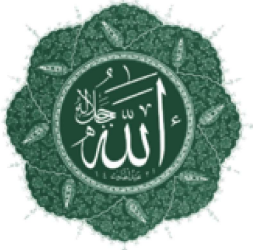


Islam The Religion Of Almighty Allah

Introduction to Islam and Islamic Beliefs and Holy Texts, Also of Great Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him)



"The Filth of Marriage" & "The Devil's Gateway" Misogyny, the Church Fathers & Christianity

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Misogyny and anti-feminism are embedded strains of conflict interwoven throughout the history of Western Civilization originating in the pagan roots that corrupted the pure teachings of Christ, thus bringing this ancient pattern of oppression into what has become the syncretic system of belief and practice with the appellation of Christianity. "Inspired by the vision of a celibate Christ, preoccupied with the notion of original sin and the subsequent curse of concupiscence transmitted to Adam's progeny, which was dealt on in detail by Augustine, Tertullian, and other patristic writers, Christianity produced a remarkable catalogue of exploits against the demons of lust" (Winter xxv). The patristic writers of the church often represented this demon of lust as woman. Medieval clerics, and their predecessors extending through the Church Fathers, finding much of their basis in Paul, were markedly anti-feminist, and in reality, misogynist. "For clerics, Eve was the archetypal human woman whose gluttony and pride caused man to be driven out of heaven" (Beidler 68). The religion which bears the name of Christianity, which bears little, if any, resemblance to the teachings of the humble Jewish prophet born of Mary, has an extensive history of interpretation, reinterpretation, and schism over even its most essential theological aspects. The disciples of Christ were known to pray in a synagogue in Jerusalem and to keep the Jewish law, and were true monotheists, believing in God's Absolute Oneness. There were several names for early monotheistic Semitic Christians; the most common being Ebionites. It is only with the "apostle" Paul, Roman citizen and native of the city of Tarsus, a known center of the cult of Mithras, a former persecutor of Christians who never physically met Christ, and later innovators that one gets many of the ideas which became "Christian" theology and practice. This is one of the reasons that many scholars and philosophers throughout time, including Nietzsche, have called Paul "the second founder of Christianity." Even within the strain of Christianity influenced by Paul, heretical arguments from monotheists such as the Arians aside, it was not until the fourth or fifth century that many of the "essential" issues of Christianity were decided upon within what eventually became the Roman Catholic church. Claiming that many of these issues were determined even by the fifth century is slightly misleading, as the title "Fathers of the Church," is given to those writers who established Christian doctrine before the eighth century. The "Doctors of the Church" include the four Western Fathers: Ambrose, Augustine, Pope Gregory I, and Jerome. The Western Fathers

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are Athanasius, Basil, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus. The earlier Eastern fathers include Clement of Alexandria, St. Justin Martyr, and Origen, while Tertullian is sometimes included as an "earlier Western Father."

Christianity, extending back to the early fathers, emphasized the superiority of virginity over marriage, and chastity in marriage to sexual activity. In the writings of the early Church Fathers, sex and sexuality were seen as evil, by their nature, and within a male-centered world view, the inability of these men to deal with their sexual desire was projected upon all women in the painted image of her as insatiable sexually, and thus the epitome of evil. Thus, there are many writings which contain misogynist aphorisms, anecdotes, parables, and confessions within the canon of early patristic writings.

One of the most concise discussions of the role of women in Christian history is to be found in Mace's [Marriage Between East and West](#): "It would be hard to find anywhere a collection of more degrading references to the female sex than the early Church Fathers provide. Lecky, the famous historian speaks of these fierce incentives which form so conspicuous and so grotesque a portion of the writings of the Fathers...'**woman was represented as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance on account of the curses she has brought upon the world. She should be ashamed of her dress, for it is the memorial of her fall. She should be especially ashamed of her beauty, for it is the most potent instrument of the devil**" (Mace, 80).

Important examples of misogynist rhetoric can be found in the writings of Jerome and Tertullian. In Letter 22 to Eustochium, chapter 22, Jerome recommends to the reader, that if he wants to know how free a virgin is from "many vexations" as opposed to the wife, who is "bound," to read Tertullian's work "*To a Philosopher Friend*" and his other treatises on virginity, as well as several other works by other Christian authors. It is interesting that Jerome recommends Tertullian, a second century theologian who actually coined the phrase "original sin." "Original sin" is the idea, foreign to the Bible itself, that the taint of sin transmitted from generation to generation by the act of procreation. In addition, St. Augustine extensively promoted ultimate misogynist idea of "original sin" in fourth century in his extensive theological works. Tertullian was a true misogynist Christian, and many of his works are still accepted as orthodox by the Roman Catholic church and included in the recognized body of patristic literature. Tertullian addresses womenkind on behalf of Christianity in the following excerpt from one of his writings: "**Do you know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserters of the divine law; you are she who persuades him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert-that is death-even the Son of God had to die**" (Mace, 80-81).

