict what others see of our bodies. But there is a flaw in their thinking. If strict clothing criteria are to be imposed in perpetuity as a result of the Fall, consistency requires that analgesics be forever prohibited during childbirth because God decreed in Genesis 3:16 that women will endure pain at such time.

The existence of any church-run maternity hospital that actually denies mothers-to-be access to pain-relieving medication has yet to come to this writer's attention. Fundamentalists' negative views of body exposure arising from the forbidden fruit episode deserve no credibility as long as

¹⁶ Many examples could be cited, but only two are shown here in the interest of keeping this paper at a reasonable length; both are taken from news articles readily retrievable through electronic database searches: (1) *The Washington Post* of October 12, 1982, observed at page B5 that the preacher at New Covenant Christian Community Church in College Park, Maryland, urged that town's council to reject a business's proposal to open a spa site. He complained that a photograph taken in another spa operated by the same owners showed "four people who seemed to be without clothes," and that features customarily found in spas (padded deck, dimmed lights, piped-in music) "promote lust and sexual immorality." [He failed, and the spa opened as planned, according to a February 28, 1983, *Post* article.] (2) *The Houston Chronicle* for March 20, 1993, reported on page 1 of its religion section that, "Bowing to Baptist pressure, Baylor University's governing board voted Friday not to add a nude figure drawing class to the art curriculum."

¹⁷ The fig leaf attire presumably covered their whole selves, not just the genitalia as popular artistry depicts.

these people continue to accept the relief from suffering now made available through modern medical science.

A related Garden of Eden justification proffered by the fundamentalists in their condemnation of body exposure involves God's furnishing Adam and Eve with coats made of skin, reported in Genesis 3:21. To the contrary, such garments would simply shield the pair from the thorns and thistles encountered--see Genesis 3:18--upon their banishment from the garden.

Other Biblical passages also mention covering one's self to protect against a harsh environment, while not giving any hint that prudery should dictate the concealment of body parts. Thus, see Exodus 22:27 (concerning a nighttime sleep comforter), Job 24:7 (referring to a need for cold-weather garb), Job 31:19-20 (describing the warming properties of sheep fleece), and James 2:15-16 (pertaining to apparel specially designed for warmth).

Further, according to the fundamentalists' theory, Noah's sons Shem and Japheth walked backward when approaching their inebriated father (see Genesis 9:23) because they were embarrassed by his nakedness. But the real reason the sons avoided looking at him is demonstrated in Genesis 9:24, viz., they were sickened by the sadistic defilement of their father's body by Canaan, his malevolent grandson.

Although instructions to the Israelites pertaining to worship rituals contained advisories limiting the extent of skin exposure--see Exodus 20:26 and Exodus 28:42-43--the purpose thereof was to head off inclinations toward pagalized sexual contact with idols that surfaced periodically in those days. There is no credible evidence for the fundamentalists' strained interpretation that these passages constitute a general command for body covering.

Still another Biblical story the fundamentalists misconstrue involves the renowned character David. After recovering the stolen ark of the covenant, he returned it to Israel and bid the community to celebrate (2 Samuel 6). However, his wife Michal--who inexplicably had come to loathe him--berated him (verse 20) after seeing him arrive and cast aside his traveling clothes within view of slave girls, an act she deemed unbecoming for an exalted leader. According to conventional fundamentalist thinking, Michal's reproach conveys an unqualified antinudity message.

However, the fundamentalists need to have brought to their attention that Michal was not concerned with David's lack of attire per se; we know this because she said nothing about the many unenslaved women present who similarly saw him without covering. Anyhow, David rejected Michal's criticism and humbly accepted God's directive that he tend to all the people (verse 21); he felt proud to be held in honor by the slave girls (verse 22).

The fundamentalists also misguidedly focus upon the first part of 1 Timothy 2:9 wherein St. Paul urges women to adorn themselves modestly. They then seize upon these words to promote a notion that women--and perhaps, by extension, men too--must guard against exposing more than a modicum of bare skin in public places.

However, the fundamentalists are wrong again. Examination of the last part of the cited passage clearly indicates that Paul's musing over modesty had nothing to do with the extent of covering, but rather, with ostentatiousness associated with such things as braiding one's hair and choosing gold or pearl accessories. (As information, a nearly identical Biblical theme appears in 1 Peter 3:3).

