

## **Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction: Eastern Orthodox Reflections (ABRIDGED OUTLINE)**

By Rev. Fr. Thomas Hopko; Conciliar Press 2006

### **Chapter Three: A Three-Dimensional Experience, p.15**

- God made everything good as the created expression of His Divinity (Gen.1).
- Everything has been corrupted and perverted by human sin (Gen.3-4).
- Everything is redeemed, sanctified and glorified by the crucified and risen Christ.
- Human beings are not autonomous (self-ruling beings). Another law is always working in them.
- Either “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” or “the law of sin and death” (Rom.7:23; 8:2).

### **Chapter Four: Same-Sex Attraction, p.17**

- In the Orthodox Christian view, the phenomenon of same-sex attraction is originally due to humanity’s rebellion against God.
- God does not make human beings “homosexual.”
- God makes men and women to live human lives of love through their complementary communion with each other on all levels of human existence: physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual.

### **Chapter Five: Same-Sex Attraction and Goodness, p.21**

- Human beings are always hungering and thirsting for what is good, true and beautiful in everything they do, including their *sexual* actions. They are seeking satisfaction, fulfillment, comfort and joy. In Christian terms, they are longing for holiness and union with God and with all creatures in God.
- When human beings engage in *sexual* activities—heterosexual or homosexual, intimate or anonymous, committed or casual, proper or improper—whether they acknowledge it or not, they are in fact longing for unending divine life, peace, comfort and happiness in God.

### **Chapter Six: Same-Sex Attraction and Passion, p.23**

- When human beings misdirect and misuse their God-given faculty of passionate desire (epithymia), it becomes perverted and deformed into the blameworthy passion of sinful lust, which in its specifically sexual expressions is generally called “fornication” (porneia) in the NT scriptures and writings of the saints.
- When this passion, in its corrupted condition, is repeatedly enacted it becomes addictive and enslaving.
- Passions that are simply *sexual*—have nothing to do with love, wholly self-centered, exclusively driven by desire for carnal and emotional pleasure as an end in itself—are always sinful, whether heterosexual or homosexual.
- They render a person culpable, however, only to the degree that they are willingly chosen, consciously embraced and intentionally enacted.
- Orthodox Christian Scriptures and saints universally testify that when the attraction between persons of the same sex is godly, *genital activity* is precluded, because divine love cannot be expressed in sexual intercourse between persons of the same sex. This is so because same-sex intercourse—however it is enacted, and however committed the persons are to each other, and however “monogamous” their relationship is, and however much they believe that they love each other with godly love—can never be complementary, unifying, life-creating and life-enhancing in the ways that God intended human sexual intercourse to be between a man and a woman.
- Christian Scripture claims that those who dishonor their bodies through *homosexual intercourse* have knowingly or unknowingly “*exchanged the truth of God (and about men and women in God’s image) for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever*” (Rom.1:24-25).

### **Chapter Seven: SSA & Sin, p.31**

- How people actually sin depends on how they deal with the degree and kind of human sinfulness which they inherit and to which others have subjected them through no original fault of their own.
- According to Orthodoxy, having involuntary and inculpable sinful desires for *sexual activities* that are not personally chosen, including passionate feelings for sexual union with persons of one’s own sex, is but one of the countless ways that people experience the results of sin in a deformed humanity. And acting on these passions is but one of the many ways that human beings personally sin themselves with God alone judging their culpability.
- Resisting these passionate desires by God’s grace (or perhaps more accurately, recognizing their source, refusing to act on them, and redirecting the goodness in them to its proper end—that is to divine love and to God Himself) is the way that human beings become holy and godlike.
- The well-being of humanity requires the complementary communion of male and female. According to Genesis 2:18, the woman’s task is to be the “*comparable helper*” to man, for whom it “*is not good to be alone*”.
- The Orthodox Church tradition makes this same point in reverse by teaching that the most perfect human being, who images and symbolizes the holiness of humanity in relationship to God in Christ, is a woman, not a man. She is of course, the All-holy, ever-Virgin Theotokos.
- “*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. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting*” (Rom.1:26-28).
- Having loving desires for people of one’s own sex is not at all sinful; it is perfectly natural, normal and necessary.

- Having lustful thoughts and feelings of a *purely sexual nature* for others, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is unnatural, abnormal and sinful.
- Although such thoughts and feelings may come to us through no fault of our own, we nevertheless have the ability and responsibility in Christ to take captive such thoughts (2Cor.10:5) and redirect such feelings.
- The tragic truth, however, is that countless people, especially in contemporary secularized societies, have become convinced that their sinful thoughts and feelings, including and even especially, those having to do with sex, are perfectly normal and natural and as such, define who they are in their essential being and life. They therefore see no purpose or need in resisting, disciplining and ultimately destroying them.