It is because of theological doctrine and its exegesis by men like Tertulian that women in Western Civilization since these doctrines' adoption, have been oppressed.

MARRIAGE

"He who is unmarried is concerned with the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. Whereas he who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife. And the unmarried woman, or the virgin, is set apart. She who is unmarried thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit. Whereas she who is married thinks about the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (1 Cor. 7-9). Paul states that people who married did not necessarily commit sin, but would have "tribulation of the flesh" in their marital bonds. Marriage would cause sexual temptations to arise, according to traditional Christian exegetes, and it would take away one from the duties one owes to God. In Letter 22 to Eustochium, chapter 22, Jerome states "I will say now that the Apostle bids us pray without ceasing, and that one who lives up to his obligations in the married state cannot so pray; we either pray continually and are virgins, or we cease to pray in order to be obedient to our marriage vows. 'And if a virgin marry...she does not sin, nevertheless, she shall have tribulation of the flesh" (1 Cor. 7:28) (Mierow 155).

Sex was looked down upon by Jerome and others of his authority, even for procreation. Unlike the Judaic tradition, with its basis in the Prophets and the Torah, Christianity did not have an example for marriage in Jesus, who was celibate. "In original Christianity, there is no place for marriage" (Izetbegovic, 262). Jesus' example in the scriptures is one of absolute chastity and celibacy, and he commands this unto his followers in the book of Mark: "You were told

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▼ October (2)

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not to commit adultery, and I say unto you: 'Everyone of you who looks at a woman with desire has already committed adultery in his heart' (Mark 5:27-28). In order to live according to the words, and more importantly, the personal example of Jesus, as represented by the "New Testament," one must live in complete chastity. Many of the Early Christians, such as Epiphanius, believed that "virginity was the foundation of the church," or even that virgins alone could reclaim that angelic state by which man becomes worthy of Heaven (Winter xxv). "By the sixth century, most notably in Eastern Christianity, the Church had settled into a set of moral teachings which expected virginity from all men and women with a higher vocation, tolerating marriage only for less gifted believers" (Winters xxv).

"In general, Christianity looks at marriage as a necessary evil, as an unavoidable reduction of perfection [which was virginity/chastity]... 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman, but to avoid prostitution, man should have woman, and a woman a man' (Corinthians 1-2). In this epistle, we feel the clear Christian principles weakening and moving closer to reality. It is a kind of compromise. From the Christian point of view, marriage is not a solution based on principle, but one forced by practice ('...to avoid prostitution'-St. Paul)" (Izetbegovic, 263). Jerome, in the same arguments advanced by Augustine, does not say that the Church condemns the institution of marriage, but that it "subordinates and regulates it. The Church knows that in any great house there are vessels not only of gold and silver, but also of clay and wood" (Beidler, 22).

There are many further interesting misogynist references in Jerome's treatise of C.E. 393 "Adversus Jovinianum," or 'against Jovinianum.' "Adversus Jovinianum" was a refutation of a 'heretical' individual who had wrote in the fourth century "certain opinions about virginity and marriage, food and eating, baptism, the nature of sin, and the rewards and punishments of the afterlife" (Beidler 20). One of the many discussions of the comparison between virginity and marriage is to be found in Jerome's "Adversus Jovinianum." The analogy of wheat bread to chastity, and barley bread to marriage is a reference to Jerome 7. Here, Jerome states that, "Paul says to the unmarried and the widows that it is good for them to remain chaste, but if they cannot do so then it is better for them to marry than to burn. Paul means that wheat bread is better than barley bread, but for those who cannot achieve the wheat, then eating the barley is better than eating excrement...It is clear that chastity is the highest virtue, but for people who cannot live chastely, marriage is better than undisciplined fornication" (Beidler 21).

Jerome cites Paul's saying of wives that "If the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will," as meaning that she is free to choose this, though this choice is not preferred. In arguing against remarriage after being widowed, Jerome compares such a marriage to prostitution, and refers to the sexual relationship in the institution of marriage as "filth." "Surely it is better voluntarily to embrace chastity than to return to the filth of marriage. To be sure, Paul said that second and even more marriages are permitted to a widow, but that is only because it is better for a woman who cannot or will not remain chaste to prostitute herself to one man than to many" (Beidler 22).

Jerome states in no uncertain terms, that for a Christian, "chastity is always preferable to the marriage state. That is why we say that, while marriage fills the earth, virginity and chastity fill paradise" (Beidler 22).