In summation, the foregoing discussion addressed sundry Biblical passages that fundamentalists have used to rationalize their negative attitude toward, e.g., beach aficionados who disrobe in sparsely populated locations to enjoy surf and sand, and devotees of the arts who seek to replicate the splendor of the human figure. Significantly, the accompanying analyses of such passages show that the fundamentalists' interpretations lack merit.

C. The historical record

It should be noted here that fundamentalist clergy have a bad track record vis-a-vis earthly professionals (i.e., scientists, etc.) in analyzing/interpreting God's revealed truth. Specifically, it was fundamentalist clergy in Rome who persecuted Galileo--a 17th century earthly professional--for popularizing Copernicus's famous hypothesis that, contrary to previous thought, the sun does not revolve around the earth.

But now scholars know for sure who was right and who was wrong on that subject in those days. It is doubtful that even the most conservative fundamentalist clergy persist in upholding the pre-Copernicus interpretation, which belief would necessarily turn astronomy on its head.

Recognizing, then, that the earthly professional Galileo undisputedly validated scientific truth in the 17th century--notwithstanding fervent opposition from the fundamentalist clergy--people today would be wise to remain skeptical when 20th/21st century fundamentalists challenge the scholarship of modern earthly professionals trained in psychiatry and sociology.

Indeed, responsible scholars in these professions have studied sexuality extensively. There are reliable findings that stability of marriage--undisputedly a desirable goal for Christians and others--rests largely upon early preparation involving principles of intimate interaction between the genders. (See Attachment II for details.) Demanding chastity outside of marriage--a pet aim of the fundamentalists--is in direct conflict with such principles.

While believers do accept that God rules supreme over psychiatrists and sociologists, failure to accord the counsel of such professionals due regard would most certainly result in more divorces and/or unfulfilling marriages arising out of basic incompatibility, perceived only after it is too late to recognize the peril. Society should consider this inevitable result in advance, rather than leap headlong, lemming-like, into the direction the fundamentalists would take us.

D. What to expect in the future

We can only speculate what the fundamentalists will be pushing in the new century. If they haven't already become agitated over the Biblical mention of gold and pearls (see the 1 Timothy and 1 Peter references thereto in section B above), it may be only a matter of time before they do.

It might be interesting to learn what the fundamentalists think about gold navel rings, which seem to be proliferating on women these days. Actually, however, little seems to be gained from our debating with them such matters as whether a nose ring in one nostril is theologically acceptable, while rings in two nostrils bring the wearer into sinfulness.

Rather than dissipate its energy on such trivial and frivolous concerns, the Church would be far better served by concentrating upon meaningful goals. An example of the latter might be organizing resources to expedite repeal of the federal marriage tax, a penalty now operating to discourage men and women from expressing their love for each other through life-long unions.

E. To summarize

How the fundamentalist mind works is difficult to fathom. Whereas ordinary people can oftentimes discern the most plausible message underlying Biblical passages, fundamentalists contrive meanings that make little or no sense, as is demonstrated above.

The dangerous aspect of all this is that the fundamentalists seek to foist their notions upon the rest of us through manipulation of the political process. Indeed, that granddaddy of all conservatives Barry Goldwater was noted in *The Arizona Republic* (June 17, 1993, at page A23) for criticizing "his own party as he's seen it surrender to a fundamentalist Christian Gestapo." Moreover, *The Washington Post* reported (August 16, 1999, at page C2) that H.L. Mencken, one of the most respected twentieth-century journalists and widely known as the "Sage of Baltimore" (although his influence extended throughout the nation), wrote biting--in connection with the famous Scopes trial on the teaching of evolution--of "the menace that fundamentalism offers to civilization."¹⁸

I challenge any fundamentalists reading these words to effectively rebut what I have said in Attachment I.

¹⁸ For further commentary unmasking fundamentalist shortcomings, see the book *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* by The Right Reverend John Shelby Spong, former Episcopal Bishop of Newark (HarperCollins, New York, 1991).