#### **Chapter Eight: SSA & Choice, p.39**

- Personal sin is not in making bad choices. It is rather in the presumption that we have choices at all. It is a dogma of the Orthodox Church that Jesus never chose anything except to do the will of His Father, and even this was not really a “choice” because it involved no deliberation. Jesus’ only choice in all things was to do God’s will, which, in this sense amounts to having no “choices” at all.
- Faithful people order their lives according to this understanding in every possible way. They pray, fast, give alms and participate in liturgical worship. They read Scripture and other spiritual books. They observe the behavior of others and take counsel from wise people. They engage in therapeutic programs in order to deal with their history, to name the causes of their disease and discontent, and to take responsibility for their behavior.

#### **Chapter Nine: SSA & God’s Will, p.43**

- It is more accurately said that because of human failings, *same-sex* desires and passions of a purely *sexual* nature are “allowed” or “permitted” by God, rather than positively “willed” by Him.
- In this view, *same-sex* attraction in its fallen form, which includes desires for *genital sexual* actions with persons of one’s own sex, is a providential cross to be borne and not a divine gift to be celebrated. In saying this, we hasten to reaffirm the conviction that *same-sex* love when properly experienced and purely expressed, is always God’s sacred gift.

#### **Chapter Ten: SSA & Sanctity, p.47**

- It requires painful remembering, blessed mourning, sincere forgiving, ceaseless praying, and the courageous acceptance of one’s providential destiny caused and conditioned by sin. It demands a firm and unwavering resolve to take full responsibility before God for one’s desires and actions. It also demands heartfelt forgiveness of those who have voluntarily or involuntarily hurt and harmed one. The way of sanctity, therefore, is not a resignation to one’s fate; it is the ascetical transformation of one’s being and life by God’s grace and power.

#### **Chapter Eleven: SSA & Asceticism, p.51**

- We must never forget that ascetic practices are not ends in themselves, nor are they “spiritual life” as such. They are but means: essential, necessary and God-given means, but nevertheless only means to the end, which is life in communion with God through keeping His commandments.
- We will be tempted to give up, to give in and to act in ways contrary to God’s will for His creatures. Yet, we trust that we will never be tried beyond our strength as God promises and provides.
- We must resist advice and arguments about human behavior based solely on personal feelings, subjective experiences, and behavioral sciences offered to them by people who have largely (if not wholly) lost the basic intuitions of reality that God has implanted in human hearts to guide and govern human thinking, feeling and sensing.

#### **Chapter Twelve: SSA & Scripture, p.55**

- Regular reading, study and reflection on God’s word in the Bible is an essential part of Christian ascetic life. Believers who fail to be regularly nourished by the “bread of life” become spiritually sick and weak, and eventually they die. According to the Christian saints, the greatest cause of human evil and misery is the ignorance of God’s Word. This ignorance is also the main cause of heresy, schism and sin in the churches.
- Ignorance of Scripture is also the ultimate cause of the most destructive of all human enslavements which is theological, spiritual and moral delusion (Greek “plane”). This is the condition in which people think they are zealous, righteous, holy and godly and even charismatic and prophetic, but are really in the power of their own will and the will of their human and demonic deceivers.
- Study is insufficient in and of itself to produce a full, deep and accurate understanding of God’s Word. Believers must pray for divine enlightenment and direction when reading the Scriptures. This guidance is sought in the lives of the Church fathers and saints, the dogmas and canons of the councils. Trained and tested pastors and teachers help them to apply these teachings and canons to contemporary issues.
- Biblical texts relevant to *same-sex* passions and actions are interpreted in this way. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18-19), for example, is understood to be not only about violence, rape and the degradation of strangers; it is also understood, already in apostolic Christian writings, to be about *sexual perversion* and immorality (2Peter2:4; Jude7).
- See Lev.18-21. No evidence exists anywhere in the NT that *homosexual acts* can be considered an expression of godly love in Christ. There is no reference anywhere in the Gospels and the apostolic writings that suggest the Mosaic laws concerning human *sexual behavior* are of the same nature as laws about ritual impurity, circumcision, or foods. It is rather the case that *sexual behavior* is made stricter in the NT than it is in the OT, being a return to what was “from the beginning,” that is, according to God’s original intention and purpose for humanity.

