

LENT'S MESSAGE

COUNTERCULTURAL

[Bill Donohue](#)

The Lenten message could not be more countercultural. In a society that prizes self-indulgence—we can't have enough money, drugs and sex—it is difficult to understand, much less appreciate, what Lent stands for: penance, forgiveness and self-denial. The latter, in particular, is seen by our elites as repulsive.

If there is one person who hated self-denial—he said so explicitly—it was the man who helped secularize, and sexually engineer, our society. His name was Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy*.

The magazine, which Hefner founded in 1953, was not the most corrupting aspect of his work. It was his “Playboy Philosophy.” Launched in December 1962, it gave the ensuing sexual revolution an ideological springboard. He offered several installments, reaching millions of men, an audience no cultural Marxist or feminist liberator could ever command.

“The Playboy Philosophy” was adamant in contending that the individual is “the all important element in society.” From a Catholic perspective, this is absurd. It is the family, not the individual, that is “the all important element in society.” But it would have been inconceivable for a man like Hefner to believe this. Indeed, he harbored a particular antipathy for Catholicism.

Similarly, “The Playboy Philosophy” maintained that “the primary goal of society should be individual happiness.” Predictably, happiness was defined as pleasure, not joy. “Happiness and pleasure are mental and physical states of being and society should emphasize the positive aspects of

both.” It would be hard to make a more anti-Christian philosophical statement.

Self-discipline, perseverance, and personal responsibility—what I call the “vital virtues”—are what Hefner disparaged. All require a measure of restraint, a property “The Playboy Philosophy” abhorred. In fact, it treated selflessness as a sin. “We oppose the tendency to meaningless selflessness in our present society”; he singled out self-sacrifice and self-denial for condemnation.

Hefner’s obsession with satisfying our individual primordial appetites did not allow him to appreciate selflessness as a virtue, one that is best expressed when we sacrifice for the good of others. Mother Teresa exemplified this virtue.

Mother Teresa is a great Lenten role model, taking her cues from Jesus, who died on the Cross for our salvation. She could not have comforted the sick and dying, caring for outcasts like lepers, without practicing self-denial. Absent self-denial, selflessness is impossible.

And then there is Hefner. As I recount in [*The War on Virtue: How the Ruling Class is Killing the American Dream*](#), he practiced what he preached.

He was an equal-opportunity predator who had sex with men, women, and dogs. He was accused of raping multiple women. If he got a gal pregnant, he arranged for an abortion. Like many men who are addicted to pornography and live a promiscuous lifestyle, Hefner was unable to get aroused without partaking in new experiences, some of which were sickening, to put it mildly. He provided girlfriends with drugs to endure constant orgies that he watched voyeuristically. Further, he engaged in acts of bestiality and forced others to do the same.

Admittedly, Hefner is an extreme example of what happens when self-denial is trashed. But his effect on the culture, via “The Playboy Philosophy,” has proven to be lasting and

destructive.

Penance, forgiveness and self-denial are not only good for those individuals who observe Lent, their exercise is good for society. We need more Lenten observances, not less of them.