ATTACHMENT II

Scholarly Writings Exposing the Fallacies of Fundamentalism

NOTE: If any readers question the validity of what I said in Attachment I, their doubts should be put to rest by the excerpts below of pertinent writings by 28 learned persons. The points they make, separately and collectively, bolster my various assertions. As can be seen, these individuals are engaged in a variety of disciplines:

*6 College faculty
5 Bishops or other high church leaders
5 Seminary faculty
4 Lay researchers
3 Unidentified church authors
2 Parish priests
1 Marriage counselor
1 Psychiatrist
1 College chaplain*

A. Clergy, Religious Educators, Church Officials, Church Literature

A1. Professor Karen LeBacqz; Pacific School of Religion; Berkeley, California:

The two redeeming purposes of sexuality have always been understood as procreation and union.... Both traditions [i.e., Catholic and Protestant] have moved toward affirming union as primary.... [The essence of such a relationship is defined scripturally in] Song of Songs [editor's note: in some Bibles, this O.T. book is named Song of Solomon] which displays in glowing detail the immense passion and vulnerability of lovers. This is not married or "preceremonial" sexuality, nor are children the justification for the sexual encounter. It is passion pure and simple. And it is graphic sex.... Celibacy in singleness is not the answer [to the quest for a sexual ethic appropriate for unmarried adults].¹⁹

¹⁹ Fundamentalists--who typically claim that sexual intercourse is unacceptable for persons not in a state of wedlock--tend to deny Professor LeBacqz's above--noted assertion that the sex play engaged in by these lovers (see especially Song of Songs 4:16-5:1*) reflects their mutual desire for sexual union, rather than a broader commitment extending to marriage. This writer's research indicates that sundry religious scholars support the professor vis-a-vis the fundamentalists (for confirmation, see the last page of Attachment II).

(continued...)

A2. David R. Mace, religious leader in the Society of Friends:

[T]he time has come--and more than come--for the church to reverse its negative and punitive attitudes toward sex, and to take a more positive approach. This decision must be taken, firmly and clearly, and the sooner the better. There is no alternative open to us if we have any true sense of our mission to our day and generation.... If Christianity persists in presenting itself as an antisexual religion, it will not get a hearing in this generation.

A3. From *Keeping Body and Soul Together*, a document prepared for the 203rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

A Christian ethic of sexuality is needed that honors but does not restrict sexual activity to marriage alone.... Similarly, it is wrong to condemn nonmarital sexual activity simply because it falls outside a particular formal institutional arrangement.

A4. Professor L. William Countryman; Church and Divinity School of the Pacific; Berkeley, California:

At one extreme, one cannot defend the promiscuous person who desires only personal gratification at whatever expense to others. At the other [extreme are] those widowed persons who wish to contract a faithful and giving relationship without benefit of legal marriage.... Between these extremes, there lies a large area of difficult individual desires. People will have to wend their way through such decisions, however, for the gift of celibacy is not given to all....

Some nonmarital liaisons may in fact prove to be preparatory to marriage in the stricter sense. Others may serve to meet legitimate needs in the absence of genuine alternatives. Still others may be abusive and exploitative. Only the last is to be condemned.

¹⁹(...continued)

* Citing studies that Bible scholar Samuel Noah Kramer has made of Song of Songs, Marvin H. Pope informs us on page 499 of *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York, 1977) that reference)by both the man and the woman)to the woman's garden seems "a euphemism for the vulva."

A5. Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark:

[I]n our generation the rules [of sexual conduct] have become so out of touch with reality that they are simply disregarded.... Does [the] status [of mature single people] require sexual abstinence? I think not.

[C]ompanionship can be on many levels) from a working relationship or a brief social connection to a deep friendship in which time is invested, life is shared, and intimate moments are spent together. Is sex to be ruled out by the guardians of public morality from all of these relationships, because they each fall short of the solitary standard of marriage? ... There are voices that would say yes.... I would like to propose that no is the proper and only moral answer....

The prohibitions of the past have been abandoned, not because people are evil "secular modernists" but because life has changed and those prohibitions are simply no longer appropriate. To expend ecclesiastical energy clinging to those prohibitions, to pass resolutions recalling people to those prohibitions, to seek to revivify those prohibitions, will prove an exercise in futility. Finally, such activities will so discredit the church that whatever moral authority it has in other areas of life will be dissipated as well.

A6. Karen A. McClintock, United Methodist clergy member, faculty affiliation at Southern Oregon University:

The goal of [our Victorian ancestors] was procreation. All other aspects of sexuality were considered sinful. The ghosts of this perspective still haunt us.

A7. A.E. Harvey; formerly lecturer at the University of Oxford and later Sub-Dean of Westminster:

What we do not find are any specific [Biblical] laws or injunctions against casual sexual relationships.

A8. Roger Shinn, professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York:

Arising out of Biblical scholarship of the last twenty years is the recognition that the Bible's attitude toward sex is affirmative and that sexual repression is a heresy.