#### **Chapter Fourteen: SSA & Joy, p.65**

- Christians who suffer afflictions because of their resistance to their sinful desires, their sorrows over the sinful actions that these passions have forced them to, and their agonies and pains from the scorn heaped on them by sinners with the insanity to “cast the stone” against them, will come to rejoice in all these afflictions, sorrows, agonies, and pains as their faith in Jesus grows and matures.
- Sadly, many of us sinners, whatever our sexual attractions, never come to taste the joy and peace in the Holy Spirit that comes with suffering in and with Jesus, because we never fully surrender to the Lord and never completely succeed in ceasing to surrender to our sinful passions with blessed mourning. We live in some in-between state, being neither here nor there. As some saints have put it, we have left Egypt but have not entered the Promised Land; we dwell perpetually in the desert.

#### **Chapter Fifteen: SSA & Friendship, p.69**

- Everyone needs to cultivate wholesome spiritual friendships with as many good and wise people as they can.
- Everyone needs to cherish special relationships with a small number of men and women, some of whom will be their dearest elders and closest companions on the way of love in Christ.
- Everyone needs therapeutic relationships, particularly with persons of their same sex, in order to deal with same-sex development issues that must be resolved for their emotional and spiritual healing especially if they find some credence in the theory that among he causes of their same-sex feelings is some sort of traumatic break with their same-sex parent or adult-caregiver in early childhood.
- It remains a firm conviction of Orthodox Christianity that healthy and holy people always have friends of both sexes. In addition, some spiritual friends have to be older and wiser than they are.

#### **Chapter Sixteen: SSA & Sexual Activity, p.73**

- Rather, these deviations bring their own intrinsic “censure” and “punishment” which may be experienced as “wrathful” because they are contrary to reality as God made them to be. Disease and afflictions resulting from sinful behavior may be taken as examples of truth, as may emotional and mental pains and sufferings resulting from the absence of love.
- A critical point in the Genesis story is that the Lord did not tell Adam and Eve that if they ate of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” He would kill them. Rather, he told them they would die (Gen.1:17; 3:3).
- OC teaches that the proper context for sexual intercourse is a marriage that is unconditionally committed, completely faithful, everlasting complementary love between a man and a woman. The marriage relationship combines charity (agape), friendship (philia), affection (storge), and desire for holy union (eros) in God’s service.
- Such love never begins with sexual activity. Nor is it defined by it, sustained by it or perfected by it in itself.
- Godly conjugal union in this age is, paradoxically, a symbol and foretaste of humanity’s conjugal union with god in the age to come, in which, as we have already noted, there will be no sexual intercourse between creatures of any kind.
- In this perspective, the sexual communion of love in marriage is like the participation in Holy Communion at the Church’s Divine Liturgy. The fulfillment of the total conjugal commitment enables sexual union to be, like a worthy participation in Christ’s Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, “for the forgiveness of sins, the healing of soul and body and everlasting life” for those who partake “in a worthy manner.” And it is “unto condemnation and judgment” for those who partake unworthily.
- An inevitable consequence of childhood abuse, whatever its forms, is an overwhelming tendency in the abused to self-centeredness and self-defensiveness. Those who have suffered great pain in childhood, especially from adults whom we should have been able to trust and live with in love and happiness, tend to receive any criticism, no matter how just and helpful, as an attack, a punishment and a beating. They even feel the same when they hear God’s commandments. Thus, going to church services can be extremely painful. At times, it produces an almost unbearable anger and grief. This is especially so when we observe the sins and failings of others, particularly our parents, elders and those in any kind of authority over us, who deprive us of their love.

#### **Chapter Seventeen: SSA & Sexual Knowing, p.79**

- In the Bible, the verb “to know” is used for sexual intercourse. When a couple “know” each other in an act of sexual union, they are joined in a psychospiritual connection that forever affects their being and life in the most basic and radical ways.
- Godly sexual “knowing,” therefore, can occur only when married men and women enact sexual intercourse in the loving manner designed by God. All other kinds of sexual “knowing” are contrary to godly life and divine love. And the “god” known in such “knowing” is always an idol, the product of creaturely imagination and fantasy.

