

**Holy Eparchial Synod of the G.O.C. in America**

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Lord

**Encyclical**

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# **An Orthodox View on Human Sexuality**

To the Genuine Orthodox Christians in the lands of the Americas, who are faithful in Christ Jesus:

*Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Eph. 1: 3-4)*

Beloved Christians,

The Church of Christ holds chastity to be among the greatest of virtues. In its purest form as virginity, it emulates the bodiless life of the angels; while in its lesser form as honorable Christian marriage it provides a vehicle for families to be created and live in harmony. Now, however, we are living in a time when sins of the flesh are being promoted as never before in history. Traditional Christian chastity has been abandoned, forgotten, and maligned, while being replaced by unrestrained sexual license. This new and completely secular form of morality, commonly called the Sexual Revolution, came into its own in the late 1960's and has since gotten progressively worse. The proponents of this revolution have entirely usurped the popular culture of the West, bombarding Christians, especially the youth, with a message of diabolical effect which has unseated the love of Christ from their hearts and separated them from God. Moreover, they have marched through the institutions originally formed to serve the common good, such as schools and the media, abusing the public trust which these institutions still command. The Sexual Revolution has had widespread effects on human behavior. In its wake we see a landscape devastated by moral confusion, spiritual darkness, mental illness, sexual perversion and bondage, rape, abuse, and broken

families and communities.

As a result, many people are confused about God's will as it pertains to sexuality and family life. In what follows we shall present a brief list of the key issues relating to these subjects, in order to remind the Orthodox faithful of the truth as revealed by our Lord in Sacred Scripture and as preserved in Holy Tradition, and encourage them to adhere with fervor to the moral teaching of the Church.

**On Sexuality and Marriage.** Marriage exists for the sake of channeling sexuality toward chastity, childbearing, and family life. Sexual relations presuppose, as precursors, love, sacrificial commitment, and the Church's Mystery of marriage. Sexual relations, then, outside of marriage are contrary to its purpose as ordained by God, Who is the cause, principle, intelligibility, and end of all things.

**On Beauty, Modesty, and Shame.** True human beauty is the image of God manifested in virtue. Modesty is a quality of temperance; while shame, being the fear of baseness, preserves the divine image in each person and protects human dignity.

**On Premarital Cohabitation.** For a man and woman to "hook up" temporarily or live informally together without being married constitutes the sin of fornication. Fornication reduces the human capacity for trust and fosters the objectification of others, viewing them not as individuals but solely as instruments for personal sexual gratification. Only a life-long commitment consecrated in the Mystery of marriage preserves the union of a man and a woman undefiled.

**On Divorce and Remarriage.** Marriage is intended by God to be an indissoluble bond, and in the Gospel the Lord mentions only infidelity as a just cause for divorce. If the Church permits divorce in other, extreme situations, this is to be understood not as a norm, but as an expression of economy: of God's wondrous compassionate condescension toward our weakness. As for remarriage, it represents a certain failure to attain the high standard of Christian perfection, which is why the tenor of the service for a second (and by extension, a third) marriage is, to a degree, penitential.

**On Abortion.** Deliberately inducing an abortion is infanticide, since it is at conception that the infant receives his individual existence. Abortion is also the ultimate violation of that most sacred and primary of bonds so central to the flourishing of human society: the love that exists between a mother and her child.

**On In-vitro Fertilization.** Procreation should occur in the natural way, not in a laboratory separated from human bodies. Apart from the destruction of unwanted zygotes, which constitutes the taking of human life, in-vitro fertilization separates the act of procreation from human love, mutual affection between husband and wife, and the

natural locus of conception and gestation. Couples who have difficulty conceiving should accept God's will and consider whether it is not guiding them to the noble act of adopting a child and giving him or her a good Christian home.

**On Birth Control.** According to the Holy Fathers, the primary purpose of the sexual act is procreation. Therefore, any attempt to prevent the conception of a child within marital relations represents a falling away from the standard of evangelic perfection proclaimed by Christ. For this reason, the Holy Church cannot encourage the use of birth control, either of the so-called "natural" or "artificial" type. Birth control should especially not be used for the purpose of maintaining a lifestyle characterized by self-indulgence or "conspicuous consumption."

**On Unnatural Acts.** Although *marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled* (Heb. 13:4) sexual activities outside of natural intercourse are blameworthy. This includes sexual acts committed alone.