A9. William Graham Cole, professor of religion, Williams College:

There can be no quarrel with the secular world [with respect to the latter's acceptance of nonmarital sex]. It is right and the church has been wrong.... The method of moralism has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, partly because it moves in the wrong direction and partly because it has based its case on fear.

A10. Rev. William Coats; Interim Rector, Church of the Redeemer; Morristown, New Jersey:

I argue that it is possible for some people to live in situations of [unwed] intimacy so long as these relationships image patterns of self-denial and mutual giving.

A11. Rev. Frederic C. Wood, Jr.; Episcopal Chaplain at Vassar and Goucher colleges:

The church ... often promulgates attitudes which inhibit health and morality in the sexual sphere.

To make intercourse outside the covenant of marriage easier certainly does not mean to remove the moral challenge [but] might even lead to a more wholesome attitude toward sexuality itself.... And the popular belief that greater social acceptance of sex outside the covenant would lead to sexual license and to disregard of all moral considerations is not demonstrable. From counseling and listening to college students involved in premarital affairs, I see no more evidence of sexual irresponsibility and license than I do among my married peers. Indeed, if anything, I see less.

A12. Walter Wink, Professor of Biblical Interpretation, Auburn Theological Seminary; New York City:

No sex act is "ethical" in and of itself, without reference to the rest of a person's life, the patterns of the culture, the special circumstances faced, and the will of God. What we have are simply sexual morals, which change--sometimes with startling rapidity--creating bewildering dilemmas. Just within one lifetime we have witnessed the shift from the ideal of preserving one's virginity until marriage, to couples living together for several years before getting married. The response of many Christians [editor's note: this means fundamentalists] is merely to long for the hypocrisies of an earlier era.

A13. Joseph Fletcher, one-time dean of St. Paul's Cathedral (Cincinnati) and, later, professor of social ethics, Episcopal Theological School; Cambridge, Massachusetts:

The Christian churches must shoulder much of the blame for the confusion, ignorance, and unhealthy guilt associations which surround sex in Western culture....

A14. *About Being an Episcopalian*, a booklet distributed by Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., Greenfield, Massachusetts (commenting upon a principal role of clergy, i.e., to offer a framework that laity might utilize in governing their adherence to God's plan):

The Episcopal Church does not control interpretation and practice. Instead, members are encouraged to use reason to explore and comprehend God's works....

A15. *The Episcopal Church History*, a pamphlet distributed by Forward Movement Publications, Cincinnati (commenting on the need for maintaining a balance among various theological subjects, a principle the antisex fundamentalists do not observe):

[T]he Christian life should neither neglect nor over-emphasize any one aspect of Christian teaching....

A16. Canon D.A. Rhymes, Southwark Cathedral (Church of England), London:

Yet there is no trace of [the tainting of sex] in the attitude of Christ.... Nor does Christ ever suggest that ... marriage is the only possible occasion of any expression of physical relationship.

A17. Rev. Richard E. Gary; graduate of Yale Divinity School; minister at St. Mary's Church, Manhattanville, New York; member of Department of Christian Social Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of New York (participating in a round-table discussion broadcast by radio station WINS in New York City):

And the very essence of the Protestant experience is the individual.... I was going to mention that in my own ministry there are a great many exceptions to the general rule of what would be regarded as normal sexuality, and these I counsel privately. But I don't have any set standard to apply in such cases, except Christian charity.

A18. Richard Holloway, Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh:

God knew when he made us that he has given us a built-in sex drive.... I think it would be wrong for the church to condemn people who have followed their instincts.

B. Academic and Professional Scholars

B1. Professor Richard Hettlinger, Kenyon College (Ohio); Consulting Editor, *Human Sexuality*:

[T]hose who avoid all sexual commitments out of ... an unexamined bondage to rigid parental or religious prohibitions are likely to remain stunted in their growth as persons.

There is a danger that ... engaged couple[s who] concentrate their energies on avoiding intercourse [may] never have the opportunity to see each other as nonsexual objects. Concentration of hope and expectation on the blissful pleasure to be enjoyed in the distant future may distract their attention from more mundane factors which affect the desirability of the partner as a lifelong mate.... As a result, a couple may find themselves virtual strangers on the honeymoon.