#### **Chapter Eighteen: SSA & Children, p.81**

- Men and women with same-sex attractions and desires may certainly care for children with love and affection.
- Unmarried people engaging in sexual intercourse with each other, not to speak of multiple partners, should not be permitted to adopt or care for children.
- Since Orthodox Christian faith requires that children be the product of the godly love of their parents, pregnancies in any way involving anyone other than the potential child’s biological father and mother are considered to be contrary to God’s will and so to divine love. Thus, gay men may not arrange for women to bear children for them. And lesbians may not arrange to become pregnant from the sperm of known or anonymous donors, whatever the means of their impregnation.
- Nevertheless, Orthodox Christians are bound to love those engaging in these ways of procreating and caring for children, and surely the children themselves, with the same love and care that they owe all people in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

#### **Chapter Nineteen: SSA & Civil Rights, p.83**

- Homosexual people must have the same access to housing, employment, police protection, legal justice, tax benefit and visitation privileges at institutions that all members of society possess and enjoy.

- Those desiring to be joined in “civil unions” or “domestic partnerships” for such purposes should be allowed to do so with the social and legal benefits that are guaranteed by such arrangements.
- I firmly believe that God commands His people to affirm and defend the civil rights and benefits of those who believe and do thing that are contrary to His will (see Luke 6:27-38; Rom. 12:14-21)
 

<sup>27</sup>“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>“bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. <sup>29</sup>To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. <sup>31</sup>And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

<sup>32</sup>“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. <sup>36</sup>Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

<sup>37</sup>“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup>Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:27-38)

<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. <sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Even when a recalcitrant brother or sister in the believing community “refuses even to hear the church” and so by Christ’s command is to be treated “like a heathen and a tax collector,” such a person is still to be fed when hungry, given drink when thirsty, clothed when naked, sheltered when homeless, and visited when sick or imprisoned (Mt.18:15-20; 25:31-46). That they are not admitted to the Holy Eucharist does not mean that they are to be hated, scorned or dealt with unjustly or uncharitably.
- Christians have no right to proclaim God’s gospel in Jesus to anyone whom they do not love in deeds as well as in words (1John 3:18) <sup>18</sup>“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
- Those professing OC may never bless unions between persons of same sex that contend to be marriages in same sense as between men and women. Where such unions are called “marriages” by civil law, OC are obliged to tolerate them as they tolerate laws allowing divorce, remarriage and abortion, but they cannot approve or affirm them as acceptable to human being and life.

Orthodox Christian view of Marriage:

- 1) A union between one man and one woman for purpose of becoming “one flesh” in God
- 2) To express human wholeness through integration of the sexes in divine love.
- 3) For procreation of children, founding families, saving souls, serving neighbors and enemies and sanctifying the world
- 4) To glorify God the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of all things in Christ & the Holy Spirit.

- The OC rite of “adelphopoiesis” or “brother/sister making” has nothing whatsoever to do with either homosexuality or marriage.

### **Chapter Twenty-One: SSA & Theology, p.91**

- Anthropological issues, particularly concerning gender and sexuality, are central theological themes in our postmodern times, especially for Christians.
- The task of Orthodox theology is to explain and elaborate the Christian “canon of faith” testified to in the canonical biblical Scriptures, particularly the NT writings that interpret the OT in the light of Christ. This constitutes Holy Tradition (with a capital “T”).
- In OC, vision (theoria) and experience (praxis) are organically united and interconnected.
- Because humanity has been distorted and corrupted by sin, we must be both radically respectful and suspicious of human experience.
- Christians submit their experiences, including sex, to the experience of the Church (JC, Apostles, Martyrs & Saints). We do not follow our own minds, hearts and bodies.
- Natural science is restricted to physical nature and human behavior. It is not concerned with metaphysical, spiritual and divine things. It says nothing about origin, meaning and destiny. Science is concerned with physical, animal and human natures in their presently deformed states, not the forms in which God originally created them, nor for the forms of the future kingdom.

### **Chapter Twenty-Three: SSA & Church Community, p.101**

- Christ’s Church is for all people who believe the Gospel and confess the Christian faith as they strive to repent of their sins and to resist their sinful passions, by which they expect to be tempted to their last breath.
- For this reason, the local parish church will never be a wholly safe place for sinners to deal openly with their temptations and sins, since it is always comprised of sinners (including its pastors and leaders) at all stages of spiritual growth and development.
- However, groups can be found within the churches in which struggling Christians with sufficient spiritual maturity, including those with same-sex attractions and desires, can “come-out” to others about the realities of their lives, including the sexual realities, without apprehension or fear.