I have already quoted Izetbegovic as asserting that the Gospel of Mark contains evidence to this effect, as well as the personal example of Jesus. But Christianity does not have historical integrity so that one can easily make such a linear appeal to the scriptures. I have already mentioned Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, where he refers to the issues of marriage and virginity. Jerome compares being chaste to aspiring to be angels, and any type of sexuality to falling to the level of the beasts. Essentially, his statements epitomize the dichotomy between religion and science that is the legacy of the Christian West in his arguments against any kind of biological need for human sexuality. Jovinian's argument that the human race would die out if Jerome's beloved principle of chastity was truly implemented on a massive scale has some logical merit. Jerome calls Jovinian's argument "absurd," but it is really his own argument that seems absurd. "We are all called to virginity, but few will choose it, and it is clear that there are plenty of wailing infants in the world" (Beidler 22).

Jerome speaks at length of the merit of virginity in his writings.

Though Jerome's arguments may seem intimidating, they are illogical.

Jerome says in reference to virginity; "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Now, this should be a bit frightening for a Christian, in that he is comparing chastity to salvation as an allusion to scripture. Jerome also says, "There is no question that the Lord loves virgins more than others. They have chosen willingly in a way that was merely recommended, not commanded, and their free choice makes them superior" (Beidler 21). In a parallel to Tertullian's earlier comments on the fallen nature of women, sexuality, and thus marriage, Jerome states: "Eve was a virgin in Paradise...Paradise is where you belong...And that you may know that virginity is natural and that marriage came after the offense..." (Mierow 151). Essentially, in Christianity, theological positions have been imposed upon and thus obscure the original meaning and texts of scripture, thus questions and arguments, may have some logical merit but the deviance of Christian theology has been so great as to not allow true discussion of the coherence of this theology or of the entire Bible as "revelation." Of course, the integrity of the Bible as a text of pure "revelation" has been called into question for a long time.

The natural idea that the sexual organs and the sexual relationship within marriage are to be enjoyed would in traditional Christianity largely be looked at as impious at the very least, and probably as a sinful deviation from "true" Christian morality. "For the body was of the devil," and, as Gregory of Nyssa stated in "On Virginity," 'if the life which is promised to the just by the Lord after the resurrection is similar to that of angels-and release from marriage is a peculiar characteristic of the angelic nature-he [the virgin] has already received some of the beauties of the promise"(Fuchs, 100).

In comparing the virgin woman to the married, Jerome advises, in his "Letter to Eustochium," Chapter 18, it becomes obvious that the only woman who is free from some of the corruption of her gender is the one who becomes asexual through chastity in aspiration to emulate the angels. "When God says to Eve, 'In pain and in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children,' say to yourself, 'That is a law for a married woman, not for me.' And when he continues, 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband,' say again, 'Let her desire be to her husband who has not Christ for her spouse.' And when, last of all, he says, 'Thou shalt surely die,' once more, say, 'Marriage indeed must end in death; but the life on which I have resolved is independent of sex. Let those who are wives keep the place and the time that properly belong to them. For me, virginity is consecrated in the persons of Mary and of Christ" (Brady 165).

In Chapter 23 of Augustine's treatise on Holy Virginity, he states: "When He [Jesus] proclaimed in a divine and terrifying manner that spouses must not separate except because of fornication, the disciples said to Him: 'If the case of a man with his wife is so, it is not expedient to marry!' And He replied: 'Not all accept this teaching... For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the kingdom of heaven's sake' (Matthew 19.10-12) (Wilcox, 167-8). Augustine explains in the next chapter that Jesus did not mean "eunuchs" in the manner of the eunuchs of the kings and wealthy. Perhaps his arguments were meant to undermine the recurrent trend of castration in the Christian church by those who took these verses literally, such as Origen, one of the Church Fathers of the Eastern Church, who is paradoxically known for his emphasis on allegorical reading of the scriptures. "In Christianity, there has always existed a tendency toward castration. Origen performed castration on himself to purify his body....The Church only forbade castration at the end of the nineteenth century" (Izetbegovic 263). Mutilation of the "organs of generation" is the ultimate physical step towards the condemnation of sexuality, and was common in several pagan religions that existed in the Greco-Roman world. Castration essentially shows the violent nature of the repressed sexual drive, which is outwardly expressed in the ideologies of misogyny in the Christian church, inwardly expressed as self-mutilation and projection of the ideas of evil onto the woman as an archetype in Eve, in the immediate reality of one's wife or relations. Castration, and the ideas which would reinforce such an action, go completely against the innate human gift of the "organs of generation," which many believed were meant to be used freely within the sacred bond of marriage.

