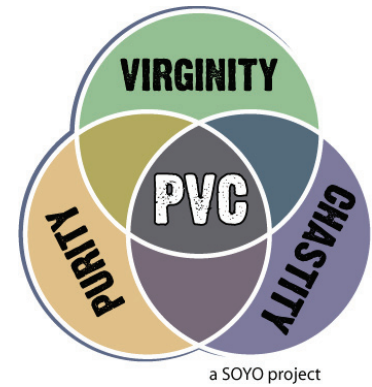


PURITY, VIRGINITY, CHASTITY EDUCATION PACKET

UPDATED WITH NEW MATERIAL FOR 2011

NAC Teen SOYO

PVC – Purity, Virginity, Chastity
Preparation for Marriage or Monasticism
A project of NAC SOYO
www.teenSOYO.org



January 2011

Dear Fathers, Parents, Teen Advisors, and Teens:

Greetings in the Name of our Savior Jesus Christ!

I pray this message finds everyone in good health. As Vice President of the North American Council of SOYO and on behalf of the NAC *Purity, Virginity, Chastity* Committee, (also known as PVC), it is with pleasure that I present to you the official **Purity, Virginity, Chastity Educational Packet**.

Since late July 2008, the Purity, Virginity, Chastity Committee has been working diligently to formulate this packet you hold today. The NAC has collectively agreed that it is extremely necessary to reach out to our SOYO chapters across the Archdiocese and provide them with an interactive packet addressing these important topics.

Our main goal is to educate, remind, and preserve young adults' beliefs about the Orthodox Church's position on Purity, Virginity, *Chastity* and Forgiveness. We have gathered information from a variety of Orthodox resources that include, the Fathers of the Church, articles written by Orthodox Theologians, the Bible, and other sources and present them to you, to help begin and increase discussion on these important issues.

We ask each parish/Teen SOYO chapter to hold discussions on this topic during the month of January, which is SOYO Education Month. Please send us feedback on your experience and what we can do to further help you and the teens of your parish.

Yours in the Lord,

Jenna Badra
NAC SOYO, Vice President
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Mary Sayegh, Michael Massad, Alexander Habib, Rachel Phillips, Adam Murphy, Vanessa Kinan, Rachel Phillips, Noura Wakim, Raquel Haddad, Laney Wagoner



THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA
METROPOLITAN PHILIP, PRIMATE

PO Box 389 ▪ Westwood, MA 02090-0389 ▪ www.antiochian.org/youth

January 2011

Dear Brother in Christ,

RE: Updated Material for SOYO Ministry - "Purity, Virginity, and Chastity" PVC

In our continuing effort to address the issues of the teen and adult Archdiocese Survey results, SOYO responded by establishing the Teen SOYO initiative called "PVC" to address what they believe to be a critical issue in the lives of their peers. Upon seeing the devastating effects that divorce, drugs, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity have on our families, our teens have committed to work towards better equipping themselves and their peers towards making better choices.

Each January, our teens raise money to educate parish youth workers through the Youth Worker Fund, as well as hold discussions on the Sacred Gift of Life on the Sunday closest to the tragic Roe vs. Wade decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. This year (January 2011) our teens will continue to expand their January Education Month to include discussions on "**Purity, Virginity, and Chastity**" as a way of preparation for marriage or monasticism.

We ask that you support our teens in this effort. Our teens, boldly and with much love and compassion, have chosen to better equip themselves and their peers to live a righteous way of life. While they, and all of us, understand this as a great daily challenge to which some may or will fail, we are committed to the struggle of staying on or getting back onto the path of Godliness.

Please work with your teens to better equip them to succeed in this struggle and or recover from past failings, as they go forward in striving to live a righteous way of life. We have posted the materials for "Purity, Virginity, and Chastity" as well as the "Sacred Gift of Life" online at www.teenSOYO.org. Please ensure that this material is made available to your teens and their advisors and that someone equipped for this discussion is present with them to help them cover this material in a loving and compassionate manner.

As a brother I also ask that you consider reading in the Philokalia, Volume 1, beginning pg 162, by St Hesychios the Priest entitled "On Watchfulness and Holiness."

Yours in Christ,

V. Rev. Dr. Joseph F Purpura, Chairman,
Department of Youth Ministry
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

V. Rev. Anthony Yazge, NAC SOYO Spiritual Advisor

A MESSAGE TO OUR TEENS



from Father
Alex Kowri

Being a teen is not so easy. This time of life is a time of transition and self-differentiation. It is a time that one begins to embrace their own beliefs rather than simply follow the ideas of others. A natural part of growing up is that teens begin to see themselves different from their parents. The ideas that they embrace will affect the choices they make. And because of this, the choices that are made are very important. They affect the rest of life. One of the areas that some teens (and people in general) are not aware of is the spiritual battles that are taking place. Any discussion on Purity, Chastity, and Virginity is more than a discussion on how to have a successful marriage, avoiding unwanted pregnancies and not contracting STD's. It is about our spiritual relationship to God. God calls us to imitate the selfless love of Jesus. Purity and chastity have as much to do with repentance, forgiveness, non-judgmentalism and unconditional love of neighbor as they do with sexuality. Yet one of the major fronts of this battle today because of the media, online pornography, and celebrity worship is in the area of sexuality. While the sexual relationship of a husband and wife is meant to be a gift from God, the abuse of this sacred act pulls us away from God. As teens consciously engage in this battle to remain pure, they strengthen their relationship with God, develop more mature and lasting relationships with their peers, and build the foundation for a more mature spirituality. And for those that do get married, this mature spirituality will strengthen their marriage as well.

You may have heard that most marriages do not last or that the chances of a successful marriage are 50% at best. Actually that is not true because there are ways to help ensure a successful marriage. For couples getting married over age 20, the success rate is higher¹. For couples who marry and are active in their faith, the success rate is higher still². And for couples that get married who are not sexually active before marriage, the success rate is even higher³. The reason the church encourages sexual abstinence before marriage is not because the Church frowns on sexuality, rather it is because the Church is showing you a path towards a healthy, Godly, and joyful life.

In fact, the Church has renounced those who say that a sexual relationship within marriage is unholy. St John Chrysostom describes the sexual relationship of a husband and wife as most sacred. He says that it is "the joining of their bodies, and they are made one, just as when perfume is mixed with ointment."⁴ But when sex is expressed outside of the commitment of marriage, then it is a sin against chastity. Sex is meant to be an expression of love for the other, an expression of commitment. When practiced before the commitment of marriage, it cuts short the important developmental stages of friendship, moderation, patience, and forbearance that are so crucial in a healthy relationship. For those who do not actively pursue these virtues, it is no wonder the divorce rate is so high.

Think about it. Who is encouraging premarital sex? Our passions for one. Passions can be good, but when unbridled and uncontrolled, they can lead to disaster. The media has no problems with exploiting the sexual drive for commercial and political purposes. What many teens in our culture have accepted in regards to sexual behavior is simply propaganda that is making someone else richer. God calls us to be smarter than this. Marriage is not only a physical union but a spiritual union as well. This union implies a selflessness and responsibility for each spouse to the other. Premarital sex is not about the other. If one truly cared about the other, he or she would do what they could to make their life the best it could be. Sex outside of the commitment of marriage is

¹ Bramlett, M.D. and W.D. Mosher. 2001. *First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce, and Remarriage: United States*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

² Bramlett, M.D. and W.D. Mosher. 2002. *Cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States*. Atlanta: CDC

³ Tracy, Steven 2005. *Chastity and the Goodness of God: The Case for Premarital Sexual Abstinence*. <http://www.mendingthesoul.org/2005/04/chastity-and-the-goodness-of-god-the-case-for-premarital-sexual-abstinence/>

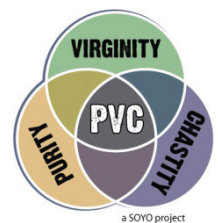
⁴ Homily 12 on Colossians

just the opposite. Here are some facts:

1. Our faith calls us to abstinence before marriage. How is going against our faith a sign of love for the other?
2. 34% of young women become pregnant at least once before the age of 20; that's around 820,000 a year.⁵ And many of those end in abortions.
3. The only way to absolutely prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is to remain abstinent. In addition to the more commonly known dangers of HIV, other STDs are also quite dangerous and some are much more common. The most common is the genital human papillomavirus (also called HPV) which can cause genital warts, as well as cervical and other cancers. The Center for Disease Control estimates that there are 6.2 million infections each year⁶ – most occurring in those in their late teens and early 20's. The only thing that prevents HPV and other STD's is abstinence.
4. When couples abstain from sexual relations before marriage, a better relationship is developed based on friendship rather than satisfying sexual drives. This strengthens both character and future relationships. If you abstain in a relationship, you know that the other person is with you for the person you are and not merely because they are interested in having sex with you.

Chastity is not the same as celibacy. Chastity and purity have to do with a way of thinking about the world, about ourselves, and about others. Chastity is presenting a true self to others without hypocrisy and selfishness. Chastity means being faithful to God first, in both soul and body. This means that monks are called to chastity as well as teens and married adults. A monk whose thoughts are not pure may be celibate but not chaste. A married person is not celibate but is called to chastity. Chastity can be a battle in today's world. Advertisements and internet, television and movies, celebrities and athletes, pornography and "friends" all contribute to the peer pressure which encourages indulgence over patience, promiscuity over abstinence. How are we to be successful in this battle when we are immersed in the world? We need to be immersed even more so in the life of the Church. We need to encourage our SOYO friends in this battle becoming a source of strength for others. We need to read the scriptures and the lives of the saints. We need to commit ourselves to Christ in worship and prayer. Having a real and intentional relationship with our spiritual father is very important. We are not meant to fight these battles alone. A lone Christian is no Christian. Talk to your priest or teen advisor. Talk to your diocesan spiritual advisor. Go to confession. Realize today that remaining (or becoming) abstinent is something that you make happen, not something that happens on its own. Therefore you must be intentional about it. Plan for it. Be aware. The fathers of the church call this awareness *nepsis*. Without *nepsis* we will fall and fall again. But with awareness and watchfulness we can avoid falling.

The intimate relationship between a husband and wife is so profound that the Apostle Paul compares it to the relationship of Christ and the Church⁷. For those called to marriage, this union is expressed (among other ways) mystically through the sexual relationship. In order for her faithful to experience the full joy of marriage and fidelity, the church calls us to prepare for marriage (and life) through abstinence until marriage. By making that commitment today, even if you have fallen before, you will strengthen your character and your relationship with God and your future spouse.



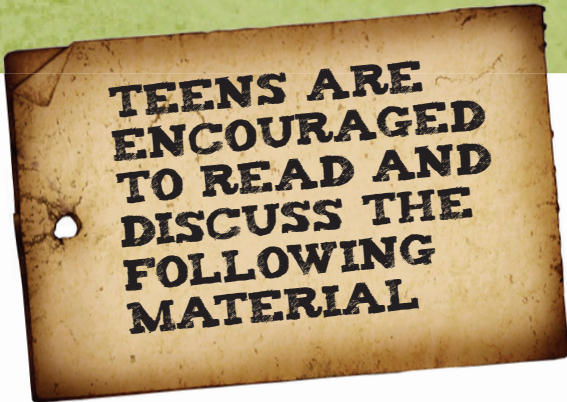
⁵ The Alan Guttmacher Institute. (2004). U.S Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information. New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute.

⁶ CDC. *Genital HPV Infection - CDC Fact Sheet*. 2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>

⁷ Cf. Ephesians 5:32

RESOURCE AND DISCUSSION MATERIALS

for Teens and Adults



**TEENS ARE
ENCOURAGED
TO READ AND
DISCUSS THE
FOLLOWING
MATERIAL**

1. All three letters at the beginning of this document
2. Progress Chart
3. Friendship in the 21st Century
4. On Chastity - from the Basis of the Social Concept – Church of Moscow
5. The Mystery and Meaning of Love and Marriage by Archbishop Lazar
6. Repentance and Forgiveness
7. The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony,
by Protopresbyter John Meyendorff
8. Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of
Life, OCA
9. Orthodox Bible Study on Human Sexuality and the Call to Purity,
Sbdn. Robert Miclean
10. What Orthodox Christians Believe,
Conciliar Press
11. Case Studies for Teens,
by Tristram Engelhardt
12. Church Positions Regarding the Sanctity of Human Life,
Fr. Stanley S. Harakas
13. The Manhattan Declaration
a message to the US Congress on the Christian Faith
14. Sex and Tech – Remember
15. Philokalia, Volume 1, beginning pg 162, by St Hesychios the Priest entitled
“On Watchfulness and Holiness.”

Friendship IN THE 21ST CENTURY⁸

⁸ABSTINENCE IS SAYING *yes* TO THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

Friendship development is a skill desperately needed by teenagers today. Teen's today stand in front of many challenges and one of them is who can I trust and build a relationship with. When this question is answered success is one step closer to becoming reality.

All of us want and need friendships. Early friends teach us many needed skills for future relationships. For example, we learn to share, to understand someone else's feelings, to communicate and to practice making and keeping friendships. As we grow older, our relationships develop and deepen.