B2. Dr. Roger W. Wescott, Associate Professor of Social Science (Michigan State University) and Fellow of the American Anthropological Association:

Even in the days of erotologist Iwan Bloch, prospects for betrothed virgins were bleak; and they seem to have declined since then. Virginity, in other words, seems to be a very poor passport to happiness.

In fact, about the only prediction one can fairly make about the girl who is a physiological virgin before marriage is that she is more likely than her unchaste sister to remain an emotional virgin after marriage.

Kinsey notes that after being thus repressed for 10 or 15 years, getting married does not transform [men] overnight into Don Juans. And the sexual adjustment with their new mates is, at best, quite often a difficult matter.

B3. Dr. Robert A. Harper, president of the American Association of Marriage Counselors:

As a veteran family life educator, marriage counselor, and writer and lecturer on premarital and marital topics, I should like to state flatly that the conventional moral code regarding premarital chastity does a great deal more harm than good in contemporary American society. This code not only leads some young people into firmly fixed pornographic attitudes and prudishly repressive sexual behavior (from which matrimonial ceremonies cannot free them), but it instills guilt feelings in countless other youth who proceed to violate the marital taboos.

Fortunately, however, a growing number of young people have been able to perceive the false, superstitious basis of the outmoded sanctions against premarital coitus and are proceeding maturely, stably, wisely, and happily with wholesome and desirable premarital sexual relations which greatly aid them in their marital sexual adjustments....

B4. Eleanor Hamilton, psychiatrist (born and raised in Oregon; later operator of a medical practice in Sheffield, Massachusetts):

Virginity is about as useful as your appendix. It used to be that a man wanted his wife to be a virgin when they married. These days, I don't know of any young man who would marry one.... Sexuality is a primary function--put it on the shelf ... and you have an 80 percent chance of dysfunction.

B5. Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, renowned behavioral researcher at Indiana University:

The girl who--as a result of premarital petting--has learned something about the significance of tactile stimulation and response, has less of a problem in resolving inhibitions after marriage.... The failure of a female to reach orgasm in her marital coitus may be a considerable source of marital discord [and our studies show such problem can last] for fifteen years after marriage.

B6. Lawrence Lipton, novelist, essayist, poet; lecturer at the Western Writer's Conference, California State College, University of Southern California, University of California at Riverside; instructor of West Coast Avant Garde Writing, University of California at Los Angeles extension:

Meanwhile the outstanding fact of sex in our time is the increase in unmarried sex, not as a preparation for marriage but as an end in itself. In effect, it does, of course, prepare [men and women] for a more successful sex life in marriage, but only if they succeed before marriage in wriggling out of the [Judeo-Christian] straitjacket of guilt, fear and psycho-physical armoring....

B7. Rustom and Della Roy, holders of doctorates from Pennsylvania State University and appointees to multiple committees of the National Council of Churches:

Christians should immediately desist from putting so much emphasis on the occurrence or nonoccurrence of premarital coitus as such.... Rightness or wrongness has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with whether or not physical juxtaposition of sex organs has occurred.

B8. Professor Leo Koch, Department of Biology, University of Illinois, writing in the *Daily Illini* (campus newspaper):

With modern contraceptives and medical advice readily available at the nearest drugstore, or at least a family physician, there is no valid reason why sexual intercourse should not be condoned among those sufficiently mature to engage in it without social consequences and without violating their own codes of morality and ethics.

B9. G. Rattray Taylor, author of *Sex in History*:

[The adultery Commandment, essentially a property offense against another's mate, does not require] that a man should restrict his attentions to his wife; indeed, when a wife proved barren, she would often give one of her handmaidens to her husband that she might bear children for him.

Nor was there any ban on premarital sex; it is seldom appreciated that nowhere in the Old Testament is there any prohibition of noncommercial, unpremeditated fornication--apart from rape, and subject to a father's right to claim a cash interest in a virgin. Once a girl had reached the age of 12 1/2 years, she was free to engage in sexual activity, unless her father specifically forbade it.

CORROBORATION THAT SONG OF SONGS REFLECTS A DESIRE FOR
SEXUAL UNION, NOT FOR A MARITAL COMMITMENT
(See Footnote 19 Hereinabove)

1. A document commissioned by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church (*Continuing the Dialogue*, published by Forward Movement, Cincinnati, 1995) stated on page 45 that the passages in this Biblical story are "in praise of sexual love, celebrating youthful passion, with no reference to God or to marriage.... It affirms that sexual love is in itself good and beneficial."

