

The Teaching of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church on Homosexuality

Adapted from an article by Rev. Fr. Tavit Boyajian

1. Are Christians “Homophobic Hatemongers”?

On a recent National Public Radio interview the leader of a homosexual rights group was discussing his organization's struggle to pass legislation in Hawaii for the legalization of same sex marriages. The supporter of homosexual rights called those who opposed the proposed changes “hatemongers.” The implication of not only this man but also of gay activist groups in general, is that those who oppose them are guilty of prejudice against gays. Their stance is that it is no different to oppose gay rights than it is to oppose the rights of women, African-Americans, Orientals, Hispanics, or any minority group. Those homosexuals who state that they believe in God, say that God created them gay, just as others were created with their own particular diversities. While some homosexuals would not go so far as to call non gay-right supporters “hatemongers,” they would refer to their legislative opponents as “unenlightened.”

The current clamor over homosexual rights encourages us to ask if society's mainstream anti-homosexual views are simply a vestige of a jaded and unhealthy conservatism that has squelched the free expression of people's God-given humanity. Some Protestant “churches” now bless homosexual marriages and both knowingly and willingly ordain homosexual priests and bishops. Some Catholics are even speaking as if Church doctrine can be changed. We must recall that St. John the Apostle warned in Scripture against those who seek to change or alter the Church's divinely revealed doctrines:

“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:8-11 -Orthodox Study Bible, OSB).

The current societal and Church situation has created a need for us, as Christians, to examine the Church's historic teaching on homosexuality. The remainder of this article will be devoted therefore, to a cursory examination of the Biblical view of homosexuality, followed by a discussion of the Church's rationale for its position regarding homosexuality.

In order to understand the Church's historic position on homosexuality we need to look to the greatest source of our doctrine, the Bible. Some would claim that while there are events in the Old Testament that speak disparagingly of homosexuality, the New Testament does not contain such a view. Even a quick look at the Bible, however,

indicates a rejection of homosexual acts in both the Old and New Testaments. Let's begin, therefore, by looking at some Old Testament references to homosexuality.

2. The Old Testament Scriptures

Genesis 19:1-11 tells the story of an attempted homosexual gang rape at the house of Lot by the wicked men of Sodom. Verse 5 mentions specifically the homosexual intentions of the men of Sodom (“to know” referring to having sex). Lot considers this behavior so wicked (v. 7) that raping his daughters was considered the lesser of two evils (v. 8). This evil of Sodom is also mentioned elsewhere (Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekial 16:49-50; 2 Peter 2:6-10; Jude 1:7) in the strongest terms of condemnation. As a result of Hebrew and Christian traditional doctrine, the term “**sodomy**” has its roots here. A similar story is found in Judges 19:22-30.

In the Holiness Code of Leviticus, homosexual acts are considered an abomination: “**You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination**” (Leviticus 18:22 OSB; cf. Lev. 20:13). The Old Testament views homosexual behavior as so abhorrent it was punishable by death.

3. The New Testament Scriptures

In the New Testament the early Church also considered homosexual acts as sinful behavior. As St. Jude comments on the Leviticus passage, “...as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7 OSB). The Pauline Epistles likewise clearly condemn homosexual acts. In Romans St. Paul states that homosexual activity is a sign of God's wrath upon mankind's blind sinfulness:

“... [they] exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Rom 1:26-27 OSB).

Homosexual behavior is considered unnatural, an indecent act, and an error, even worthy of death [i.e., deserving of hell]. As St. Paul states, “...Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32 RSV).

St. Paul writes to the community at Corinth stating that sexual deviants (among others), will “not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10). Sadly, this means those who reject God's truth will go to hell. St. Paul goes on to say that while some of the

Corinthian Christians apparently had been homosexuals, God had cleansed them of this sin:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9-11 OSB).

Read in the light of Roman's 1:25, Paul's position stated in 1 Cor. 6:9 is that **homosexual behavior is forgivable through the Gospel and that any homosexual temptations should be resisted as seriously as those toward fornication or adultery.** Paul also taught that homosexuality was contrary to sound doctrine...

“...the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10 OSB).

As the preceding cited verses indicate, the position of the Bible, both Old and New Testament alike, is clearly opposed to homosexual acts. According to the Scriptures, homosexuals who engage in these acts, [like all who reject God and remain in sin], deserve hell, **but may be cleansed of their sin by battling against their passions through the power of a right relationship with Jesus Christ.**

4. The Homosexuals' Claim that their Feelings are God Given

Some homosexuals would argue that the Church's position, “God is against homosexuality,” is merely a result of the Church attributing to God what is really no more than a projection of the Church's own discomfort about homosexuality. The Church, however, does not believe that God is a creation or projection of our own humanity. Rather the Church believes that God revealed Himself to the Jews first and then to all peoples.

The Bible is the history of God's progressive revelation of Himself to mankind. Therefore the Bible is for us a guide to determine what is from God and what is not. Many homosexuals would claim that they have homosexual feelings and identify the source of these feelings as God-given. The issue for us as Christians is not whether or not homosexuals feel attraction to those of the same sex. They do. The issue is whether or not these feelings have their origin in God.

For the Christian, all feelings do not originate in God. We believe in and recognize the presence of a tempter, the devil, who can give us ungodly passions. No one denies the alcoholic really feels like getting drunk or the smoker really wants another

cigarette or the kleptomaniac wants to steal. The issue is not whether or not they really feel like doing these things, they do. Merely feeling a desire to do something is insufficient in and of itself to conclude that the origin of that desire has its place in the Lord. The issue from a Christian standpoint is that certain things have been revealed as immoral and even though people really feel like doing them they should exercise strength over their passions. St. Paul writes,

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:12-14 OSB).