GENUINE FRIENDSHIP

Can you spot a real friend? Much has been written on the qualities of true friendship, and if we look at a wide selection of writings, basic signs of friendship will surface time and time again:

- **Friendship takes time.** Friendship evolves as two people make time for one another to share activities, plans, and interests. Acquaintances, or people to whom you know only well enough to say "hi", certainly are not true friends; but this group can be considered the pool from which we can make, with time, close and genuine friends.
- **True friends show kindness toward each other.** True friends care about what is really best for each other and will have the courage to speak up if a friend is doing something that could be harmful to himself and/or others.
- **Genuine friendship is built on loyalty and trust.** When you are having problems, a true friend will stand by you and won't "tell the world" about what you are going through.
- **In a real friendship, you will give of your time and energy to your friend, and will feel good about being able to help.** This doesn't mean that you control or dominate the other person, but simply that you are there when he/she needs you.
- **You can be yourself with a true friend and know that you will be accepted.**

ARTIFICIAL FRIENDSHIP

Perhaps the clearest sign that a relationship with another person is not one of true friendship is when one person is being used by the other.

At every stage in life this occurs. For example, a 10-year-old may want to visit a neighbor's house only because of the new mountain bike he can ride there. At age 13, he may be friendly toward someone only because of that person's I-Pod. At 16, he may seem to be friends because of not having a car (the ticket to popularity and freedom!) and the other person does. True friendship, however, cannot be built on selfish interests such as these. In each example one person is exploiting or using the other.

Artificial or "fake" friends are marked by insecurity (saying or doing things that you don't really mean),

compromise (not being true to your values in order to please someone else), and lack of loyalty (not standing by someone when he or she really needs you - “fair weather friends”).

Relationships such as these not only fail to meet your needs but can be very hurtful and frustrating as well. Experiences with artificial friends can carry over into other future relationships and tend to make you mistrust the motives of those you want to trust. These early hurtful relationships can make it hard for the person to develop strong bonds.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

There are **four basic levels of friendship**:

1. **acquaintances**
2. **casual friends**
3. **close friends**
4. **intimate friends (this does not refer to sexual intimacy; it can mean emotional, spiritual connection -- “soul mates” who complement & share their “innermost being” levels)**

Acquaintances, the people you say “hi” to when you greet them in the mall, make up the pool of potential friends and potential dates. These acquaintances become known as your peer group.

Today, casual dates and “hookups” are so prevalent amongst teens and young adults. “Hookups” are one night stands with strangers (someone never met before), or that are only acquaintances. Any relationship starting on the foundation of sexual activity will not last long. All that lasts is the broken heart.

Analyzing the behavior, character, dress, activities and future goals of various acquaintances will help you make good decisions about which people possess value systems resembling yours. Narrowing down which peer group best compares to your family and personal values allow you to identify your next smaller group of potential friends.

Some members of the pool of acquaintances (peer group) develop into the next level of friendship called **casual friends**. Generally speaking, casual friends are people with whom you feel comfortable sharing activities and interests. Most friends that you make in a lifetime are casual.

It takes much time and sustained commitment to arrive at the third level of **close friendship**. From within the casual friends, a smaller group of close friends begins to gather. In a discussion of building friendships, it should be understood that although close friendship may be your goal, that level of commitment sharing and trust is harder to achieve.

Intimate friendship is the fourth category. Friends in this category are very special and rare. At this level of sharing, intimate friends feel comfortable sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings. This type of friendship is usually marked by a deep understanding of and appreciation for the view and values of those involved. A desire for intimate friendship is a basic human quality that calls for a giving of self to others; it can result in a lasting love relationship. A person would be fortunate to have 5 intimate friends in a lifetime.

One of those intimate friends will be a marriage partner. Marriage is the means ordained to bond one to his/her spouse, and to provide for the future of humanity. Marriage is a lifetime covenantal relationship for the health and well-being of a man and a woman, a family environment for children to be produced and raised, and an institution for the wellbeing of society at large. It is the basic unit of civilization; the healthy survival of marriage and family is crucial to the healthy survival of civilization as we know it.

Each day in America, 8000 teens will be infected with a sexually-transmitted disease (STD/STI)⁹
One of 4 sexually active teens in America is infected with an STD/STI¹⁰

⁹ Meg Meeker, M.D. (2002) *Epidemic*, DC, Regency Publishing Company.

¹⁰ AGI, *Sex and America's Teenagers*, New York: AGI, 1994, pp. 19-20.

The younger the person is when he/she starts sexual activity, the more likely that person is to have multiple sex partners. Research shows among those who were age 20 in 1992, 74 percent of these males who had sexual intercourse at age 14 or younger; they had 6 or more partners during their lifetime. About 48 percent of those who initiated sex at ages 15 or 16, had 6 or more lifetime partners, and only 10 percent of those who did not have intercourse until age 17 or older had 6 or more lifetime partners. The greater the number of sexual partners a person has, the greater the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.¹¹

Now there are 8 couples living together for every 100 married couples. In 1970, there was 1 cohabiting couple for every 100 married couple households.¹²

The pressure today to develop only shallow friendships, or friendships that are all about “me”, is significant. In a world of one night stands, and how many partners can I bag this weekend, today’s relationships are not started to last. Many relationships are over before they even really begin. With broken relationships come broken hearts. It takes an incredibly long time for a person’s heart to heal.

¹¹ <http://aspe.hhs.gov/HSP/97trends/sd4-4.htm>

¹² Waite, L.J. & Gallagher, M (2000), *The Case for Marriage*, New York, Double Day.

THE BASIS OF THE SOCIAL CONCEPT

PART X: PERSONAL, FAMILY AND PUBLIC MORALITY SECTION 6: ON CHASTITY

<http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/kh>

(This document was adopted at the Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, this document sets forth the basic provisions of her teaching on church-state relations and a number of problems socially significant today. It also reflects the official position of Moscow Patriarchate on relations with state and secular society. In addition, it gives a number of guidelines to be applied in this field by the episcopate, clergy and laity.)

X. 6. The virtue of chastity preached by the Church is the basis of the inner unity of the human personality, which should always be in the state of harmony between its mental and bodily powers. Fornication inevitably ruins the harmony and integrity of one's life, damaging heavily one's spiritual health. Libertinism dulls the spiritual vision and hardens the heart, making it incapable of true love. **The happiness of full-blooded family life becomes unattainable for the fornicator. Sins against chastity also lead to negative social consequences.** In the situation of a spiritual crisis of the human society, the mass media and the products of the so-called mass culture sometimes become instruments of moral corruption by praising sexual laxity, all kinds of sexual perversion and other sinful passions. **Pornography, which is the exploitation of the sexual drive for commercial, political or ideological purposes, contributes to the suppression of the spiritual and moral principles, thus reducing man to an animal motivated by instinct alone.**

The propaganda of vice is especially harmful for the still infirm souls of children and youth.

Through books, films and other video products, as well as the mass media and some educational curricula, teenagers are often taught an idea of sexual relations extremely humiliating for the human dignity, since it gives no room to such notions as chastity, marital faithfulness and selfless love. Intimate relations between man and woman are not only exposed for show, offending the natural feeling of prudence, but also presented as an act of purely corporal gratification without any association with inner communion or any moral obligations. The Church urges the faithful to struggle, in co-operation with all morally healthy forces, against the propagation of this diabolical temptation, which, by destroying the family, undermines the foundations of society.

«Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart», the Lord Jesus Christ says in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:28). «When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death» St. James warns (Jam. 1:15). «Neither fornicators... shall inherit the kingdom of God» (1 Cor. 9-10). These words can be fully applied to the consumers and even more so the manufacturers of pornographic production. The latter can also fall under these words of Christ: «Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea... Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh» (Mt. 18:6-7). «Fornication is poison mortifying the soul... Whoever fornicates rejects Christ», St. Tikhon Zadonsky wrote. St. Dimitry of Rostov wrote that «the body of each Christian is not his, but Christ's, according to the words of Scripture: 'Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular' (1 Cor. 12-27). And it does not behove you to defile the body of Christ by carnal and voluptuous actions, except lawful conjugality. For you are a house of Christ, according to the word of the Apostle: 'for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are' (1 Cor. 3:17)». The Early Church, in the writings of her fathers and doctors, such as Clement of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nyssa

and St. John Chrysostom, invariably renounced obscene drama scenes and presentations. Under the threat of excommunication, the 100th Canon of the Council in Trullo prohibits making «representations corrupting the mind and provoking inflammations of impure pleasures».

The human body is a wondrous creation of God and is ordained to become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). **Condemning pornography and fornication, the Church does not at all call to abhor the body or sexual intimacy as such. For the physical relations between man and woman are blessed by God in marriage in which they express chaste love, complete communion and the «harmony of the minds and bodies» of the spouses, for which the Church prays in the celebration of wedding. What actually should be denounced is the tendency to turn these chaste and appropriate relations as God has designed them and the human body itself into an object of humiliating exploitation and trade to derive egoistic, impersonal, loveless and perverted pleasure. For this reason, the Church invariably denounces prostitution and the preaching of the so-called free love in which physical intimacy is completely divorced from personal and spiritual communion, selflessness and all-round responsibility for each other, which are possible only in the lifetime conjugal faithfulness.**

Aware of the need for the school, along with the family, to give children and adolescents the knowledge of sexuality and the physical human nature, the Church cannot support those programs of «sexual education» in which premarital intercourse and, all the more so, various perversions are recognised as the norm. It is absolutely unacceptable to impose such programs upon schoolchildren. School is called to oppose vice which erodes the integrity of the personality, to educate children for chastity and prepare them for creating solid families based on faithfulness and purity.



ONE: LOVE WITHOUT COMMITMENT IS A LIE

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and do not have love, I am as the sound of brass and a noisy cymbal...Love is longsuffering and kind; love does not envy; love does not boast of itself nor is it puffed up. Love does not behave itself in an unseemly manner, nor seek to have its own way; it is not easily provoked and does not think evil. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but in truth; it bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became an adult, I put away childish things ...Now, there abides faith, hope and love: but the greatest of these is love" (1Cor.13).

Of all the faculties, senses, capabilities, attributes and virtues of the human race, it is committed love that bestows upon us our humanity and relates us to the Divine. Love is the dynamic force which gives meaning to our lives in this world, and hope for eternity. While the nature of genuine love may seem elusive and indefinable, it is clearly a force which takes us outside ourselves and unites and bonds us to a greater reality in a positive and creative manner.

It is a tragedy that the word "love" is so often used as a metaphor for "gratification," "self-fulfillment," or for using another person to fulfill our sexual passions.

In fact, love gives meaning and purpose to life by spiritually bonding us together with another person (as in marriage), with other people (as in a parish or other extended family), and with God, in a way that gives depth, meaning, permanence, commitment and a positive, creative dimension, to all that we share in life and, indeed, to life itself. Love, for an Orthodox Christian, is above all the dynamic force of salvation, of ascension toward God. Marriage is, first and foremost, a path of salvation.

There is no such thing as love without a firm commitment. Not realizing the full meaning and implications of love is one of the main reasons young people engage in pre-marital sexual relations, and also the single most important reason that so many marriages fail.

The commitment of love is expressed in the sincere desire, arising from the depths of heart and soul, to forsake every consideration of self, and subject every other attachment for the sake of the one we love. In true love, ambition for self-glory and advancement is transformed into a desire to please and care for the one we love. Individual interests are replaced by mutual interests, "my" life is dissolved into "our" life. We commit ourselves to a spiritual bond which is a type and likeness of Christ and the Church, a likeness of self-sacrifice which brings with it the joy of hope and expectation, and of salvation and everlasting life. Marriage is a type and likeness of redemption itself.

Many times, people think that they "fall in love", but this is almost never true. A couple may like each other very much ___ even intensely ___ and feel a strong sexual attraction to each other, and these powerful feelings are interpreted as a strong love. Unfortunately for the girl or woman in such a situation, if they fall into pre-marital sexual relations, they will find that the man's "love" was often no more than his drive for conquest, and that there was no bases for a genuine commitment.

It is, therefore, important that children and young people always be taught the absolute bond between love and complete commitment. Love is a "growth situation." No one actually "falls in love." People may like each other

deeply and be strongly attached to each other, but love comes only from a long-term experience. Commitment to one another is the prime expression of love and it gives strength to a relationship so that it can have time to grow and develop into a full and complete love. Without a fulfilled commitment, sexual relations are merely using another person for the most selfish of reasons.

Love pertains not only to the things we find positive and attractive in a person, but also to the negative aspects of their personality and the things we discover about them over the years that we find unattractive. This is why actual love is not instantaneous. It is a process of growth and maturity.

None of us are “complete packages.” We are all constantly changing, hopefully growing and developing. No two people grow and develop at the same rate and to the same degree. Unfortunately, some of us actually stop growing mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and begin to stagnate and then degenerate. Very often the elusive, almost indefinable gradual breakdown in a marriage is precisely this difference in the growth and development of the partners. It does not matter whether both partners are working outside the home or the wife is working in the home, one of the two will almost certainly mature more quickly and more completely, and the spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth rate may very easily be different. This difference in development can cause the subtle arising of a gulf or division between a couple, and often, neither party realizes the source of the gradual feeling of “drifting apart.” If they do realize it, it can be difficult to discuss in a positive manner. Men often feel threatened by a wife’s growth and women who work in the home often feel oppressed and “cheated” of the opportunity to grow.

Actually, in a relationship with true love and commitment, a couple should grow and develop not merely *with* each other, but *because* of each other. It is important to realize the possibility of this problem arising and discuss it at the very beginning of a marriage. Indeed, it should be an integral part of the pre-marital counseling. Personal and individual growth, maturing and development is something that should be planned for and, from the very beginning of an Orthodox marriage, it should be resolved that this process is going to be founded on genuine spiritual growth. It should be clearly understood that mutual spiritual growth and development is a fundamental *reason* for an Orthodox marriage in the first place. If this is clearly established, and the possibility of differing rates of intellectual and emotional maturing is understood from the beginning, it will be infinitely easier to cope with such a problem if it should arise. Any family, whether it consists only of husband and wife or includes a number of children, must constantly *struggle* to grow, develop and mature spiritually, emotionally and intellectually together, as a unit. This is difficult to accomplish and, from an Orthodox perspective, it requires much prayer and a clearly Christ-centered family life.