**On Pornography.** Our Lord severely reproveth the viewing of unclean images when He declares, *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust Encafter her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* (Matt. 5:28). Pornography is an addiction which floods the heart with spiritual darkness, defiles the mind with images of depravity, creates false expectations, and reduces the soul's capacity for spousal love.

**On Homosexuality.** Men and women complement each other in their physiologies and psychologies, and it is only a union between man and woman that rightly begets and nurtures life. To lust after one's own sex sinfully overturns the whole divinely ordained purpose of human sexuality. The Church teaches that same-sex concupiscence is not simply a failure to achieve the lofty Christian standard, but an abrogation of it. It is a passion extrinsic and contrary to nature, and as such must be resisted.

**On Same-Sex Marriage.** From what has been said above, it is evident that the Church must regard same-sex marriage with the utmost disfavor, since it normalizes sexual perversion and promotes it as being equal to divinely-ordained Christian marriage.

**On Gender Roles and Feminism.** The Church defends the true dignity of men and women by remaining faithful to the prophetic teaching: *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them* (Gen. 1:27); that is, they are equal spiritually but remain distinct with separate, interdependent roles. Although the Industrial Revolution and accompanying social developments have created new opportunities for women, women remain biologically and psychologically adapted to be the primary caregivers of children in a family, and it is wrong for them to neglect their marriage or parental responsibilities in the name of their career.

**On Transvestitism.** Sacred Scripture states that *the woman shall not wear that which*

*pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God (Deut. 22:5).* The Church, therefore, remains faithful to Divine Revelation in teaching that men and women are to dress and present themselves in accordance with their sex, lest they disfigure their gender and deface the image of God manifest in them.

**On Gender Fluidity and Transgenderism.** Sex is providentially assigned by God to each of us for our particular salvation and is not subject to arbitrary whim. Men and women are to act in accordance with traditional standards for their gender. To deny natural gender differentiation and seek radical emancipation from human biology through chemically and surgically mutilating the body is a rebellion against God's providence shown towards us at our birth. Those who do this harm both their bodies and their souls.

Beloved Christians,

Our Lord has provided for us to live in these trying days so that we might work out our salvation by remaining pure and faithful to Him amid the surrounding dissipation and by bearing witness of His Gospel in word and deed. We shall be judged, however, if we fail both to guard ourselves and to ensure the spiritual wellbeing of our children by passing down to our posterity the Pearl of great price that we received from our Fathers. For this reason we must become vigilant guardians of our children's hearts and minds and active advocates of their moral formation. Orthodox parents should inspire their children to loyalty to our Savior Christ. They should praise virtues such as virginity, chastity, modesty, fatherhood, and motherhood, and take strong measures to shield the eyes of the young from impure and suggestive imagery. These should include restricting access to the internet, the media, and the products of the entertainment industry. Where possible, they should become vocal defenders of Christian morality in their local schools. Where this is impossible, they should seriously consider opting out of their local system of public education and embracing Christian education in the form of private schooling, homeschooling, or one of the many hybrid forms of education available today.

To those who have been wounded by the Sexual Revolution, to those beguiled by its doctrines, to those who have lived by its misbeliefs, we say: take heart and arise. The Church of Christ teaches the truth with clarity and conviction, proclaiming the Gospel of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Through the mystery of repentance we rise from spiritual death unto newness of life. In this task sinners have the Church as their advocate rather than their judge; for the Church, acting through the hierarchs and spiritual fathers, is always ready to exercise mercy and economy in order to condescend to the sinner and raise up an ailing soul.

This, dear Christians, is the spirit of true Christian love. Each of the sins and failings enumerated above violates this spirit of love in one way or another. They disfigure those most sacred bonds which constitute society and are essential to true human flourishing and wellbeing: the love of a mother for her child, the love of a man for his wife, the love of true friends, the blameless love of self, the love of man for life, and, above all, the love of man for God. Let us cleave therefore to that pure love in Christ, that love which is alien to any perverted sexual passion promoted by the world, for *by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye have true and undefiled love one toward another* (John 13:35).

Your fervent suppliants before the Lord,  
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and the Members of the Holy Eparchial Synod  
† Metropolitan PHOTIOS of Demetrias  
† Metropolitan MOSES of Toronto  
† Bishop AUXENTIOS of Etna and Portland  
† Bishop CHRISTODOULOS of Theoupolis  
† Bishop MAXIMUS of Pelagonia

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