Paul goes on to say that those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24). The Bible, therefore, does not deny the reality of homosexual feelings. Rather it recognizes them while equating them with other evil passions.

5. Responses to Homosexuals

From a Biblical standpoint, the primary approach to addressing another's sin must be one of gentleness and sincere concern for the well-being of the other. We are not to approach one another in a self-conceited manner desiring to exhibit a moral superiority or to provoke argument.

“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal 5:27-6:1 OSB).

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:24-26 OSB).

Therefore Paul says the approach to addressing someone caught in a particular sin is one of gentility. This gentility, however, is not to be weak and permissive. If one continues in their sinful ways and so creates division in the Church, separating the congregation from one another or from Biblical doctrine, St. Paul writes,

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11 OSB).

6. Could the Bible be Wrong?

As Orthodox and Catholic Christians we believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God. The truths revealed in the Scriptures do not change because God does not change. As the Prophet Isaiah states, “The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of our God abides forever” (Is 40:7-8 OSB). What God has inspired the prophets and apostles to write down in the Scriptures, will not and should never be changed because: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8 OSB).

Yet some proponents of “gay rights” simply see the Bible as an antiquated document which is wrong in what it professes. Therefore it would be impossible to convince such a person who does not accept either the accuracy or the authority of Scripture, of the evil of homosexuality by simply quoting Scripture. Therefore one needs to offer other explanations which may open their minds to questioning their position.

The first issue to address is that of procreation. Since homosexuals can not procreate, they cannot continue their race. There was actually a heretical Christian sect some centuries ago which believed all sexual relations were evil. They won many converts, but in just a few generations the sect died out. So too must homosexuality die out. Why would God create an animal that could not continue its own kind? Were He to do so, He would certainly be breaking the pattern He has established throughout the rest of the animal kingdom. Therefore if one believes that the rest of God's creation is evidence of God's will, he or she must take into account the conflict that arises through trying to reconcile homosexuality with the needs of humans to propagate their own species.

Next is the issue of human sexuality. From the Church's standpoint there are variances in the makeup of men and women that go beyond the obvious biological differences. The Church believes that men and women each have something the other needs for completeness. The various God-made male and female attributes are intended to be complementary to one another. The Church would argue that homosexuals cannot experience the fullness of their humanity without a healthy emotional, spiritual and intellectually intimate relationship with someone of the complementary (often referred to as opposite) sex. Were sexual diversity to have none other than a procreative value, then could not God have created one androgynous self-procreating sex? Why would He bother to create men and women if sexual diversity was to serve no purpose? The homosexual must come to terms with the difficulties involved with trying to reconcile a belief in a God who designs with purpose, with the existence of male-female sexual diversity.

The Church believes that the male-female union is necessary for us to experience our full God-given humanity as He intended. While one frequent, and for many important, aspect of this union is the physical, it need be noted that even with those who live a life of celibacy still have the capacity to fully experience their humanity. Celibates, however, are called to have a non-physically sexual union with someone of the opposite sex. That is to say for instance, celibate monks may have an intimate emotional prayer-based relationship with the Virgin Mary. Still, however, for celibates and non-celibates alike, the Church maintains that the fullness of our God-given humanity can only be

experienced through a healthy union with someone of the opposite sex. God grants us, through the Holy Spirit, essential gifts vital to our full spiritual development through male-female relationships. The rejection of this divine design through living a homosexual life-style is therefore ultimately a kind of rejection or blasphemy against an essential gift of the Holy Spirit: “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven” (Mt 12:31 RSV).

While as Christians we are called to strive for a close relationship with all people, homosexual relationships are a sinful turn from the direction God has given us towards the fullness of life. God's directions to us are not intended to inhibit us experiencing our humanity, on the contrary, they are given so that by following His caring guidance we might be filled with His joy and love. This is why Jesus came; to teach us and to die for our sins, so that we might have abundant life. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 RSV). As Christians we are called to exhibit divine compassion to all people while both humbly and confidently representing by our words and actions God's loving will for his children. Representing God's will towards homosexuals requires firm, patient, compassionate, loving and gentle correction which simultaneously acknowledges the importance of seeking close relationships with all people while maintaining a loving stance as to the Biblical parameters of these relationships.

In the eyes of God, homosexual acts are sinful. Yet God did not come into the world to condemn the sinners, but so that all people might be saved through Him. [Thus Christians are called to hate the sin, but love the sinner]. During Jesus' earthly ministry His powerful representation of His Father's love drew people to Him. In the same way we too must strive to be filled with His love so that through us others may experience the love of the Lord and be drawn to the Church to repent and to receive God's salvation. Let us pray therefore, brethren, for the souls of those who have been deceived by the devil and led astray. Through prayer and meditation upon the Holy Scriptures, may we become filled with the love of God, so that He may use us as His instruments to direct sinners back toward the love they have lost by straying from His holy path. May his name be praised forever.

Original written by:
Rev. Fr. Tavit Boyajian
Armenian Apostolic Church
Palos Heights, IL

Editor's Note: This article has been slightly edited in a few places and a few sentences have been added by the web-servant (Sub-Dn. Lazarus Der-Ghazarian) for clarity and to make apparent the universality of its Christian application. But I have strictly avoided any change in Fr. Boyajian's original line of thought.