It is evident that this growth and development is something which must be carefully planned for in pre-marriage discussions and during the early years of a marriage. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, it is an essential part of the *reason* for a couple to want to marry each other and it is a fundamental aspect of the very *nature* of marriage.

If there is a firm commitment to each other between two people, then there can be a *mutual* growth and development in love, no matter what other divergent directions the two people’s development may take. Their common ground for growth and development, indeed, the pivot point of their lives, should be their spiritual advancement. With this shared in common, their commitment will be firm and certain and their growth in love will be permanent and continuous. If the common ground of Orthodox Christian spiritual growth and development is established and accepted as the basis of a couple’s life, then divergent paths of growth in other areas will not create difficulties in a marriage. The commitment of love requires that we keep our priorities clear.

Man was not created to exist in egoistic isolation, and man and woman are not two totally separate beings, for neither can, on their own, fulfill God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. Rather, they are two halves of one whole, called upon to dwell together in a sanctified unity, drawing together in an increasing love, so that in such a state of oneness, they may rise from carnal to spiritual love and so aspire toward the Creator, having discovered through their own ascent in love the hint of that higher and more perfect love which seeks freedom from the bonds of fleshly passions.

Marriage provides us with an opportunity and a means to grow and develop in the spiritual and emotional realm, but this growth and development can only take place on a firm foundation of genuine commitment to each other, and a mutual, sincere commitment to God. The bond of unity and ever-growing love between husband and wife

is designed to give humanity a basic experience and awareness of a growth in love toward unity with God, made possible by Jesus Christ. Marriage, according to the Apostle, is a type of Christ and the Church. It is intended to instruct us, not by means of abstract concepts or in books or words, but in an actual living experience, about Christ and the Church, and our whole relationship with God.

Love is intended to be, first and foremost, a path of salvation, a path of ascension toward God. The *commitment* of love is an important aspect of this, for it defeats our ego and self-love, which are hindrances to our salvation and our relationship with God.

Marriage is not a legal or magical ritual for “making sexual relations moral.” It is perfectly possible for sexual relations *within* a marriage to be immoral. If one party has entered into the marriage under false pretenses and is living in it without genuine love then, for that person the relationship is not moral, but merely a matter of utility or self-gratification. Love itself is the factor which makes the union moral. It is wrong to consider that the crowning ceremony is a magical means of changing something immoral into something moral. For, though a marriage is sanctified by the Church, it is the condition and transformation of the heart which perfects and transfigures and saves.

All these things should be discussed in detail, and prayerfully, not only with a couple who have decided to be married, but with teenagers, and in a more simple form this should be gently woven into the children’s church-school classes. The depth of commitment in marriage must be stressed, and the priest should make it clear that the commitment in marriage is not only a commitment of two people to each other, but a commitment to God which involves the salvation of the soul. Marriage is, above all, a union of two people for the sake of mutually working out the salvation of their souls. Marriage is a means of ascent toward the heavenly kingdom.

TWO: THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE

{1}

“Shall I tell you how marriage is also a mystery of the Church? Christ came into the Church, and She was made of Him and He united with Her in spiritual intercourse...So marriage is a type of the presence of Christ.” (St John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians).

In the beginning, God created man and woman and called on them to unite as one, to live in unity and harmony, putting every other relationship aside. They were to be so spiritually united that they would be “as one flesh.” (Gn.2: 24) In paradise this unity was real. After the fall, however, divisions of all kinds took place in our human nature and the bond between husband and wife was corrupted. Because of this corruption, divorce was permitted (Nm.30:10-14) because mankind’s heart had become hardened (Mt.19:7-8). There was a certain amount of protection for a woman, particularly with relation to her dowry but, apart from some social restrictions, divorce was simply a matter of the man telling the woman that the marriage was over. Marriage had lost its divine purpose and become only an agreement to live together, to “co-habit.” Technically, it was reduced to a social and sexual function.

With the coming of Christ, something dramatic took place which changed the way marriage is understood. Christ not only restored the original meaning of marriage, but gave it the *fulness* of its meaning. Christ not only restored, in Himself, the original condition of man, but in His humanity the destiny which Adam failed to attain is completed. As the “new Adam,” He restores all things to their original intent and purpose. God’s plan for mankind is re-born in Christ. The blessed condition of humanity in paradise was lost.¹³

Christ has reopened the gates of paradise and, in the Holy Church, planted anew the garden of Grace.

The Kingdom of God has now been manifested on earth, and henceforth everything that takes place in the Christian life must be viewed in the context of the Heavenly Kingdom. Perhaps mankind has not yet returned to Eden, but paradise, in a spiritual form, has returned to mankind, and all who believe and accept the Kingdom must strive

¹³ Man was not perfect in paradise. He was in a state of spiritual infancy and was supposed to grow and develop spiritually. In the fulness of time, he would have been given all things of the garden. By the “blessed condition of humanity in paradise,” we mean his state of innocence and of ongoing spiritual growth and development.

to draw away from the standards and concepts of the fallen world and come into accord with the standards and concepts of the Kingdom of God. Spiritually, with the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit, man must rebuild paradise in his heart, or rather struggle to allow the Holy Spirit to manifest it there. For the Kingdom must live within us now if we hope to abide in it for eternity.

Thus, for the Orthodox Christian, every step, every aspect of life is a Holy Mystery – a mystery of the Kingdom, and thus a part of the Mystery of Redemption. In the manifestation of the Heavenly Kingdom by Jesus Christ, marriage returns to its original intent, to the purpose for which it was created in paradise. It is once more a revelation of redemption, a type and likeness of Christ and the Church.

The being of mankind itself reveals the Church and its relationship to Christ our God – obscured though that revelation may have become. For the human race, working together with Satan, has enslaved itself with senseless passions and negative stereotypes. Western man has excelled in this, to such a degree that the true basis and purpose of human sexuality as a revelation has become completely obscured.

By sexuality we do not mean “making love” (sex). Sexuality is the whole fabric of an individual’s being as either male or female. When human sexuality becomes imprisoned in stereotypes and moralistic bonds, then it is held back from rising to its true purpose and that purpose itself is obscured in blind negatives. Human sexuality is at once deep and powerful, and yet as fine and delicate and beautiful as a fragile spring blossom. It is fascinatingly simple and pure, while at the same time, one of the most complex, baffling and vulnerable aspects of our inter-human relations. These contradictory qualities are the conflict between the passions of the fallen nature, and the purpose of the creation of human sexuality.

Man was created for communion with God. He can find his complete fulfillment only in a life of communion, praise and giving glory to the Creator, living in a unison of love with God, by love drawing nearer to Him, toward sharing in His immortality, in His Deity. We know that man was not created for death, that it was not God’s intention for him to die, but rather to live through unity with the Creator. Yet God, Who knows all things from eternity unto eternity, foreknew humanity’s fall from this state of unity and thus, the advent of death. On account of this, He created Eve and provided every creature and living thing with a means of procreation. Man and woman were created in such a way that even in the fallen state they would have a means of a certain fulfillment in a type and revelation about Christ and the Church. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Ephesians about the Mystery of marriage (which is also, in fact, the mystery of human sexuality), says: *“This mystery is great, for I speak of Christ and the Church,”* and St John Chrysostom tells us:

“Shall I tell you how marriage is also a mystery of the Church? Christ came into the Church, and She was made of Him and He united with Her in spiritual intercourse...So marriage is a type of the presence of Christ.”

Humans were not created to exist in egoistic isolation, but to dwell together in a sanctified unity, drawing together in an increasing love so that in such a state of oneness, they may rise in spiritual love and so aspire toward the Creator, having discovered through their own ascent in love the hint of that higher and more perfect love which seeks freedom from the bonds of fleshly passions. The bond of unity and growing love between husband and wife is designed to give man the first basic experience and awareness of his growth in love, toward unity with God, made possible by Christ Jesus.

Human sexuality is intended to reflect and thus to instruct us, not in totally abstract concepts or in books or words, but in actual living experience, concerning Christ and the Church and our whole relationship with God. In this revelation, the husband typifies Christ and the wife typifies the Church.

{2}

Marriage is a very great mystery of divine Grace. As a type of Christ and the Holy Church, Orthodox matrimony is also a profound revelation about the nature of our redemption. It reveals to us the fallen nature and teaches what Christ has done to redeem human nature through His Holy Church. Since the mystery of redemption has nothing to do with fulfilling or satisfying justice or with purging some imaginary “Original Sin,” but rather with the rescue and healing of the human nature, enslaved by sin and the bondage of death, marriage is an ideal reflection of our

redemption.

Christ came to earth to redeem human nature from the bondage of the Evil One and to regenerate us through the mystery of co-suffering love, a love so great, so totally unselfish, that the Immortal One Himself laid down His life for our sake. As Apostle Paul says: *"Christ loved the Church and gave His life for Her" (Eph.5:25).*

The creation of man and woman as opposites, as two separate parts of one whole, was a provision God made, foreknowing man's fall. As such, it is a revelation about the separateness or division in the fallen human nature caused by sin, as St Basil the Great says:

"For there would be no divisions, no strife, no war among men, if sin had not made cleavages in human nature.... And this is foremost in the Saviour's incarnate economy: to gather human nature to itself and to Himself and, having abolished this evil cleavage, to restore the original unity, as the best physician binds up a body that has been broken in many pieces...."

Thus, marriage is a sanctified union of two people with different aspects of the human nature. This union joins the struggle of two individuals into a stronger, mutual effort for salvation. By growing in co-suffering, unselfish love for each other and their family, they conquer the fragmentation of human nature into isolated and self-centered individualism. This is stated clearly in the Prayer of Betrothal:

"O Lord, eternal God, Who has brought into unity and oneness the things which before had been separate, Who blessed Isaak and Rebecca declaring them to be inheritors of Thy promise, bless these Thy servants...."

These same ideas are evident in the prayers throughout the service of the Holy Mystery of Matrimony, particularly in the most notable part of the service, the crowning. Traditionally, the bride and groom are crowned three times with "stefana," wreaths of laurel and blossoms which, from ancient times, has symbolized victory. At the time of the crowning ceremony, the husband and wife are led three times around the analogion with the Gospel on it. As they process, three hymns are chanted which explain both the three-fold crowning and the profound meaning of marriage:

"Rejoice, O Isaiah! For a virgin was truly with child and bore a Son, Emmanuel, Who is both God and Man: Dayspring is His name, and magnifying Him, we call the Virgin blessed."

The bride and groom are crowned with a crown of rejoicing. For Christ, as the Prophet foretold, has come into the world to reunite and redeem human nature, uniting it to Himself and regenerating it in His Holy Church. They are crowned with joy as types of Christ and His Holy Church, symbolizing and typifying that very redemption itself, as they are united into one flesh by the Holy Spirit.

For the second crowning, as the couple processes around the analogion, the people chant:

"O holy martyrs who have fought the good fight and have received your crowns: entreat the Lord to have mercy on our souls."

The couple is crowned also with the martyr's crown. As Christ loved His Church and died for Her (Eph.5:25), so also now the husband and wife are called upon to sacrifice their ego and self-love, to cease being "I" and become "we." They will sacrifice themselves for each other and, later, for their children, willingly "martyring" themselves, overcoming their own individual ego and will for the sake of one another, out of love of each other. By this very act, they experience and grow in co-suffering love in imitation of Christ. In this, the human nature is healed and redeemed, if they will *"run with patience the race which is set before them" (Hb. 12:1).*

The third crowning, and circuit of the analogion and Gospel, is signified by the hymn:

"Glory to Thee, O Christ God, Boast of the apostles and Joy of martyrs who proclaimed the Consubstantial Trinity."

The victory crown of salvation is bestowed upon the couple, for marriage is a union of two people into one flesh so that they can mutually work out their salvation by means of love, hope, joy, self-sacrificing and spiritual struggle. They have become both martyrs and apostles of Christ, striving to live His Gospel and teach it to their children, shepherding their families as the apostles and bishops shepherd the Church. Moreover, bride and groom have

become something of a type of oneness of love of the Holy Trinity, since *“the two shall be one flesh”* (Gn.2:24; Mt.19:5), *“so that they are no longer two, but one flesh”* (Mt.19:6).

The original form of the Orthodox Christian marriage service was simple, direct and clear. The couple attended the Divine Liturgy and received Holy Communion together. They were then blessed by the bishop with a short prayer in which he asked God to unite the couple. The actual moment of the completion of the marriage was (and is) the joint reception of Holy Communion. This is straightforward and perfectly logical, since marriage is a type and likeness of Christ and the Church. The Liturgy is the divine wedding feast of Christ and the Church, and Holy Communion is that moment in which the faithful – the Church – are supremely united to Christ. Holy Communion is a central point in our redemption. Marriage, as a direct type of the unity of Christ and the Church, is thus an event in the realm of redemption.

For Orthodox Christians, marriage is not simply a mutual agreement to live together in love and raise children in a legally sanctioned bond. It is a form of ministry, sealed by the Holy Spirit, in which the couple become living types of Christ and the Church, fulfilling the ministry of salvation toward each other, toward their children and toward the whole Orthodox community.

