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FEAR GOD, FEAR SEX

The Politics of Lust, by John Ince **A Radical New Perspective On Sex**

Why is sex such a hot issue in faith communities? Why do many religious leaders support sexual prohibitions in religious codes yet ignore many non-sexual prohibitions?

In *The Politics of Lust* (September 2003) Vancouver lawyer and sexual theorist John Ince, explores those questions in his investigation of an intriguing demographic correlation: the more stratified the religious culture, the more severe its sexual prohibitions. The more egalitarian the religious community, the more relaxed its sexual values.

For example, the most antisexual religious groups, such as fundamentalists of all faiths, eagerly embrace spiritual and social stratification. They perceive God in overtly hierarchic terms - usually an all-powerful male figure, often described as "Lord," to whom the faithful must slavishly submit. Fundamentalist social organization is also highly stratified. Males rank above females who are above children, and mankind ranks above the natural world. Leaders are appointed by elites rather than elected by common folk.

In contrast, in much more sex-positive religious cultures such as the ancient Tantric and Taoist traditions in India and China that are now gaining popularity in the West, God is conceived not as a jealous patriarch but rather the ineffable essence in all things. Men and women have equal status and the environment is to be nurtured rather than exploited.

Ince contends that the first and most overlooked allusion to the link between sexual attitudes and political structure is the Bible. He points to the extraordinary attention given to sexual attitudes in Genesis. Indeed the very first biblical reference to human emotion is not joy, anger or sadness but the complex feeling of genital shame. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were free of such negativity in Eden, but acquire it after the Fall. In its cryptic language the Bible tells us that sexual fears are enormously significant, a barometer of our relationship with God, each other, and our self.

Why is sex-negativity linked with spiritual and social stratification, and why is egalitarianism usually sex-positive? Ince answers that complex question in accessible terms. For example, Ince shows that prohibitions against nudity, masturbation, or erotic art teach an individual to regard his or her own sexuality as "inferior." Perceiving one's own nature in such stratified terms, one is more inclined to look for the same top-down structure in external relationships, such as with God and with other people. Sexual prohibitions breed the psychology that embraces the pecking order. That is one reason people who occupy the top of the pecking order favour sexual prohibitions.

Religious patriarchs have another more personal reason for their sexual censoriousness. They tend to have the greatest fear of sex. Why? They face the harshest sexual prohibitions. A Pope must completely deny his sexual urges for his entire life. A visit to a prostitute cost Jimmy Swaggart his church. When your own sexual impulses can get you in such trouble you cannot help but perceive sexuality as frightening, and that feeling will inspire attacks on the sexual expression of others, which in turn reinforces the hierarchic structure in which you are the top dog.

The Politics of Lust (Pivotal Press, 2003, \$24.95, softcover, 336 pages, ISBN 0-9696567-1-8)

Ince's tour schedule:

Vancouver: Oct 6-10, **Calgary** 12-14, **Toronto** 15-18,

Montreal 19-22, **Ottawa** 23-25, **Winnipeg** 25-27, **Edmonton** 28-30

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