

## The Homosexual Christian

*by Fr. Thomas Hopko*

Many gay men and lesbians claim that the Christian faith is the guiding rule of their lives. Some of them hold that their sexual orientation is given by God, that it is good, and that there is nothing wrong or sinful with their homosexual activities. These persons say that the Bible and Church Tradition do not condemn homosexual behavior, but have been misinterpreted and misused, sometimes unknowingly and other times quite willfully, by prejudiced and hostile people who hate homosexuals. Those who believe in this way obviously want others to agree with them, and many are now working hard to have their views accepted, particularly by fellow Christians and Church leaders.

Other homosexual Christians hold that their sexual orientation is not from God — except providentially, since the Lord's plan inevitably involves human freedom and sin but derives from human fault. While some of these people are not willing or able to identify the specific reasons for their sexual feelings, though still affirming that they are not good and are not to be indulged; others with the help of what they believe to be sound biblical interpretation and accurate psychological analysis, identify the source of their sexual orientation in faults and failures in their family experiences, particularly in early childhood, and perhaps even before that, which contribute to their sexual makeup. These people hold that they are called by God to struggle against their homosexual tendencies as all people are called to struggle against the sinful passions which they find within themselves, while they work to heal the causes of their disorientation and disease. Those who hold this position look to their fellow Christians, especially their Church leaders, for support and assistance in their spiritual struggle.

### The Orthodox Position

Given the traditional Orthodox understanding of the Old and New Testament scriptures as expressed in the Church's liturgical worship, sacramental rites, canonical regulations and lives and teachings of the saints, it is clear that the Orthodox Church identifies solidly with those Christians, homosexual and heterosexual, who consider homosexual orientation as a disorder and disease, and who therefore consider homosexual actions as sinful and destructive.

According to Orthodox Christian witness over the centuries, Biblical passages such as the following do not permit any other interpretation but that which is obvious.

*If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination ...  
(Leviticus 20:13)*

*For this reason (i.e. their refusal to acknowledge, thank and glorify God) God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27)*

*Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral (or fornicators), nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals (or sodomites; literally those who have coitus, or who sleep, with men), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

*And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)*

## **Unwilled Sins**

According to the Orthodox Church not all sins are willful and voluntary, and not all acts of sin are the conscious fault of those who do them; at least not at first. In a word, sin is not always something for which the sinner himself or herself is necessarily culpable in a complete and conscious way. There are sins of ignorance and passion, sins which "work in our members," as St. Paul says, even against our rational and conscious wills. (See Romans 6-8) These are the sins referred to in the Church's prayers when the faithful beg God for forgiveness and pardon of sins which are not only conscious, but unconscious; not only voluntary, but involuntary.

There are sins which are involuntary, unwilled, unchosen; sins which overcome people and force them by irrational impulses and compulsions, by weaknesses of the flesh, emotional drives and misguided desires into actions which they themselves do not want, and often despise and abhor — even when they are engaging in them. These are known traditionally as the sins of passion. The fact that these sins are not freely chosen do not make them any less sinful. To sin means to miss the mark, to be off the track, to deviate, to defile, to transgress ... whether or not the act is consciously willed and purposefully enacted; and whether or not the offender personally is freely and fully at fault.

## **Redeemed Sinners**

According to Orthodox Church Tradition, Christians are redeemed sinners. They are human beings who have been saved from sickness and sin, delivered from the devil and death by God's grace through faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit's power: "and such were some of you." (1 Cor. 6:10) They are baptized into Christ and sealed with the Spirit in order to live God's life in the Church. They witness to their faith by regular participation in liturgical worship and Eucharistic communion, accompanied by continual confession, repentance and the steadfast struggle against every form of sin, voluntary and involuntary, which attempts to destroy their lives in this world and in the age to come.

The homosexual Christian is called to a particularly rigorous battle. His or her struggle is an especially ferocious one. It is not made any easier by the mindless, truly demonic hatred of those who despise and ridicule those who carry this painful and burdensome cross; nor by the mindless, equally demonic affirmation of homosexual activity by its misguided advocates and enablers.

Like all temptations, passions and sins, including those deeply, and oftentimes seemingly indelibly embedded in our nature by our sorrowful inheritance, homosexual orientation can be cured and homosexual actions can cease. With God all things are possible. When homosexual Christians are willing to struggle, and when they receive patient, compassionate and authentically loving assistance from their families and friends — each of whom is struggling with his or her own temptations and sins; for no one is without this struggle in one form or another, and no one is without sin but God — the Lord guarantees victory in ways known to Himself. The victory, however, belongs only to the courageous souls who acknowledge their condition, face their resentments, express their angers, confess their sins, forgive their offenders (who always include their parents and members of their households), and reach out for help with the genuine desire to be healed. Jesus himself promises that the saintly heroes who

"persevere to the end" along this "hard way which leads to life" will surely "be saved." (Matt. 7:13; 24:13)

*"... the Lord guarantees victory in ways known to Himself"*

*From Word Magazine Publication of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America January 1987 pp. 7-8*