{3}

“How shall we describe the joy of a marriage which is prepared and arranged by the Church. It is given strength by the Eucharist, and the seal of blessing is set upon it; angels are present as witnesses and the Father bestows His consent upon it.” (Tertullian)

Then a couple have had their marriage crowned by the Church, their union is one specially sanctified *“both on earth and in heaven”* (Mt.16:19), and their marriage is not theirs alone, but is a matter of the whole Church, the whole body of Christ. This is why there is no possibility of a “private marriage,” which excludes *any* of the faithful from attendance. Marriage is a liturgical service which takes place in the presence of the whole “people of God.” For the Orthodox Christian, the faithful – the people of God – are his or her immediate family, for they have a common father – God – and a common mother – the Church. A private, “by invitation only” wedding is not Orthodox, and is contrary to the very essence of Orthodox marriage. A priest has no reason to serve such a marriage, and if a couple seek to insist on such an arrangement, he should refuse on the grounds that they are not seeking to enter into an Orthodox Christian marriage. The Holy Mysteries are not a matter of the priest making magical pronouncements over people. The Mysteries are “liturgical,” and this means “a gathering of the faithful,” not “a ritual.” An Orthodox wedding is a matter of the whole congregation (coming together) of the faithful in which the priest, as the ordained representative of the congregation, presides. The prayers are the prayers of the whole congregation, the “people of God,” being led by their ordained presbyter. A wedding served only by the priest without the coming together of the congregation to jointly bestow the prayers and benedictions of the Church, is not proper and not Orthodox. A priest has no right to serve any Holy Mystery or Liturgical service of the Church at which a portion of the faithful are excluded.

What we have said here should also make it clear that Sunday is the proper day for marriage, that the couple should have their marriage crowned at the Liturgy and, if they are both Orthodox, receive Communion together. It is quite perverse to marry a couple on Saturday, without the Divine Liturgy and Communion.¹⁴ This not only leaves the marriage un-sealed by the mutual reception of Holy Communion, but also puts them in the position of spending their first night together instead of preparing for Communion on the eve of the Lord’s Day Liturgy, thus from the beginning, violating the essential meaning of marriage.

Marriage, as with all Holy Mysteries and liturgical services, is a matter of the coming together (synaxis) of the people of God--the congregation for mutual prayers and intercession. Marriage especially, should be served in conjunction with the Liturgy and the receiving of the Eucharist. The practice of replacing Holy Communion with the “common cup” can only indicate that one of the couple is not Orthodox and therefore cannot receive Communion. This is a subject for another discussion.

¹⁴ Presumably, one could have a marriage crowned on any non-fast day, provided the “Wedding Liturgy” was served and Holy Communion sealed the marriage. Even with a Saturday Liturgy (which is offered in behalf of all departed souls and is not appropriate for a wedding) it is difficult to see how one can justify spending the first night together on the eve of the Lord’s Day. This does not mean that there is anything wrong or even slightly “off” about the sexual relations of the married couple, but Saturday is the day of preparation for the Eucharist of the Lord’s Day.

THREE: LOVE: AN EVER EXPANDING CIRCLE

Marriage unites two people in a growing bond of love and makes them “one.” But marriage involves more than the two people being united. The relationship between each individual and their family and friends is going to change – sometimes dramatically. In some instances, old friendships will slowly disappear. Family relationships will not disappear, however, and each partner in a marriage will acquire a new or “extended family.”

From an Orthodox point of view, parents and family are very important. An Orthodox couple who are planning to marry should work out their relationship with each other’s parents and family before their marriage takes place. Much pain and difficulty can be avoided if there is a loving, harmonious relationship among the extended family, on both sides. The basis for this love and harmony is the love between husband and wife. A person is expected to “leave mother and father and cling” to one another. In reality, however, when a couple marry, each of them usually marries into a new family of in-laws. The manner in which each spouse relates to the new “expanded family” can have a dramatic effect on the condition of the marriage. It should not always be this way, but it usually is, and this should be taken into account in the early stages of planning for a marriage. There are two special reasons for this in modern society.

First of all, we do not have the cultural and social support which existed in previous times, and which controlled and helped shape our clan and tribal relationships. The old, clear and inviolable standards of relationships __ even the beautiful and enduring Serbian “Kumstvo” __ have all but vanished in the modern hi-tech and highly mobile society.

The second problem is complex; we find that marriages in which a young couple live at home and go directly from their family setting into marriage, are especially vulnerable. This was not the case when the former cultural and social frameworks were strong, but it is now. We now find that when two people have lived on their own for a while and “discovered themselves” before they enter into marriage, the marriage tends to be stronger. There are clear reasons for this, but it is an unfortunate situation. From a spiritual point of view, it is better if a person does not live alone, subjected to extra temptations. It is better to live with one’s family, and leave home only when one marries but, in our society, this is only an ideal. When it does happen, each partner is obviously more closely bound to his or her family, and too often the other partner is not merely marrying the spouse, he or she is “marrying the spouses family.”

It is important for the priest to discuss this with a couple who plan to marry. It is important for a couple to realize that their love is going to have to extend outward to their new relatives. Their love must expand beyond themselves and encompass the “new family” they are marrying into.

Each partner should weigh his or her relationship with and feelings toward the extended family and realize the full implications it holds for their marriage. This matter must be examined and discussed frankly as part of the priest’s preparatory discussions with the couple.

In marriage, love must be an ever expanding circle. Our children naturally expand its boundaries, but each partner must expect and understand the full implication of “sharing their love” with each other’s family. They should also understand the proper boundaries to this sharing of love, and firmly resolve that their love for each other and the marriage are their first considerations. The couple should carefully resolve, ahead of time, questions about the limits of their parents influence and involvement in their married life. They must put each other first and their marriage above every consideration, while resolving to love and respect each other’s parents and relatives.

The priest, counseling a couple who desire to be married, should never neglect to discuss this important matter of relationships with the “extended family.” Continued parental dependency in one or both marriage partners is a frequent source of conflict and stress. It occurs predominantly by (but not exclusively among) individuals who have not lived away from home before their marriage.

Over dependency on parents and/or parental over protectiveness can be a real destroyer of marriages if it is not recognized and dealt with effectively. Gentleness, compassion and understanding are necessary in these cases, but

firmness and a primary loyalty to the spouse are equally necessary.

Other related problems are discussed in the section, “Stress Points in Marriage.”

FOUR: STRESS POINTS IN MARRIAGE

There are many stress points in marriage, and we cannot discuss all of them here. There is, however, one important and pivotal problem which must be looked at.

One major stress point which can be quite serious, and which often requires special love and work to come through, is the differing rate of growth and maturity which is often experienced by each partner in a marriage.

In this present context, let us repeat something that was said earlier. None of us is a “complete package.” We are all constantly changing, hopefully growing and developing. No two people grow and develop at the same rate and to the same degree. Unfortunately, some of us actually stop growing mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and begin to stagnate and then degenerate. Often the elusive, almost un-definable gradual breakdown in a marriage is precisely this difference in the growth and development of the partners in marriage. It does not matter whether both partners are working outside the home or the wife is working in the home, one of the two will almost certainly mature more quickly and more completely, and the spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth rate may very easily be different. This difference in development can cause a subtle development of a gulf or division between a couple and, very often, neither party realizes the source of the gradual feeling of “drifting apart.” If they do realize it, it can be difficult to discuss in a positive manner. Men often feel threatened by a wife’s growth and women who work in the home often feel oppressed and “cheated” of the opportunity to grow.

Actually, in a relationship with true love and commitment, a couple should grow and develop not merely *with* each other, but *because* of each other. It is important to realize the possibility of this problem arising and discuss it at the very beginning of a marriage; indeed, it should be an integral part of the pre-marital counseling. Personal and individual growth, maturing and development is something that should be planned for, and from the very beginning of an Orthodox marriage, it should be resolved that this process is going to be founded on genuine spiritual growth. It should be clearly understood that mutual spiritual growth and development is a fundamental *reason* for an Orthodox marriage in the first place. If this is clearly established, and the possibility of differing rates of intellectual and emotional maturing is understood from the beginning, it will be infinitely easier to cope with such a problem if it should arise. Any family, whether it consists only of husband and wife, or includes a number of children, must constantly *struggle* to grow, develop and mature spiritually, emotionally and intellectually together, as a unit. This is difficult to accomplish and, from an Orthodox perspective, it requires much prayer and a clearly Christ-centered family life.

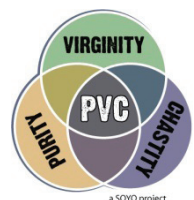
It is evident that this is something which must be carefully planned for in pre-marriage discussions and during the early years of a marriage. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, it is an essential part of the *reason* for a couple to want to marry each other, and it is a fundamental aspect of the very *nature* of marriage.

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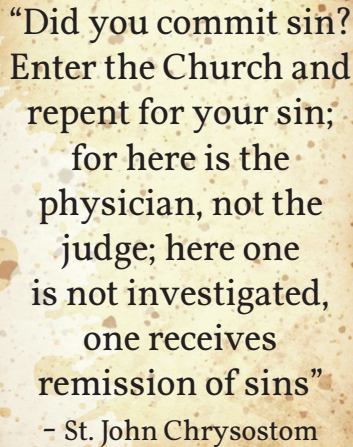
Before you begin this discussion, list details in the first two columns and then fill in the last column after completing your readings and discussions.

HUMAN SEXUALITY – PURITY, VIRGINITY, AND CHASTITY		
WHAT I KNOW	WHAT I WANT TO KNOW	WHAT I LEARNED

∴ KEEP THIS PAGE FOR YOUR OWN USE ∴



REPENTANCE & FORGIVENESS



“Did you commit sin?
Enter the Church and
repent for your sin;
for here is the
physician, not the
judge; here one
is not investigated,
one receives
remission of sins”
- St. John Chrysostom

Forgiveness is a necessary piece of the Orthodox Christian faith— Living in the fallen world, we find ourselves from time to time falling short of the *mark*, the *mark* being the perfected life of Jesus Christ which is our high calling.

In Orthodoxy we believe that when you fall, there is always a way to get back up. This process includes repentance and forgiveness. For anyone to say that he is perfect and does not need to be forgiven for his/her sins is a disservice to oneself. Unless we seek forgiveness of our sins, we will find ourselves more weighed down by them and more challenged to follow Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness comes about as a result of repentance. The steps of repentance are:

1. Recognition of one's sins;
2. Turning aside from the sin by changing one's behavior so as to not sin anymore;
3. Reception of absolution through the sacrament of Confession.

All sins are sin, in that they are actions which turn us away from God. Fr. George Morelli states “Sin is a breaking of God's Laws to love Him and to love our neighbor, despite and in the face of His infinite love for us.” Confession is one of the sacraments of the Church, for it leads us back on the path to “oneness” with God. When we confess with a true heart, we are forgiven by God, but we need to constantly renew it by living a life of constant repentance and forgiveness.

The Role of the Priest

It is not the priest that absolves and forgives our sins, but God. The priest is God's instrument to bear witness and offer absolution and penance. We should not be afraid of the priest. The priest is like one's family doctor, he gives counsel and “spiritual” medication. He knows best what medications work best for us. If you are sick, you wouldn't hide your sickness from your family doctor. Therefore if we are spiritually sick, we need not hide it from our spiritual doctor.

Sources and Helpful Information:

- www.Orthodoxinfo.com
- **Antiochian Archdiocese:** <http://www.antiochian.org/node/18185>

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY



Protopresbyter
John Meyendorff

THEY BECAME ONE FLESH

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." . . . and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man . . . Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18-24)

In the very beginning of human existence, God established one of the essential laws of human nature: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Even modern philosophy -- that of Freud, for example -- finds in this law an explanation of the most intimate psychological and physiological impulses of man, although philosophical systems in the Freudian tradition usually lose all sense of balance and measure, and cannot be accepted as such. Even so, it is impossible to deny a fundamental truth to God's words, for a person in isolation often tends to live for himself, developing a spirit of self-sufficiency, while losing the sense of responsibility for others and his freedom to love, thereby further isolating himself from true human happiness. So quite naturally, ". . . a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."

But it must be remembered that this law of human love has been given to man still in paradise, to a man who lived in conformity with his Creator's will and in accordance with the purpose for which he was created. Neither the story of Adam and Eve's fall, as described in the Book of Genesis immediately after the account of their creation, nor any historical or scientific research, can tell whether such an ideal humanity existed on earth any substantial length of time. For through man's unwillingness to obey God and to enjoy the happiness granted to him, evil and death entered into the world and all aspects of human life went astray from their original form and purpose. All natural instincts acquired an ability to be misused: man's position of dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28-29) became his instinct of egoistic domination and the natural use of the earth's fruits became gluttony. Of course, none of these abused instincts can be fully satisfied, as they point to a goal which is beyond human reach . . . man can still be happy with God, but he cannot be fully happy while he remains alone.

According to Christian revelation, the abuse of human instincts were not in the original plan of God; they came with man refusing God's company and fellowship, wishing to be by himself. And since he had no true life in himself, he became mortal, and thus utterly unsatisfied, and finally, sinful.

The original affinity of man and woman was also touched by this universal corruption: the instinct of bringing together two human beings acquired an element of self-satisfaction: the "other" ceased to be a friend and became a "thing" determined for a certain usage. All sexual depravations come from this fundamental transformation of the original meaning of sexual relations. And since, in this dimmed form, the sexual instinct cannot bring full satisfaction, it produces not only suffering, but also instability and constant search for "something better." The physical strength of the man permitted him to establish regimes of polygamy, and marriage was considered as a temporal contract, which could be dissolved at any time by not only a bilateral, but often also a unilateral, agreement. God's command of "being fruitful," of "multiplying and replenishing the earth" (Genesis 1:28) while remaining a valid part of marriage, involved not only physical suffering of the woman, but also material and moral responsibility, and finally the sad

realization that children will share in the same mortal and limited life as their parents.