The understanding one gets, from reading the traditional Christian understandings of human sexuality and its relation to religion as a social institution, is that there is a great spiritual and religious unbalance in Western Civilization; the effects of this can be studied systematically in the religious and secular dissent that has become manifest throughout the centuries.

It is, of course, fundamental to understanding Christianity that one sees the ways in which it stands irreconcilably distant from Judaism and many of the "Old Testament" teachings, as well as from logical coherency as a religious-social institution. The teachings of Christianity focus on the personal spiritual life, not the integrity of the Christian society as a whole. However, in its essence personal spiritual life is diverted by the poisons of misogyny, self-hatred, and the guilt of being born originally sinful.

Further Notes:

"Perceiving...God to be male, orthodox Christians considered male supremacy an extension of heavenly order, St. Augustine wrote in the early fifth century, "we must conclude, that a husband is meant to rule over his wife as the spirit rules over the flesh (18)." In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul tried to explain the reason for male supremacy: For a man did not originally spring from woman, but woman was made out of man; and was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the sake of man." (19) As late as 1977, Pope Paul VI still explained that women were barred from priesthood "because our Lord was a man." (20) Among the orthodox, women were to take submissive roles. In the first letter to Timothy, St. Paul says: Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness, I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. (21) When Christian monks in the fourth century hacked the great [pagan] scholar Hypatia to death with oyster shells, St. Cyril explained that it was because she was an iniquitous female who had presumed, against God's commandments, to teach men. (22) (Ellerbe 7-8)

"Augustine believed that our freedom of will to choose good over evil was lost with the sin of Adam. Adam's sin, that, in Augustine's words, is in the "nature of the semen from which we were propagated," brought suffering and death into the world, took away our free will, and left us with an inherently evil nature. To sin is now inevitable. Should we occasionally do good, it is only good, it is only because of irresistible grace. "When, therefore, man lives according to man, not according to God, he is like the devil," Augustine wrote." (Ellerbe 31-32)

"Human sexuality, to Augustine, clearly demonstrates a human inability to choose good over evil. Augustine based this belief upon his own experience. Having himself led a promiscuous life in his youth during which he fathered and then abandoned an illegitimate child, he thought that sex was intrinsically evil. He complained of sexual desire: Who can control this when its appetite is aroused? No one! In the very movement of this appetite, then, it has no 'mode' that responds to decisions of the will...Yet what he wishes he cannot accomplish...In the very movement of the appetite, it has no mode corresponding to decision of the will." (32) "This diabolical excitement of the genitals," as Augustine referred to sex, is evidence from Adam's original sin which is now transmitted "from the mother's womb," tainting all human beings with sin, and leaving them incapable of choosing good over evil or determining their own destiny." (Ellerbe 33)

St. Jerome warns, "Regard everything as poison which bears within it the seed of sensual pleasure."

In her book *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, Elaine Pagels writes:

Clement (of Alexandria) excludes...intercourse with a...pregnant, barren, or menopausal wife and for that matter, with one's wife 'in the morning,' 'in the daytime,' or 'after dinner.' Clement warns, indeed, that 'not even at night, although in darkness, is it fitting to carry on immodestly or indecently, but with modesty, so that whatever happens, happens in the light of reason...' for even that union 'which is legitimate is still dangerous, except in so far as it is engaged in procreation of children.' (Ellerbe 33)

"In April of 418 the pope excommunicated Pelagius. Ever since, the Catholic church has officially embraced the doctrine of hereditary transmission of original sin." (Ellerbe 35)

"By opposing Pelagius, the Church adopted Augustine's idea that people are inherently evil, incapable of choice, and thus in need of strong authority. Human sexuality is seen as evidence of their sinful nature." (Ellerbe 40)

"The witch hunts were an eruption of orthodox Christianity's vilification of women, "the weaker vessel," in St. Paul's words. The second century St. Clement of Alexandria wrote: "Every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman." (Ellerbe 114)

"The sixth century Christian philosopher, Boethius, wrote in the Consolation of Philosophy, "Women is a temple built upon a sewer." Bishops at the sixth century Council of Macon voted as to whether women had souls. In the tenth century Odo of Cluny declared, "To embrace a woman is to embrace

a sack of manure..." The thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas suggested that God had made a mistake in creating woman: "nothing [deficient] or defective should have been produced in the first establishment of things; so woman ought not to have been produced then." And Lutherans at Wittenberg debated whether women were really human beings at all. Orthodox Christians held women responsible for all sin. As the Bible's Apocrypha states, "Of woman came the beginning of sin/And thanks to her, we all must die."

Women are often understood to be impediments to spirituality...As I Corinthians 7:1 states, "It is a good thing for a man to have nothing to do with a woman." (Ellerbe 115)

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