

## ASSESSING THE ASCETIC VIEW - DOES GOD WANT YOU TO REFUSE TO INDULGE YOURSELF AND LIVE IN A STATE OF HARSH DISCIPLINE?

John the Baptist who ate honey and insects and lived in a cave in the desert is a prime example of an ascetic. Is that a twisted abnormal thing to do?

Many say, "God would not have given us the capacity for pleasure if pleasure is wrong. He is our maker. He gave us skin that enjoys being touched, the feel of nice clothes or the afternoon summer breeze. He gave us eyes that enjoy the pleasure of beautiful things. The list could go on. To maintain that the Lord is a sadist is to contradict reason and what the very eyes he made for us to admire with behold."

But it assumes what it wants to prove. Why can't a God give you great capacity for happiness and pleasure so that you have the choice of abandoning them for him? The failure of the argument makes the connecting of God to happiness extraordinary and shallow.

God makes babies. So, he sends them to families that are bonded in evil. To corrupt them? "No", the theologian replies, "It is in order that they might grow into holy persons despite the bad environment. They are sent into the well of evil in order that they might come out of it with amazing holiness." We learn from this that God can bestow the power to enjoy the flesh so that we might renounce it. We learn from this that God only wants good works that are difficult to perform.

But if he is asking that of the babies maybe he is not asking that of me? That is a very convenient assumption! So you can let them have the hard lot while you reap the benefits and have a calm life?

Some will reason: "Happiness must not be sinful. If it is then how can it be a sin to do harm? Then we would be as well off sinning and going to Hell forever than being free from sin."

The argument for asceticism does not say happiness is sinful but that breaking your vow to give it up is the sin. Yet the implication is that happiness is a sort of threat if not a sin.

If you are not supposed to consider what you can get out of anything the argument of those people fails. In Hell you suffer but not for love but in Heaven you suffer for love. We are not as well off going to Hell as Heaven in the moral sense. But pain wise they may not differ.

"God would not want us to suffer too much for he loves us. It must hurt him to see us suffer."

If suffering is necessary to be able to love then he would not love us unless he commanded us to suffer greatly. He may hate seeing us suffer but he has no choice when love cannot happen without it.

The replies to rabid Puritanism are quite naïve when you think about them.

The Catholic magazine, The Brief of St Anthony of Padua (Vol 44, No 4) stated that Christianity is not a religion of killjoy and that the reason God gives pleasure is that it is meant to help us carry out our duties. And it says this is the reason it is wrong to seek pleasure in itself. You must work for the duty and use the pleasure for that end. So it is your duty to go to Mass on Sunday even if you have never missed Mass before no matter how much pleasure you will gain from missing Mass. This tells us that rules matter and not feelings. And the rules are entitled to be cruel too when feelings don't matter. Duty is a hateful word. It implies something that you must do whether you want to or not and something that is sterile and scary. Pleasure will not be possible when engaged in just for the sake of fulfilling a duty. If pleasure is just for helping you to do your duty then it follows that the less pleasure the better of a person you are. It is not the pleasure that is wanted but the duty and the pleasure is just exploited for the sake of the duty. So you are supposed to hate every minute of the pleasure or just think of the duty.

If you have a duty and enjoyment of pleasure motivates you to do the duty, there seems to be nothing wrong with that. But is that not manipulative of God to have made us like that? It means part of us is like, "If I didn't have that fun in doing the duty I wouldn't bother. Its about the fun not what I should do morally."

## DOES INCARNATION DISPROVE ASCETICISM?

The Christian Church argues that God became man once. They believe that Jesus Christ was true God and true man - fully God and yet fully man at the same time.

If God took a body that was capable of pleasure then God must have valued human pleasure greatly. But God enfleshed could endure constant torment and make it look like nothing was wrong. Jesus said that the Pharisees ought not to walk around with sad pale faces when they were fasting but to look as if they were happy.

If the incarnation would mean that God approved of pleasure it would be clear that it could not have happened.

God may have been forced to allow himself to have some happiness in a human body not because it was good but to draw people to himself by going among them at a level that was just right for them to build on. Happiness would have been a necessary evil in such a case.

And the teaching of the Bible is that Jesus' was accustomed to torment and misery. It even says he endured a horrific death on the cross.

## Conclusion

Belief in God should be discouraged. It justifies extreme religious sadism.

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