However, in spite of all this, man continues to follow the laws of his nature, to look for a companion, and to expect fulfillment in marriage of his personal destiny and happiness. And his expectations are often being fulfilled, because the present human condition, in spite of all its corruption, has retained elements of its original purpose. God blesses human happiness and rejoices in it. He also condescends to human weaknesses. In the Old Testament, He even has admitted such institutions as polygamy and divorce because He knew that man was still unable to understand his own original destiny and to live in accordance with it. However, a new and perfect life was revealed by the restoration of human nature in Christ, and the original plan of God was reenacted in an even more perfect way.

A GREAT MYSTERY

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians (5:25-32), in the passage which is read at the ceremony of the marriage crowning, gives the new Christian meaning of the union between man and woman. He refers to the text of Genesis, but adds to its significance an entirely new dimension.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . because we are members of His body . . . This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church.

Man was created in order to share in God's communion, and God, through the coming of Christ, by becoming man Himself, did not only restore what human sin has corrupted, but also gave man the possibility to partake of divine life. When a man is baptized, he accepts into his own flesh, the power of Christ's death and resurrection, and should, therefore, "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). When he participates in the communion to the Body and Blood of Christ, he becomes a member of Christ.

Marriage then ceases to be simply the satisfaction of a natural human instinct, or the fulfillment of man's search for earthly happiness. It is an event which concerns not only the newly married couple, but also Christ Himself, for two of His members are being joined in one within the whole Church which is the Body of Christ. The crowns which are placed on the heads of the couple are martyrs' crowns, as indicated by the hymn "O Holy Martyrs" which is sung during the circular procession around the Table during the Crowning service. "Martyr," in Greek, means "witness." The new husband and the new wife are thus called by the Church to be eternally -- the circle is always a symbol of eternity -- witnesses of the union of Christ with the Church. Marriage, then, ceases to be a "private affair." The meaning of Christian life is precisely to go beyond the simple egotistic interests of man. This new dimension is what constitutes the whole difference between a Christian marriage and the one which is concluded outside of the Church.

In the early days of the Church, marriage was not celebrated, as today, during a special ceremony or rite which one attends at special invitation. It took place, after the bishop had given his permission for the union, at the solemn Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. The whole community was gathered together as Body of Christ and the couple solemnly took Communion together, with the whole Church witnessing their pledge to be together and their desire to build a new Christian family. In our present rite, several elements recall that early stage of the celebration of marriage: the ceremony of the "Crowning" starts, as does the Liturgy, with the exclamation "Blessed is the Kingdom," and the rite itself includes such elements as the singing of the "Our Father" followed by the couple's participation in a common cup of wine. It is not the place here to discuss the reason why this cup ceased to be the Cup of Communion to the Body and Blood of Christ, but it is important to understand that the Holy Orthodox Church has always considered marriage in its relation to our common life in the Body of Christ. When two souls and two bodies are accepting to be united in marriage, it is "a great Mystery" and it concerns "Christ and the Church."

Christian marriage is, therefore, not simply the fulfillment of a set of rules which do exist even outside of the Church, such as mutual faithfulness, social honorability and responsible education of children. It is much more than that. It is:

Mutual faithfulness, not for the sake of human, social or psychological reasons only, but because Christ

abides in both our souls and bodies, and that He is concerned with what we do with them; when St. Paul was confronted with questions of fleshly sin, he wrote: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? *You are not your own*; . . . Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" (I Corinthians 6:19, 15)

A constant effort to live not for one's own self, but for the other's because "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25); mutual dedication is the main psychological and moral content of marriage, for both the man and the woman. The role of direction and initiative, which belongs to the man, is primarily a function and a responsibility. It does not indicate any moral superiority of the man over the woman.

Childbirth, which is to be understood in the context of what the Church expects from it: the birth of new members of Christ. The parents, whose union must naturally result in the appearance of new human life, are also responsible for their children's spiritual birth, their participation in the sacraments and their religious education; a couple which avoids any of these responsibilities - actual childbirth, followed by spiritual and material care for the children -- betrays not only the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, but their very status as Orthodox Christians, members of the Body of Christ.

All these elements are, of course, incomprehensible, if one does not understand that the Kingdom of God calls for the Transfiguration and renewal of our whole self, body and soul, and that every step of our existence -- our birth, our marriage, our death -- become really *different* when they are accomplished in Christ. Why care about the sacraments, if anyhow all this remains the same? This difference has been marked by the Lord Himself, when, after having given His teaching on marriage as an inseparable union of two beings, He was told by His disciples:

*If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry. But He said to them,
'Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given.'
(Matthew 19:10-11)*

We, Orthodox Christians, have been given everything, the whole Truth, the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the new eternal life. Let us not forget it.

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. If "it is not good that the man should be alone," why does the Church encourage and bless monasticism?

The Lord said that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30), and St. Paul, thinking primarily of the constant expectation by Christians of the glorious day of universal resurrection, wrote, "To the unmarried and widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do" (I Corinthians 7:8). Such is also the meaning of the "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom," mentioned by the Lord (Matthew 19:12). By remaining celibate, monks or nuns want to manifest the real presence, in the Church and in them selves, of the Kingdom of God and try to express this presence through their own lives.

But we have seen that true Christian marriage is also an image of the union between Christ and the Church. Both monasticism and marriage are, therefore, two different ways to manifest the great Mystery of our communion with Christ, but neither of these states of life can be justified by any egoistic or individualistic motivation.

2. What is the teaching of the Orthodox Church on “mixed marriages”?

Orthodox canon law strictly forbids marriages of Orthodox Christians with the non-Orthodox (Sixth Ecumenical Council, canon LXXII). What has been said earlier shows clearly that the whole teaching of the Church implies that a Christian marriage is a marriage between two members of the Body of Christ, which is expressed by the common participation of the couple in the Eucharist, their taking Holy Communion together. Originally, the marriage service itself took place as part of the Sunday Liturgy. “Mixed marriage” became possible only when the marriage ceremony was separated from the Liturgy.

“Mixed” marriages are being permitted today only according to the principle of “economy,” which permits the Church to abstain from applying canon law strictly hoping that such a condescension would bring forth better practical results than strictness. Thus, the Church always hopes that the Orthodox party will finally bring the whole family into the Orthodox Church. However, in cases when the ceremony of marriage is performed outside of the Orthodox Church, and when children are not educated in the Orthodox faith, there is an obvious betrayal of Orthodoxy and any condescension can rarely be justified.

3. Does the Orthodox Church admit divorce?

When asked quite specifically about divorce, which was admitted by the Old Testament Law, the Lord answered: “I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). The Church cannot teach any other doctrine than that of Christ, our Lord.

However, as in the case of mixed marriages, the principle of “economy” is applied, but only by condescension for human weakness. When a marriage is already destroyed -- as in the case of unchastity, mentioned by the Lord -- the Church considers it possible to bless her sinful member for a new marriage union. But such condescension always implies sincere repentance, and therefore, the rite of the second marriage possesses a marked penitential character.

True Christian marriage is unique. Such a marriage is therefore required of all members of the clergy. A priest cannot be married with a widow, or a divorcee, and furthermore, a priest may be married only once.

4. What is the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards birth control?

No universal disciplinary decision on this question has ever been taken by the Orthodox Church, as the Church never possessed the tendency to regulate all areas of human life according to one single pattern. The practical attitude of Orthodox Christians must, therefore, be determined by the general doctrine of the Church concerning marriage.

It should be noted that the Church definitely teaches that marriage *implies* childbirth. The woman, says St. Paul, “will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (I Timothy 2:15). However, nowhere in Scripture is it said that childbirth is the only aim of marriage. Marriage is essentially an inseparable union, both spiritual and carnal, of two beings. St. Paul teaches: “For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again.” (I Corinthians 7:4-5).

It is clear, therefore, that such a union -- an image of the union between Christ and the Church -- should not be broken when reasons of medical or moral nature prevent repeated childbirth. Such reasons do often arise, since human nature, in its present state of corruption due to original sin, does not always follow the law of God. Promotion of unlimited childbearing cannot, therefore, be based upon the idea that “we should follow nature.” Fallen nature can and must be corrected, not only by prayer and abstention, but

also by human means.

Orthodox Christian couples should, therefore, consult their own conscience, and, even better, their Father Confessor at those times when they are considering measures of birth control. Then they may decide whether these measures are justified, or whether they would not simply indicate a lack of confidence in God and faith in His help. In the latter case, such measures would be sinful.

From *The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony*. Commentary by Very Rev. John Meyendorff. Department of Religious Education/Orthodox Church in America, 1975, 1978, 1989, pp. 29-29

Source: <http://www.holy-trinity.org/morality/meyendorff-marriage.html>

SELECTIONS
FROM THE

SYNODAL AFFIRMATIONS ON MARRIAGE, FAMILY, SEXUALITY, AND THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA)
TENTH ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL, JULY, 1992

These affirmations on marriage, family, sexuality, and the sanctity of life are issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops on the occasion of the Tenth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America.

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

God creates human beings in His own image and likeness, male and female. He declares human life, with all that He makes, to be “very good” (Genesis 1:27-31).

God wills that men and women marry, becoming husbands and wives. He commands them to increase and multiply in the procreation of children, being joined into “one flesh” by His divine grace and love. He wills that human beings live within families (Genesis 1 :27; 2:21 -24; Orthodox Marriage Service).

The Lord Jesus blessed marriage in which the “two become one flesh” when, by his presence with his mother Mary and his disciples at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, he revealed his messianic glory in his first public miracle, evoking for the first time the faith of his disciples (Genesis 2:24; John 2:1-11).

The Lord Jesus Christ abrogated the practice of divorce which was permitted in the old covenant due to the people’s “hardness of heart”, insisting that one unique marriage between man and woman was God’s will from the beginning (Mark 10:2-9, Matthew 19:3-12). He stated clearly that “every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity [porneia, i.e. sexual immorality], makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32).

The Lord went even further to declare that people who look at others in order to lust after them in their hearts have “committed adultery” (cf. Matthew 5:27-30).

Christ’s apostles repeat the teachings of their Master, likening the unique marriage between one man and one woman to the union between Christ and His Church which they experience as the Lord’s very body and His bride (Ephesians 5:21-33; 2 Corinthians 11 :2) .

While condemning those who forbid marriage as an unholy institution, along with those who defile marriage through unchastity (1 Timothy 4:3, Hebrews 13:4), the apostles commend as “the will of God” that Christians, as examples for all human beings, “abstain from unchastity [porneia] and know how to marry “in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God”. They insist that “whoever disregards this [teaching] disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit” to those who believe (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

Husbands are commanded to be the heads of their wives as Christ is the head of the Church. They are called to love their wives as their very selves, as Christ loves the Church, giving themselves in sacrifice to their brides as to their own bodies. And wives are called to respect and reverence

their husbands as the Church devotes itself to Christ with whom she too, like the wife with her husband, is “one flesh” (Ephesians 5:21-33; Orthodox Marriage Service).

The “great mystery” of marriage (Ephesians 5:32) is the most used image and symbol in the Bible for God’s relationship with His People in the old and new testaments where the Lord is the husband and His people are His wife so often unfaithful and adulterous (cf. Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Song of Songs, Corinthians, Ephesians, et. al.). And the ultimate union between the Lord and those saved by Christ for eternal life in God’s kingdom by the indwelling Holy Spirit is likened to the communion of marriage (Revelation 21-22).

Convinced of these God-revealed truths, we offer the following affirmations and admonitions for the guidance of the faithful.

Every human being of whatever religion, race, nationality or moral convictions is to be respected and valued as a creature of God with the potential for everlasting life in God’s coming kingdom.

No human being, whatever his or her religion, race, nationality or moral convictions, is to be treated in a wicked, evil or unjust manner.

Orthodox Christians are to make supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings (lit. eucharists) for all people. This, according to Christ and the saints, includes one’s enemies, cursers and abusers, as well as persecutors of the Church, heathens and heretics (Luke 6:27-49; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; St. John Chrysostom, On First Timothy, Homilies 6 and 7; St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ).

MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

Marriage and family life are to be defended and protected against every open and subtle attack and ridicule.

Sexual intercourse is to be protected as a sacred expression of love within the community of heterosexual monogamous marriage in which alone it can be that for which God has given it to human beings for their sanctification.

Sexual love in marriage is to be chaste and pure, devoid of lewdness, lechery, violence and self-gratification.

Couples planning to marry are to be properly counseled and prepared to confront the challenges of the married life, being guided in the ways to find within family life the way to spiritual fulfillment and sanctity.

ABORTION

Abortion is an act of murder for which those involved, voluntarily and involuntarily, will answer to God.

Those finding themselves confronted with tragic circumstances where the lives of mothers and their unborn children are threatened, and where painful decisions of life and death have to be made such as those involving rape, incest, and sickness are to be counseled to take responsible action

before God, who is both merciful and just, to whom they will give account for their actions.

Women and men, including family members and friends of pregnant women considering abortions, are to be encouraged to resist this evil act, and be assisted in bearing and raising their children in healthy physical and spiritual conditions.

Women who have had recourse to abortion, men who have fathered aborted children, and others involved in cases of abortion, are to be provided with pastoral care which includes recognition of the gravity of the act and assurance of the mercy of God upon those who repent of their sins.