2. In *Sexual Paradox: Creative Tensions in Our Lives and in Our Congregations* (Pilgrim Press, New York, 1991), Celia Allison Hahn noted on page 192 that "The story is clearly not about marriage or procreation ... but about the delights of erotic love."

3. In *God and the Rhetorical Sexuality* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978), Phyllis Tribble stated on page 162 that "[T]o the issues of marriage and procreation the Song does not speak."

4. In *People of Passion: What the Church Teaches About Sex* (Moberly Press, London, 1997), Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher noted on page 204 that "fertility [an essential for marriage among early Jews] is not a concern of the Song; instead it revolves around desire and the quest for its fulfillment.... The Song shudders with passionate imagery, glows in the beauty of the body, and the glory is mutual."

5. In *New International Biblical Commentary: ... Song of Songs* (Henderson Publishers; Peabody, Massachusetts; 1999), Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler noted on page 243 that "According to many [interpreters], the central couple is not married. This view is supported by the fact that the lovers must part in the morning.... Also, most of the couple's lovemaking apparently takes place out of doors, in the wilds, and in gardens.... [Overall, the text] does not seem to insist that the appropriate expression of sexuality is necessarily limited to marriage."

6. In an article titled "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs," which appeared in the October 1937 issue of *The Journal of Theological Studies*, H.H. Rowley stated on page 358 that "I am not persuaded that ... the Songs had anything to do with a wedding occasion. They appear rather to be a series of poems in which a lover enshrined the love he gave and the love he received."

ATTACHMENT III - Relevant Portions of a Letter to My Former Parish Explaining in Detail the Nature of My Discontent

NOTE: This letter facilitates a greater understanding of my past difficulty. (It is edited here to streamline content and to omit certain extraneous matter included in the original.) So as to emphasize the message, rather than the people involved, I have x'ed out sections naming the parish and its clergy. Nevertheless, because nothing herein exposes secrets, I am willing to reveal their identities to anyone asking.

November 6, 1998

The Reverend xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Associate Rector, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxx, Virginia 2xxxx

Dear Mr. xxxxxxx:

Feeling a need to communicate with someone in authority, I selected you for the reason that we meet from time to time when you preside at the Wednesday Noon Eucharist. I don't recall whether I previously informed you that my wife is heavily involved in parish work at another Episcopal church, thus creating a scheduling difficulty which led in 1997 to my attending this parish (selected largely because the midday timing of the service best suited my needs). While my year 1998 financial pledge was not extraordinary, it was not insignificant either.

Over the past year, I have gradually become aware of a facet of this parish which disturbs me greatly. This would be the rector's seeming fixation upon matters sexual. On the attached Appendix A, I have identified seven leading instances in which the subject has arisen, directly or indirectly. These occurrences have impacted negatively upon my fidelity to the parish.

During my lifetime, I have been affiliated with Episcopal congregations elsewhere in Virginia and also Maryland, District of Columbia, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and California. In none of these, however, have I ever been exposed to such repeated allusions to parishioners' sex lives. Indeed, neither my wife nor I can recall ever hearing a sermon in any Episcopal parish) other than this one) that discussed approved (versus disapproved) sex practices. Additionally, the confirmation-preparation workbook I once used never touched upon sex at all. Moreover, a search of An Outline of the Faith (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 845-862) for possible references to sex reveals but a single oblique mention secreted amidst an abundance of other material.

Most educated people, including mainstream clergy, would likely not shy away from pondering scriptural nuances that may be advanced by antisex crusaders. However, the rector has not set forth a case amenable to debate. Basically, all he offers are shallow platitudes

unaccompanied by scholarly reasoning sufficient to constitute even prima facie underpinning for his views.¹

Conversely, my memorandum prepared in conjunction with this year's study classes (excerpts attached hereto) reflected reasoned research into relevant issues of this nature. I tendered explanatory interpretations of Biblical passages of the kind typically seized upon by our fundamentalist brethren in their attempts to foist their notions upon the rest of us through manipulation of the political process. Indeed, that granddaddy of all conservatives Barry Goldwater lamented shortly before his death that fundamentalists had infiltrated the Republican Party and were displacing its traditional values.

If the rector truly desires to effect widespread acceptance of the massive and far-reaching behavior modification program implicit in his pronouncements, one would expect to see him support his hypothesis by offering a point-by-point rebuttal of those theologians whose position he apparently finds so distasteful. Strangely, he does not seem to do so. Had I had engaged in shoddy documentation of my conclusions while assisting in writing legal analyses for the Interstate Commerce Commission, I would have been fired early on.