- For OC, the “exodus experience” is never something social, political, national or cultural. It is always liberation from evil, sin, and death through the “exodus” that Christ “was to accomplish at Jerusalem.” It is the “pascha” and “exodus” of Christ’s death and resurrection into God’s glory.
- Healing in this world is often restricted to our willingness and ability to discern and acknowledge evils and diseases, to claim them as our own, to suffer them with patience, to struggle against them courageously, and to forgive those who have caused and contributed to their effects in our lives, as we work to attain perfect wholeness and holiness only in the age to come.
- St. John Chrysostom says that a person who is healed in this age from whatever malady and disease is always healed for “more crosses.”

#### **Chapter Twenty-Four: SSA & Sacraments, p.105**

- It is not necessary for believers to be wholly successful in spiritual warfare to participate in the sacraments. Those who have given up the fight, or even worse, who do not believe that there is a war to be fought, may not participate in Holy Communion.
- In Orthodoxy, communicants in the sacramental mysteries are not only obliged to be steadfast in Christian faith and perpetually repentant over their failures, they are also obliged to take full responsibility for the Church’s teachings and practices and to be ready, to defend them unto death.
- For this reason, those publicly affirm and promote homosexual behavior (like those who publicly advocate abortion) cannot be sacramental communicants in the Orthodox Church.
- When Church leaders rightly remove persons from sacramental communion, they must understand their action as therapeutic and not punitive.
- We can “judge” only those within the Church, not those outside (see 1Cor.5:12-13). We must resist the temptation to think that we know what God’s final judgment will be for any person, even while professing to know the criteria of divine judgment, which we apply first of all to ourselves. We also stand firm in the conviction that it is never too late for anyone to repent.

#### **Chapter Twenty-Five: SSA & Pastoral Care, p.111**

- In order for Orthodox Christians with same-sex attractions and desires to be victorious in the “unseen warfare” in which they are engaged, they have to reveal their sexual feelings to their pastors, confessors, spiritual elders and compassionate friends.
- It is crucial therefore, that the Church’s priests and pastoral ministers be honest, loving, co-suffering Christians who are struggling with their own sins, confessing their own transgressions, repenting over their own failures, and receiving counsel in their own spiritual lives from their own pastors and guides.
- trust and of whose love they are uncertain, nor should they permit their children to do so.
- Pastors and counselors must exercise discrimination and discernment (diakrisis) about what realistically can be expected from people, given the realities of their lives. They must have the grace and the skill to know how to give counsel that realistically assists people in their spiritual enlightenment and growth.
- Because the majority of those who consider themselves Christians today, including the majority of members of Orthodox churches, have hardly been evangelized and instructed in the Christian faith, proper pastoral care with wise discernment and appropriate oikonomia are extremely hard to come by.
- Orthodoxy holds, however, that those desiring guidance and support in the way of Christ and the Holy Spirit will find and receive it. The condition for our being led, of course, is that we are truly humble and authentically willing to be taught, directed, and healed by God.
- Oikonomia- the proper application of God’s laws and commandments to persons in situations where, for any number of reasons, the commandments and laws cannot be strictly followed.

#### **Chapter Twenty-Six: SSA & the Counseling Process, p.117**

- Christian counselors must abandon all stereotyping of people with same-sex attractions. They must resist every temptation to oversimplify. Same-sex attraction must be seen as no more shocking or abhorrent than other feelings and actions that OC considers sinful.
- They must radically distinguish between a person’s feelings and actions, between what one feels and does willfully and voluntarily and what one does by passionate compulsion. They must never forget that God alone knows the culpability of every person’s thoughts, words, feelings and actions.
- They always begin with prayerful questioning and listening, learning as much about the person and his/her family as possible. They never begin by preaching, teaching, prophesying or pronouncing judgments. They should never engage in debating and quarrelling.
- One of the first conversations between counselor and patient must be about Christ and the Gospel. They must find out what the person knows, thinks and believes about the Christian faith. They must learn the person’s spiritual history and become aware of his/her theological ideas, regarding the Bible, the sacraments, services and saints of the Church.
- Regarding the counseling process itself, the first concrete goal is to persuade the counselee to stop his/her sinful behavior. The cessation of the sinful action is a necessary condition for understanding its sinfulness.
- While any one of us is engaging in destructive behavior, we are incapable of seeing and thinking clearly and fruitfully. Thus, we are incapable of understanding the nature of our wrongdoing and the causes for its presence and power in our lives. To talk with an alcoholic who is actively drinking, or an overeater who is overeating, or a fornicator who is fornicating, is a waste of time and energy that cannot possibly bring fruitful results.
- Therefore, the first talking, therefore, and the first goal of counseling, always has to do with actions, not attitudes. It is about behavior, not beliefs.