Orthodox Christians are to contribute to legislative processes according to their knowledge, competence, ability and influence so that laws may be enacted and enforced which protect and defend the lives of unborn children while being sensitive to the complexities and tragedies of life in contemporary society.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Created to know God's divinity and power through creation, human beings have refused to acknowledge God, to honor and thank Him, and to obey his divine teachings. Through their rebellion "they became futile in their thinking and their senseless hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Therefore, as the apostle Paul continues to teach, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...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 shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:26-27).

Homosexual acts, like adulterous and incestuous behavior, are condemned in the law of Moses. Those who do these things, both men and women, are, according to God's law of the old covenant, to be put to death (Leviticus 18:6-23; 20:10-21).

According to the apostle Paul, those engaging in homosexual acts, with fornicators, adulterers, idolaters, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and robbers, will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Christians come from all these categories of evil doers who have, voluntarily and involuntarily, been caught up in the sin of the world. They are those who through their personal repentance and faith in Christ, their baptism and chrismation, and their participation in Holy Communion, have been "washed...sanctified...and made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Orthodox Baptism and Chrismation Service).

Jesus teaches mercy and forgiveness for all sinners, but the Lord does not justify sin. When the Son of God pronounces divine pardon to those caught in evil he always charges the forgiven sinner to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Convinced of these God-revealed truths, we offer the following affirmations and admonitions for the guidance of the faithful:

Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity's rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being. It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God's image and likeness.

Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings.

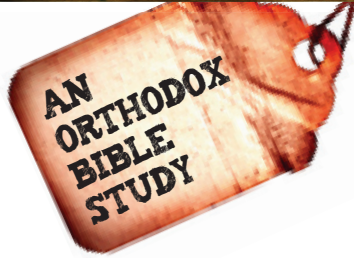
People with homosexual tendencies are to be helped to admit these feelings to themselves and to others who will not reject or harm them. They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.

Persons struggling with homosexuality who accept the Orthodox faith and strive to fulfill the Orthodox way of life may be communicants of the Church with everyone else who believes and struggles. Those instructed and counseled in Orthodox Christian doctrine and ascetical life who still want to justify their behavior may not participate in the Church's sacramental mysteries, since to do so would not help, but harm them.

Assistance is to be given to those who deal with persons of homosexual orientation in order to help them with their thoughts, feelings and actions in regard to homosexuality. Such assistance is especially necessary for parents, relatives and friends of persons with homosexual tendencies and feelings. It is certainly necessary for pastors and church workers.

Source: <http://www.holy-trinity.org/morality/affirmation.html>

HUMAN SEXUALITY & THE CALL TO PURITY



A. READ THE FOLLOWING PRAYER FOR DISCUSSION:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the Priest of mystical and pure marriage, and the Ordainer of the law of the marriage of the body, the Preserver of immortality, and the Provider of good things, do thou, the same Master, who in the beginning didst make man and set him to be a king over thy creation, and didst say: It is not good for man to be alone on the earth; let us make a helpmeet for him; and didst fashion Woman, which when Adam beheld, he said: This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman; for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and [they] shall be one flesh; and those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder... (from the Orthodox Marriage Service).

Discussion Questions:

What does this prayer, based on Genesis, chapter 2, say about God's role in bringing husband and wife together in marriage?

What is the natural purpose and result of Orthodox Christian marriage?

B. NOW READ THE PASSAGE BELOW FROM PROVERBS, CHAPTER 5.

¹⁵Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. ¹⁶Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, *and* rivers of waters in the streets. ¹⁷Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. ¹⁸Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. ¹⁹*Let her be as* the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. ²⁰And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? ²¹For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings. ²²His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. ²³He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Discussion Questions (for when the giggling dies down). Explain any words that may not be clear. What does this passage by the inspired author of Proverbs say about sex outside of marriage?

What does this passage from the Holy Scriptures say about God's attitude toward sexual intimacy within the context of marriage?

C. MANY OF YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD THE COMMANDMENT, "THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY."

But look at the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the following two verses from the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 27-28:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The word, "*lust*," means a desire to gratify the senses; bodily appetite; overmastering desire often of a sexual nature. God gives us passions and natural sexual desires; they only turn to lust because of our sinfulness. When, because of sin, we allow these passions to master us instead of us mastering them and enjoying them as God intended them, then they become destructive.

Discussion Questions:

Our Lord takes sexual sin to a new level. What is the significance of our Lord's words?

Why do you think that Christ would call attention to our thoughts and not just our actions?

Note: Thoughts which enter the mind (such as those of a lustful nature) are not sins but rather temptations. These temptations become sins only when we willfully entertain them in our minds and let them master us.

D. READ GALATIANS 5:16-25.

¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires. ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe the difference between 'walking in the Spirit' and lusting 'in the flesh'?

Why is St. Paul's analogy of us "crucifying the flesh" appropriate for describing our struggle against the flesh?

A wise Orthodox priest once said that the victory against the flesh is often realized in the struggle. How are these words helpful to you in this context?

APPLYING THE TEACHING TO YOUR LIFE:

How does the Orthodox teaching on sex differ from how sex is portrayed in many shows on T.V. or in music

videos that you watch?

Does learning about what the Church teaches in regard to sexual purity help you in your struggle to pursue holiness in this area of your life? If so, how?

Having learned God's intention with regard to sexual purity for His beloved sons and daughters, how does this Truth lead you to think of your future spouse? How does this help you now to prepare yourself for Holy Matrimony (if it is God's will that you marry)?

Questions? Contact Sbdn. Robert Miclean at RobMiclean@aol.com .

SELECTIONS
FROM

WHAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

BY
CONCILIAR
PRESS

ABORTION is the termination of a pregnancy by taking the life of the baby before it comes to full term. The Scriptures teach, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). When an unborn child is aborted, a human being is killed. There are at least two effective alternatives to abortion: 1) prevention of conception by abstinence or contraceptives, or 2) giving up an unwanted baby for adoption. For the Christian, all children, born or unborn, are precious in God's sight and a gift from Him. Even in the rare case in which a choice must be made between the life of the child and the life of the mother, decision making must be based upon the recognition that the lives of two human persons are at stake.

MARRIAGE in the Orthodox Church is forever. It is not reduced to an exchange of vows or the establishment of a legal contract between the bride and groom. On the contrary, it is God joining a man and a woman into "one flesh" in a sense similar to the Church being joined to Christ (Ephesians 5:31, 32). The success of marriage cannot depend on mutual human promises, but on the promises and blessing of God. In the Orthodox marriage ceremony, the bride and groom offer their lives to Christ and to each other-literally as crowned martyrs.

PREMARITAL SEX. The Orthodox Christian Faith firmly holds to the biblical teaching that sexual intercourse is reserved for marriage. Sex is a gift of God to be fully enjoyed and experienced only within marriage. The marriage bed is to be kept "undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4), and men and women are called to remain celibate outside of marriage. Our sexuality, like many other things about us human beings, affects our relationship with God, ourselves, and others. It may be employed as a means of glorifying God and fulfilling His image in us, or it may be perverted and abused as an instrument of sin, causing great damage to us and others. Saint Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body . . ." (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

"WHAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS BELIEVE: A CONCILIAR PRESS COMPENDIUM"

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Source: <http://www.antiochian.org/whatorthodoxbelieve>

*The following two
case studies are
from:*

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE: PREPARING FOR LIFE IN A HETERODOX WORLD*

H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.,
Rev. I. Julian Anitei, and
Susan G. M. Engelhardt

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(Unpublished)

THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDIES ARE DESIGNED TO
ENGAGE TEENS IN DISCUSSION.

CASE 5A: LIFE IN A WORLD OF POWERFUL TEMPTATIONS

John, who is in his first year of college, receives a telephone call from his older brother George, who is a first-year law student in another state. George is furious. He tells John that he called up their parents to say that at Christmas three weeks from now he wants to bring his girlfriend whom he hopes to marry and introduce her to the family. His mother was very happy and said that this is wonderful news. She was looking forward very much to meeting her. She then added that, since the house would be very crowded, George would have to sleep in his brother John's room so that his girlfriend could have his. George said that was not necessary, they could share a room together, that in fact in September they had moved in together. At this point his mother said, "George, I think you need to talk to your father."

George's father listened patiently to his son. He did not get angry. He waited until George had said all he wanted to say. His father then asked him, "Are you through now? I have something very important to tell you." Then in gentle but no uncertain terms he made four points. First, he explained that the girlfriend was welcome but she could not sleep in the same room with George; the two had to behave "absolutely properly" in the family home, Second, he said that he was very upset that George was living in sin and that if George and his girlfriend had any respect for each other and love for God they should move to separate apartments at once. Third, he warned his son that this was a very bad, indeed an unholy way to begin a relationship that George hoped would lead to marriage. George at this point interrupted and said, "We're very happy and very comfortable with that we're doing." George's father said that being comfortable and happy had nothing to do with pursuing salvation. "You have obligations to God and to this woman if you really love her." Then George's father made the final point that he did not want to be involved in George's sin in any way. Therefore, until they decided to live separately, he was not going to send any more money to help with George's housing costs while he finished his studies.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is the father's reaction to his son's sinful life-style positive or negative?
2. What is the basis for the father's reaction? Is he acting out of love or anger?
3. Does the father out of love for his son owe it to his son to tell him as clearly as possible what is morally at stake?
4. Why has George come to look at sex and marriage within a secular moral paradigm?
5. Why is George calling to tell John about what he is doing?
6. In what ways is George's living with his girlfriend bad?
7. Will a fully secular person be able to understand what is wrong with living together outside of marriage?
8. Has our dominant secular culture lost an appropriate understanding of the relationship of sex and marriage?

CASE 10: HOW ABORTION HAS BECOME A PART OF SECULAR CULTURE: GETTING COMMITMENT STRAIGHT

Paige: “Theodora, my sister Peyton won’t have to have an abortion. Isn’t that wonderful?!”

Theodora: “Paige, why would Peyton ever have to have an abortion?”

Paige: “Oh, Theodora, don’t you remember my sister? She’s the real successful one in my family. She’s the famous lawyer. She has finally made senior partner in the famous law firm of Brutus, Nasty, and Short. However, it took until she was 39, so she and her husband only decided to have a child when she was 40. The risk of having a baby with Down’s syndrome is really high, so they did the responsible thing. She had a test to make sure the fetus wasn’t defective.”

Theodora: “So, Paige, you’re telling me that if your sister Peyton had had a child with Down’s Syndrome, she would have aborted it, killed the child in her womb?”

Paige: “Naturally, Theodora, it’s the only sensible and responsible thing to do. If they had had a child with serious handicaps, that would have really hurt their life-style and their important careers. You can’t just go ahead and do the important things you are aiming at if you have a child with serious problems.”

Theodora: “Does that give you a right to kill the child in the womb?”

Paige: “Oh, come on. It’s not a child until it’s born.”

Theodora: “So tell me what the big difference is between being a child for nine months in the womb and being born? From conception to birth, the baby grows. Anywhere you draw the line is arbitrary. Would your sister have killed her child, had it developed a serious disease leading to handicaps the week after its birth?”

Paige: “I don’t know about all that. I just know that the responsible thing is to use abortion so that you can go on with your life, your career, and your plans. Without abortion, think how many of the career plans of women would really have been derailed.”

Theodora: “Why would that be the case?”

Paige: “You know, Theodora. What would happen if you got pregnant during college? You would never finish college.”

Theodora: “I am committed to not having sex until I marry, so I really think that’s not a likely problem for me. What you are telling me is that if people are not going to be chaste until they marry, then the women who have sex with men who are not willing to marry them or whom they are not willing to marry may be tempted to kill the child in their womb. What you are telling me is that one sin leads to another, that things go from bad to worse. What you are telling me is that one irresponsibility leads to another.”

Paige: “Oh, Theodora, grow up! We’re in the 21st century. Your view is positively medieval. Are you afraid that the fetus has a soul? Who knows when a soul comes into a fetus?”

Theodora: “Rest assured, Paige, my view is older than the Middle Ages. I know God exists. I am an Orthodox Christian. I also know that we as Christians know that abortion separates us from God, and, as St. Basil the Great said, we are not interested in hair-splitting about how old the fetus is or when it has a soul or doesn’t have a soul – any of that stuff. Abortion is wrong, no matter when the soul enters.”

Paige: “How do you know that all those views make sense?”

Theodora: “We know, because our way of life produces saints. We have experience as to what ways of life make people not just good but holy.”

Paige: “What do you mean, holy? Why think about such things?”

Theodora: “Paige, I mean living so one can come in union with God. That’s what life is all about.”

Paige: “Huh?!”

Theodora: “I know it’s hard to think about aiming at God when you first start. It seems that the most important thing, at least according to our culture, is to be rich, famous, and powerful. We are young now and we think we will live forever. But that’s a lie. Life is more serious than that. We are meant for an eternity with God.”

Paige: “What do you mean?”

Theodora: “Our life will be over more quickly than you think. What Christianity is about is teaching us to be concerned with being responsible in a way that counts for eternity.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has our contemporary culture turned morality on its head, so that it becomes responsible to consider killing one’s child in the womb?
2. Has this temptation become widespread because our secular society accepted sexually irresponsible ways of living, so that abortion has become a part of an established sinful way of life because it offers a kind of insurance against some of the consequences of living sinfully? Among other things, has abortion become an insurance against one of the major risks associated with sexual promiscuity: an unexpected pregnancy?
3. Is the Christian understanding of responsibility radically different from that of the secular culture?
4. What will you need to do in order to live as a responsible Christian?
5. Have you thought of the ways in which you might have accepted secular values without having noticed it?
6. Can one understand what responsibility means apart from recognizing God and our responsibilities to Him?
7. If we are beings created to love and worship God forever, can we even begin to make adequate sense of our lives without recognizing God and our obligations to Him?
8. What is involved in maintaining an Orthodox culture for our family life?