Indeed, responsible scholars in the psychological and sociological professions have studied sexuality extensively. There are reliable findings that stability of marriage (undisputedly a desirable goal for Christians and others) rests largely upon early preparation involving principles of intimate interaction between the genders. One of the rector's fond examples, absolute chastity outside of marriage, is in direct conflict with such principles.

You can say, of course, that God rules supreme over the views of these earthly professionals. But if the rector's version were to prevail, the result would most certainly be more divorces and/or unfulfilling marriages arising out of basic incompatibility, perceived only after it is too late to recognize the peril. Perhaps that is a price church-going people should be willing to pay, but if so, we should consider this inevitable result in advance, rather than leap headlong into the direction the rector would take us. As far as I know, he ignores the adverse collateral ramifications that would ensue. (He probably has never even thought about this.)

Undoubtedly, the relations between the sexes have a moral element and, as such, may be appropriate for theological counsel. But at this parish, other precepts necessarily get short shrift when so much emphasis--virtually all negative--is placed upon sex. The various messages emanating from the pulpit appear fundamentally out of balance.

¹ A good example of this is the rector's article in *The Episcopalian* for May 1987. To say--as it does--that sex before marriage is like communion before baptism, is ludicrous in light of my extensive and fully documented research, as explained in the body of this letter and in the attachments.

Curiously, of the three church presentations by the rector to which my wife accompanied me, sex warnings came up in two of them. (I guess fitting sex into a Christmas Eve message would be a bit difficult.) Neither my wife nor I have clandestine sex partners. The rector's incessant harping on sex seems to imply that he suspects we might, something I find a bit insulting. Moreover, he likely sympathizes with the fundamentalists' opposition to repeal of an anachronistic Virginia criminal statute (Title 18.2, §361A) limiting what even married couples may lawfully do in the bedroom.

Incidentally, the rector says that he laments the recent "feminization of society," whatever that means. Maybe he favors repeal of the women's suffrage amendment.

In closing, let me say I acknowledge that God's message can reach us through Scripture (recognizing, of course, that the various Biblical writers expressed outlooks reflecting their particular life experiences). A problem for modern Christians is understanding the meanings of Biblical text originally written in ancient languages. I expended some effort on this subject in the aforementioned study class memorandum, specifically concluding that I doubt God would have us literally hate our parents (a sickening thought) as the English translation directs us to do in Luke 14:26.

I further believe that God encourages us to grow and benefit from the cumulative wisdom gleaned from our study of this world, thereby empowering each generation to improve its understanding of the Gospel by applying newly found knowledge to the circumstances then prevailing. Notwithstanding that the grace of God is eternal, we can strive to enrich our insights into the greater scheme.

The collective result of the foregoing is that I have decided my future spiritual enrichment must lie in another parish of the Diocese. (Will you kindly see that my name is removed from current records.) I guess I've wasted a year and a half of my life while figuring all this out.

Respectfully,
/signature/

APPENDIX A - EXAMPLES OF ANTISEX EXPRESSION

1. In the leaflet entitled *Distinctives of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx*, a passage reads, "... single persons [are to govern themselves] by abstinence from sexual activity." Why does the rector not similarly admonish us against such acts as murder, which I am under the impression Episcopalians are expected to refrain from?
2. During the January meeting of the Men's Ministry, the rector articulated that we should eschew pornography, a word excluded from my personal lexicon because I have learned it means different things to different people. (I have to guess what the rector meant by his use of the term; he never disclosed his definition.)
3. At the same men's meeting, it was apparent that a goodly number of attendees had visited with considerable enthusiasm the then-recent mass gathering of Promisekeepers. My understanding of this organization is that while its publicly stated goals appear laudable, the underlying motivations of its sponsors--slanted toward the fundamentalists' agenda--are inimical to my beliefs.
4. Enrolled with me in this year's study group was a couple, the husband of which is on the professional staff of an extreme right-wing political organization characterized in part by antisex dogma. While the chances of leader Gary Bauer's achieving his objective of winning the presidency of the United States are deemed slim, I believe the agenda which the group pursues--involving suppression of political freedom for others--is dangerous for the country. That this couple resides in the District of Columbia (where there is a plethora of Episcopal churches) but comes all the way out to this rector's parish is eye-opening. They apparently are finding something considerably different from that which I am seeking.
5. The rector's Easter sermon claimed that the young stars of the movie *Titanic* foolishly lost themselves in a moment of sex, rather than delay their carnal gratification until after achieving a wedded state. People I know who saw this movie regard the sex as constituting only a fractional aspect of the woman's realization that the world offered more than the sheltered life with which she was familiar. The sex scene likely overwhelmed the rector to the point of precluding his ability to grasp the main message.
6. At the spring banquet, the rector in his remarks brought up sex in some negative context, the specifics of which I don't remember. I do, however, recall feeling it coming. Sure enough, it came.
7. The September newsletter report on the Lambeth conference is especially insightful. The rector voiced his approval of the third world bishops' criticism of homosexuality (most U.S. bishops tend to rank sex issues low on their list of priorities). He then uses this as an opening for yet another condemnation of nonmarital heterosexual acts. Sadly--but not surprisingly--the column is totally silent on everything else that occurred at Lambeth, as if nothing matters but sex!