PASTORAL CHURCH POSITIONS REGARDING GUIDELINES THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE



FR.
STANLEY S.
HARAKAS

The Sanctity of Human Life: The Church's teaching about human life is based on Holy Tradition, including the Scriptures as a primary resource and the ongoing teaching and interpretation of the Orthodox Faith. Life is a gift of God in the formation of the created world. All life is precious, but God uniquely creates human life in the "image and likeness of God." Human life as such is deserving of deep respect and individual human beings are to be treated in accordance to their inherent human dignity.

Thus, racism, unjust prejudicial treatment of men and women, genocide, forms of sexual exploitation, domestic violence, child abuse, rape, theft or destruction of legitimately owned property, deceptions and deceit, environmental plunder and other such manipulative behaviors violate the human dignity of others. Human life as a gift of God should be respected. Some specific issues are the following.

Sexuality: The Orthodox Church recognizes marriage as the only moral and spiritually appropriate context for sexual relations. Thus, all other forms of sexual activity such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, pornography, all forms of prostitution, and similar forms of behavior are sins that are inappropriate for the Orthodox Christian. Marriage is only conducted and recognized in the Orthodox Church as taking place between a man and a woman. Same-sex marriages are a contradiction in terms. The Orthodox Church does not allow for same-sex marriages.

Abortion: The Church from the very beginning of existence has sought to protect "the life in the womb" and has considered abortion as a form of murder in its theology and canons. Orthodox Christians are admonished not to encourage women to have abortions, nor to assist in the committing of abortion. Those who perform abortions and those who have sought it are doing an immoral deed, and are called to repentance.

Suicide: Suicide, the taking of one's own life, is self-murder and as such, a sin. More importantly, it may be evidence of a lack of faith in our loving, forgiving, sustaining God. If a person has committed suicide as a result of a belief that: such an action is rationally or ethically defensible, the Orthodox Church denies that person a Church funeral, because such beliefs and actions separate a person from the community of faith. The Church shows compassion, however, on those who have taken their own life as a result of mental illness or severe emotional stress, when a condition of impaired rationality can be verified by a physician.

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<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8083>

WHAT IS ORTHODOXY'S STAND ON PREMARITAL SEX?



This one is easy. Only have sex with the person you're married to. It is the consummation of Marriage, meaning that it fulfills and completes the union of Man and Woman. There, the marital act is meaningful.

To join oneself to another person in this way means that the two are one, that they will be united forever and that they are open to the creation of new life together. This is what happens and what is proclaimed at the wedding service. As we read in the scriptures "the two shall become one." To join oneself to another in this way in the absence of a commitment to stay with that person forever is a lie of a very destructive nature. It is a selfish lie because it values one's own pleasure more than what is good for another person, and it is a harmful lie, because it takes something from that person, and from yourself, that cannot be returned.

The Orthodox Church says pre-marital sex is forbidden. One must begin by asking the question what is the purpose of sex, or perhaps what is God's purpose for sex. Sex is a term to describe the act of coupling between a husband and wife. The word "couple" means the joining of two things into one. This is what happens and what is proclaimed at the wedding service. As we read in the scriptures, "the two shall become one." Sex is the physical realization of this.

As we learn from scripture, we are taught that this joining is only to happen within marriage. There is no joining without marriage. Therefore to engage in what is reserved for the sacrament of marriage is a violation of the sacrament and a sin.

The first purpose of marriage is to tame men and women and bring serenity. Chastity within marriage is faithfulness - conjugality within sanctity, not with lusts of the world. The second purpose is to create life, and the third is to strengthen the bond between two people. The conical union between two people is to promote marital union and harmony

In the book of Genesis, it clearly states how a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. For this reason, the man and woman shall become one flesh. Therefore, the Orthodox state that sex is something holy and it is a bond that should be shared by husband and wife only. I Corinthians 6:16 states "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? *For the two*, He says, *shall become one flesh.*" Thus, save yourself, and wait for the special someone that you will spend the rest of your life with.

WHAT CONSTITUTES LOSING YOUR VIRGINITY?

The short answer is that intercourse constitutes losing your virginity. Don't listen to the short answer. "Technical Virginity" is another very harmful lie. To think that you can be physically intimate in all sorts of ways without doing any damage to your soul or the soul of the person you're with is crazy. Sexual intimacy is a continuum. The marital act does not begin only with intercourse. Every touch, every loving gesture, all of the emotional and spiritual connections involved are deeply meaningful. If we indulge in them out of their proper context, we make a mockery of them, and we injure ourselves and the person we may otherwise genuinely care for. In short, it's all sex. That's why they call it foreplay. One thing leads to another and that is by God's design. Again, actions are meaningful. If you are not in a relationship - meaning if you are not married - where sexual union is appropriate, then you should not do the things that are intended to precede sexual union.

For females, there is a permanent and physical alteration that occurs after engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time. For both males and females it is a spiritual, physical and moral life changing event. The Church calls us to remain virgin until marriage and then to be faithful to one another in that one marriage.

Although losing your virginity does include one's physical actions, it also includes mental thoughts and visual actions. The passion of lust includes all this. Jesus himself quotes several times that one commits adultery if he even looks at another woman while married. Also, Jesus states that where your heart is, there your treasure also is. Keep your way straight and without blemish.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PURE AND HOLY?

To be holy and pure is to really love. That kind of love will always be willing to postpone gratification of natural desires until their proper time. It is to lead a life following the commandments, worshiping, praying and partaking of the sacraments. Once the holiness and purity are lost, one has lost that connection with God. In the context of sex, it is more specifically not engaging in sexual activity, or observing abstinence. If one is "experienced" in a sexual matter before marriage they bring a defiled body, or better understood their other partners to the marriage with them. If we consider that dating someone will always end one of two ways, break up or marriage, then we might spend time thinking about why we want to date a person, which is ultimately seeking a spouse. If we seek for something other than that, then we should examine if we are being holy and pure. Remind yourself that you are the Lord's, and that you are to be holy and pure.

IS KISSING ACCEPTABLE?

Kissing is not evil in itself, yet it can lead to other actions. Again we must understand the context. Of all the physicality in a relationship, holding hands and hugging for example, kissing is the most intimate. A sweet, tender kiss conveying

genuine affection to a person with whom you have some kind of genuine commitment, such as engagement or near engagement, is probably acceptable and beautiful. Kissing for fun, for sport, or for a thrill is foolish and destructive. If a kiss is given in a way that invokes arousal, a kiss of passion for someone, then it is not okay. That type of kiss is a part of the act of coupling, which is observed only within the sacramental confines of marriage. Therefore kissing can lead into greater intimacy in a relationship.

THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN LUST & LOVE?

I've talked about love. Lust is the opposite. Selfish desire for my personal gratification regardless of the cost to my soul or anyone else's. Every time you give into it you choose your gratification over your God.

Love is the concern for the care of another, lust is the concern for the gratification of our selves. Love between man & woman is our first earthly love, but Christ is our first love over all. If Christ is not a part of our earthly love then it is not the right kind of love, it is more lust. If Christ is a part of that love, then we will treat those we love as Christ treats us. We will respect the other as God's child and would not defile that which is holy.

The dichotomy between lust and love. The result of the passion of lust is self-satisfaction and pleasure. One can be selfish, only wanting to be pleased and to please his or her lover. On the other hand, the power of love is the exact opposite. There is unity between the two individuals with sincere feelings for one another. True satisfaction can be achieved only if people will trust in God and have patience till marriage.

I've talked about love and its beauty. Lust is the opposite. Lust is wanting someone only because they satisfy you in a sexual way. It's based solely on looks. Whereas love brings you companionship and trust lust brings you loneliness and a temporary feeling of contempt. I

Man loves Women. This is how we were created. To truly love we must submit ourselves to the will of God. Lust will be gone once we become old and wrinkly. But love will stay strong for eternity. So it's clear that lust is a selfish act, only caring about your own satisfaction, needs and wants. Love on the other hand is to care for someone. Love is to be like Jesus. Love is to wait until marriage to share one of the most sacred gifts we have, love of a husband and a wife.

MANHATTAN DECLARATION: A CALL OF CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE



PREAMBLE

Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God's word, seeking justice in our societies, resisting tyranny, and reaching out with compassion to the poor, oppressed and suffering.

While fully acknowledging the imperfections and shortcomings of Christian institutions and communities in all ages, we claim the heritage of those Christians who defended innocent life by rescuing discarded babies from trash heaps in Roman cities and publicly denouncing the Empire's sanctioning of infanticide. We remember with reverence those believers who sacrificed their lives by remaining in Roman cities to tend the sick and dying during the plagues, and who died bravely in the coliseums rather than deny their Lord.

After the barbarian tribes overran Europe, Christian monasteries preserved not only the Bible but also the literature and art of Western culture. It was Christians who combated the evil of slavery: Papal edicts in the 16th and 17th centuries decried the practice of slavery and first excommunicated anyone involved in the slave trade; evangelical Christians in England, led by John Wesley and William Wilberforce, put an end to the slave trade in that country. Christians under Wilberforce's leadership also formed hundreds of societies for helping the poor, the imprisoned, and child laborers chained to machines.

In Europe, Christians challenged the divine claims of kings and successfully fought to establish the rule of law and balance of governmental powers, which made modern democracy possible. And in America, Christian women stood at the vanguard of the suffrage movement. The great civil rights crusades of the 1950s and 60s were led by Christians claiming the Scriptures and asserting the glory of the image of God in every human being regardless of race, religion, age or class.

This same devotion to human dignity has led Christians in the last decade to work to end the dehumanizing scourge of human trafficking and sexual slavery, bring compassionate care to AIDS sufferers in Africa, and assist in a myriad of other human rights causes - from providing clean water in developing nations to providing homes for tens of thousands of children orphaned by war, disease and gender discrimination.

Like those who have gone before us in the faith, Christians today are called to proclaim the Gospel of costly grace, to protect the intrinsic dignity of the human person and to stand for the common good. In being true to its own calling, the church through service to others can make a profound contribution to the public good.

DECLARATION

We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians, have gathered, beginning in New York on September 28, 2009, to make the following declaration, which we sign as individuals, not on behalf of our organizations, but speaking to and from our communities. We act together in obedience to the one true God, the triune

God of holiness and love, who has laid total claim on our lives and by that claim calls us with believers in all ages and all nations to seek and defend the good of all who bear his image. We set forth this declaration in light of the truth that is grounded in Holy Scripture, in natural human reason (which is itself, in our view, the gift of a beneficent God), and in the very nature of the human person. We call upon all people of goodwill, believers and non-believers alike, to consider carefully and reflect critically on the issues we here address as we, with St. Paul, commend this appeal to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

While the whole scope of Christian moral concern, including a special concern for the poor and vulnerable, claims our attention, we are especially troubled that in our nation today the lives of the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly are severely threatened; that the institution of marriage, already buffeted by promiscuity, infidelity and divorce, is in jeopardy of being redefined to accommodate fashionable ideologies; that freedom of religion and the rights of conscience are gravely jeopardized by those who would use the instruments of coercion to compel persons of faith to compromise their deepest convictions.

Because the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage as a union of husband and wife, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, we are compelled by our Christian faith to speak and act in their defense. In this declaration we affirm: 1) the profound, inherent, and equal dignity of every human being as a creature fashioned in the very image of God, possessing inherent rights of equal dignity and life; 2) marriage as a conjugal union of man and woman, ordained by God from the creation, and historically understood by believers and non-believers alike, to be the most basic institution in society and; 3) religious liberty, which is grounded in the character of God, the example of Christ, and the inherent freedom and dignity of human beings created in the divine image.

We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right - and, more importantly, *to embrace our obligation* - to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty.

LIFE

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Although public sentiment has moved in a pro-life direction, we note with sadness that pro-abortion ideology prevails today in our government. The present administration is led and staffed by those who want to make abortions legal at any stage of fetal development, and who want to provide abortions at taxpayer expense. Majorities in both houses of Congress hold pro-abortion views. The Supreme Court, whose infamous 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* stripped the unborn of legal protection, continues to treat elective abortion as a fundamental constitutional right, though it has upheld as constitutionally permissible some limited restrictions on abortion. The President says that he wants to reduce the "need" for abortion - a commendable goal. But he has also pledged to make abortion more easily and widely available by eliminating laws prohibiting government funding, requiring waiting periods for women seeking abortions, and parental notification for abortions performed on minors. The

elimination of these important and effective pro-life laws cannot reasonably be expected to do other than significantly increase the number of elective abortions by which the lives of countless children are snuffed out prior to birth. Our commitment to the sanctity of life is not a matter of partisan loyalty, for we recognize that in the thirty-six years since *Roe v. Wade*, elected officials and appointees of both major political parties have been complicit in giving legal sanction to what Pope John Paul II described as “the culture of death.” We call on all officials in our country, elected and appointed, to protect and serve every member of our society, including the most marginalized, voiceless, and vulnerable among us.