Sources Used in Above

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The Christian Response to the Sexual Revolution (Mace)

Christian Century; May 6, 1987 (Karen LeBacqz)

Human Sexuality: A Psychosocial Perspective (Hettlinger)

Journal of Sex Research, February 1972 (Reevy)

Sexual Shame (McClintock) - p. 41

Promise or Pretence: A Christian's Guide to Sexual Morals, SCM Press, 1994 (A.E. Harvey) - p. 63

Sex in History, G. Rattray Taylor: p. 241

Sex and the New Morality, F.C. Wood, Jr. - pp 34, 120-1

Honest Sex, Rustom and Della Roy: p. 87

Not used in paper, but perhaps relevant on page 23 of:

Sex and the Christian Life (Seward Hiltner-Professor of Pastoral Theology of the University of Chicago's Federated Theological Faculty, and currently [1957] Visiting Professor at the Menninger School of Psychiatry):

"... [R]elatively well-educated people seem usually indifferent about having their children glimpse them in the nude at home; whereas relatively uneducated people often regard it as unnatural to have nudity in the home even when sexual intercourse is being engaged in with the spouse."

Not used in paper, but perhaps relevant to footnote 10:

"Neither the Old or the New Testament can be treated as a code book of timeless truths which can be isolated from the situations in which they were uttered.... The Bible does not present a united front with reference to sexual ethics, because it was written from and to different communities, whose circumstances and needs were far from identical. It therefore represents not one tradition but a number of traditions, whose very diversity is evidence that they were living and changing.

Not used in paper, but in W.G. Cole's *Sex in Christianity and Psychology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 195?:

"The church has been guilty of preserving and preaching a point of view not generic to Christian faith, an attitude which originated in Hellenistic dualism and which is not only un-Biblical but also anti-Biblical." (p. 285)

"Pre-school boys and girls accompany one another to the toilet and continue conversation with complete nonchalance while they evacuate bowel and bladder. Children raised in such an atmosphere seldom reveal any morbid curiosity about the anatomy of the opposite sex, or any shame about their own bodies." (p. 295)

More Sapp language on p. 33: "The O.T. makes fully clear both in the laws and in descriptions of marriages that the woman was, in a fundamental sense, the property of her husband.... Coitus with another man, therefore, was fundamentally an affront to the husband's exclusive possession of his wife.... This 'chattel motif' naturally led to a double standard, by which the wife could sin only against her own marriage whereas the husband could not sin against his marriage but only against that of another man."

GG's ELEMENTS OF LUST: an abnormally elevated level of desire; an avaricious craving or greed; a seizure of dominion; an unrestrained urge to wrest control, with utter disregard for negative consequences upon the entity lusted after.

See Prof. Wescott's comment on "promiscuity." (PB Philosophy, Vol. II, P. 55)

Virgins in 1 Corinthians 7 (LA Bible): 6 in text plus 2 in note q

1. Virgo intacta - "A woman who has never known a man."

2. Roma locuta. Causa finita est. - "Rome has spoken. The matter is settled."

"...[T]he beauty which should be preserved by art was, and is, chiefly woman--young, pretty, and for the most part naked--and sexual connection with her." Leo Tolstoy, "Introduction to the Works of Guy de Maupassant" in *What is Art?*, The World's Classics, London, Oxford University Press, 1930 & 1959, pp. 35, 37.