A culture of death inevitably cheapens life in all its stages and conditions by promoting the belief that lives that are imperfect, immature or inconvenient are discardable. As predicted by many prescient persons, the cheapening of life that began with abortion has now metastasized. For example, human embryo-destructive research and its public funding are promoted in the name of science and in the cause of developing treatments and cures for diseases and injuries. The President and many in Congress favor the expansion of embryo-research to include the taxpayer funding of so-called “therapeutic cloning.” This would result in the industrial mass production of human embryos to be killed for the purpose of producing genetically customized stem cell lines and tissues. At the other end of life, an increasingly powerful movement to promote assisted suicide and “voluntary” euthanasia threatens the lives of vulnerable elderly and disabled persons. Eugenic notions such as the doctrine of *lebensunwertes Leben* (“life unworthy of life”) were first advanced in the 1920s by intellectuals in the elite salons of America and Europe. Long buried in ignominy after the horrors of the mid-20th century, they have returned from the grave. The only difference is that now the doctrines of the eugenicists are dressed up in the language of “liberty,” “autonomy,” and “choice.”

We will be united and untiring in our efforts to roll back the license to kill that began with the abandonment of the unborn to abortion. We will work, as we have always worked, to bring assistance, comfort, and care to pregnant women in need and to those who have been victimized by abortion, even as we stand resolutely against the corrupt and degrading notion that it can somehow be in the best interests of women to submit to the deliberate killing of their unborn children. Our message is, and ever shall be, that the just, humane, and truly Christian answer to problem pregnancies is for all of us to love and care for mother and child alike.

A truly prophetic Christian witness will insistently call on those who have been entrusted with temporal power to fulfill the first responsibility of government: to protect the weak and vulnerable against violent attack, and to do so with no favoritism, partiality, or discrimination. The Bible enjoins us to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to speak for those who cannot themselves speak. And so we defend and speak for the unborn, the disabled, and the dependent. What the Bible and the light of reason make clear, we must make clear. We must be willing to defend, even at risk and cost to ourselves and our institutions, the lives of our brothers and sisters at every stage of development and in every condition.

Our concern is not confined to our own nation. Around the globe, we are witnessing cases of genocide and “ethnic cleansing,” the failure to assist those who are suffering as innocent victims of war, the neglect and abuse of children, the exploitation of vulnerable laborers, the sexual trafficking of girls and young women, the abandonment of the aged, racial oppression and discrimination, the persecution of believers of all faiths, and the failure to take steps necessary to halt the spread of preventable diseases like AIDS. We see these travesties as flowing from the same loss of the sense of the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life that drives the abortion industry and the movements for assisted suicide,

euthanasia, and human cloning for biomedical research. And so ours is, as it must be, a truly consistent ethic of love and life for all humans in all circumstances.

MARRIAGE

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:23-24

This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5:32-33

In Scripture, the creation of man and woman, and their one-flesh union as husband and wife, is the crowning achievement of God’s creation. In the transmission of life and the nurturing of children, men and women joined as spouses are given the great honor of being partners with God Himself. Marriage then, is the first institution of human society - indeed it is the institution on which all other human institutions have their foundation. In the Christian tradition we refer to marriage as “holy matrimony” to signal the fact that it is an institution ordained by God, and blessed by Christ in his participation at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. In the Bible, God Himself blesses and holds marriage in the highest esteem.

Vast human experience confirms that marriage is the original and most important institution for sustaining the health, education, and welfare of all persons in a society. Where marriage is honored, and where there is a flourishing marriage culture, everyone benefits - the spouses themselves, their children, the communities and societies in which they live. Where the marriage culture begins to erode, social pathologies of every sort quickly manifest themselves. Unfortunately, we have witnessed over the course of the past several decades a serious erosion of the marriage culture in our own country. Perhaps the most telling - and alarming - indicator is the out-of-wedlock birth rate. Less than fifty years ago, it was under 5 percent. Today it is over 40 percent. Our society - and particularly its poorest and most vulnerable sectors, where the out-of-wedlock birth rate is much higher even than the national average - is paying a huge price in delinquency, drug abuse, crime, incarceration, hopelessness, and despair. Other indicators are widespread non-marital sexual cohabitation and a devastatingly high rate of divorce.

We confess with sadness that Christians and our institutions have too often scandalously failed to uphold the institution of marriage and to model for the world the true meaning of marriage. Insofar as we have too easily embraced the culture of divorce and remained silent about social practices that undermine the dignity of marriage we repent, and call upon all Christians to do the same.

To strengthen families, we must stop glamorizing promiscuity and infidelity and restore among our people a sense of the profound beauty, mystery, and holiness of faithful marital love. We must reform ill-advised policies that contribute to the weakening of the institution of marriage, including the discredited idea of unilateral divorce. We must work in the legal, cultural, and religious domains to instill in young people a sound understanding of what marriage is, what it requires, and why it is worth the commitment and sacrifices that faithful spouses make.

The impulse to redefine marriage in order to recognize same-sex and multiple partner relationships is a symptom, rather than the cause, of the erosion of the marriage culture. It reflects a loss of understanding of the meaning of marriage as embodied in our civil and religious law and in the philosophical tradition

that contributed to shaping the law. Yet it is critical that the impulse be resisted, for yielding to it would mean abandoning the possibility of restoring a sound understanding of marriage and, with it, the hope of rebuilding a healthy marriage culture. It would lock into place the false and destructive belief that marriage is all about romance and other adult satisfactions, and not, in any intrinsic way, about procreation and the unique character and value of acts and relationships whose meaning is shaped by their aptness for the generation, promotion and protection of life. In spousal communion and the rearing of children (who, as gifts of God, are the fruit of their parents' marital love), we discover the profound reasons for and benefits of the marriage covenant.

We acknowledge that there are those who are disposed towards homosexual and polyamorous conduct and relationships, just as there are those who are disposed towards other forms of immoral conduct. We have compassion for those so disposed; we respect them as human beings possessing profound, inherent, and equal dignity; and we pay tribute to the men and women who strive, often with little assistance, to resist the temptation to yield to desires that they, no less than we, regard as wayward. We stand with them, even when they falter. We, no less than they, are sinners who have fallen short of God's intention for our lives. We, no less than they, are in constant need of God's patience, love and forgiveness. We call on the entire Christian community to resist sexual immorality, and at the same time refrain from disdainful condemnation of those who yield to it. Our rejection of sin, though resolute, must never become the rejection of sinners. For every sinner, regardless of the sin, is loved by God, who seeks not our destruction but rather the conversion of our hearts. Jesus calls all who wander from the path of virtue to "a more excellent way." As his disciples we will reach out in love to assist all who hear the call and wish to answer it.

We further acknowledge that there are sincere people who disagree with us, and with the teaching of the Bible and Christian tradition, on questions of sexual morality and the nature of marriage. Some who enter into same-sex and polyamorous relationships no doubt regard their unions as truly marital. They fail to understand, however, that marriage is made possible by the sexual complementarity of man and woman, and that the comprehensive, multi-level sharing of life that marriage includes bodily unity of the sort that unites husband and wife biologically as a reproductive unit. This is because the body is no mere extrinsic instrument of the human person, but truly part of the personal reality of the human being. Human beings are not merely centers of consciousness or emotion, or minds, or spirits, inhabiting non-personal bodies. The human person is a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit. Marriage is what one man and one woman establish when, forsaking all others and pledging lifelong commitment, they found a sharing of life at every level of being - the biological, the emotional, the dispositional, the rational, the spiritual - on a commitment that is sealed, completed and actualized by loving sexual intercourse in which the spouses become one flesh, not in some merely metaphorical sense, but by fulfilling together the behavioral conditions of procreation. That is why in the Christian tradition, and historically in Western law, consummated marriages are not dissoluble or annulable on the ground of infertility, even though the nature of the marital relationship is shaped and structured by its intrinsic orientation to the great good of procreation.

We understand that many of our fellow citizens, including some Christians, believe that the historic definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman is a denial of equality or civil rights. They wonder what to say in reply to the argument that asserts that no harm would be done to them or to anyone if the law of the community were to confer upon two men or two women who are living together in a sexual partnership the status of being "married." It would not, after all, affect their own marriages, would it? On

inspection, however, the argument that laws governing one kind of marriage will not affect another cannot stand. Were it to prove anything, it would prove far too much: the assumption that the legal status of one set of marriage relationships affects no other would not only argue for same sex partnerships; it could be asserted with equal validity for polyamorous partnerships, polygamous households, even adult brothers, sisters, or brothers and sisters living in incestuous relationships. Should these, as a matter of equality or civil rights, be recognized as lawful marriages, and would they have no effects on other relationships? No. The truth is that marriage is not something abstract or neutral that the law may legitimately define and re-define to please those who are powerful and influential.

No one has a civil right to have a non-marital relationship treated as a marriage. Marriage is an objective reality - a covenantal union of husband and wife - that it is the duty of the law to recognize and support for the sake of justice and the common good. If it fails to do so, genuine social harms follow. First, the religious liberty of those for whom this is a matter of conscience is jeopardized. Second, the rights of parents are abused as family life and sex education programs in schools are used to teach children that an enlightened understanding recognizes as “marriages” sexual partnerships that many parents believe are intrinsically non-marital and immoral. Third, the common good of civil society is damaged when the law itself, in its critical pedagogical function, becomes a tool for eroding a sound understanding of marriage on which the flourishing of the marriage culture in any society vitally depends. Sadly, we are today far from having a thriving marriage culture. But if we are to begin the critically important process of reforming our laws and mores to rebuild such a culture, the last thing we can afford to do is to re-define marriage in such a way as to embody in our laws a false proclamation about what marriage is.

And so it is out of love (not “animus”) and prudent concern for the common good (not “prejudice”), that we pledge to labor ceaselessly to preserve the legal definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman and to rebuild the marriage culture. How could we, as Christians, do otherwise? The Bible teaches us that marriage is a central part of God’s creation covenant. Indeed, the union of husband and wife mirrors the bond between Christ and his church. And so just as Christ was willing, out of love, to give Himself up for the church in a complete sacrifice, we are willing, lovingly, to make whatever sacrifices are required of us for the sake of the inestimable treasure that is marriage.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s. Matthew 22:21

The struggle for religious liberty across the centuries has been long and arduous, but it is not a novel idea or recent development. The nature of religious liberty is grounded in the character of God Himself, the God who is most fully known in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Determined to follow Jesus faithfully in life and death, the early Christians appealed to the manner in which the Incarnation had taken place: “Did God send Christ, as some suppose, as a tyrant brandishing fear and terror? Not so, but in gentleness and meekness..., for compulsion is no attribute of God” (Epistle to Diognetus 7.3-4). Thus the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the example of Christ Himself and in the very dignity of the human person created in the image of God - a dignity, as our founders proclaimed, inherent in every human, and knowable by all in the exercise of right reason.

Christians confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Immunity from religious coercion is the cornerstone of an unconstrained conscience. No one should be compelled to embrace any religion against his will, nor should persons of faith be forbidden to worship God according to the dictates of conscience or to express freely and publicly their deeply held religious convictions. What is true for individuals applies to religious communities as well.

It is ironic that those who today assert a right to kill the unborn, aged and disabled and also a right to engage in immoral sexual practices, and even a right to have relationships integrated around these practices be recognized and blessed by law - such persons claiming these “rights” are very often in the vanguard of those who would trample upon the freedom of others to express their religious and moral commitments to the sanctity of life and to the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife.

We see this, for example, in the effort to weaken or eliminate conscience clauses, and therefore to compel pro-life institutions (including religiously affiliated hospitals and clinics), and pro-life physicians, surgeons, nurses, and other health care professionals, to refer for abortions and, in certain cases, even to perform or participate in abortions. We see it in the use of anti-discrimination statutes to force religious institutions, businesses, and service providers of various sorts to comply with activities they judge to be deeply immoral or go out of business. After the judicial imposition of “same-sex marriage” in Massachusetts, for example, Catholic Charities chose with great reluctance to end its century-long work of helping to place orphaned children in good homes rather than comply with a legal mandate that it place children in same-sex households in violation of Catholic moral teaching. In New Jersey, after the establishment of a quasi-marital “civil unions” scheme, a Methodist institution was stripped of its tax exempt status when it declined, as a matter of religious conscience, to permit a facility it owned and operated to be used for ceremonies blessing homosexual unions. In Canada and some European nations, Christian clergy have been prosecuted for preaching Biblical norms against the practice of homosexuality. New hate-crime laws in America raise the specter of the same practice here.

In recent decades a growing body of case law has paralleled the decline in respect for religious values in the media, the academy and political leadership, resulting in restrictions on the free exercise of religion. We view this as an ominous development, not only because of its threat to the individual liberty guaranteed to every person, regardless of his or her faith, but because the trend also threatens the common welfare and the culture of freedom on which our system of republican government is founded. Restrictions on the freedom of conscience or the ability to hire people of one’s own faith or conscientious moral convictions for religious institutions, for example, undermines the viability of the intermediate structures of society, the essential buffer against the overweening authority of the state, resulting in the soft despotism Tocqueville so prophetically warned of.¹ Disintegration of civil society is a prelude to tyranny.

As Christians, we take seriously the Biblical admonition to respect and obey those in authority. We believe in law and in the rule of law. We recognize the duty to comply with laws whether we happen to like them or not, unless the laws are gravely unjust or require those subject to them to do something unjust or otherwise immoral. The biblical purpose of law is to preserve order and serve justice and the common good; yet laws that are unjust - and especially laws that purport to compel citizens to do what is unjust - undermine the common good, rather than serve it.

Going back to the earliest days of the church, Christians have refused to compromise their proclamation of the gospel. In Acts 4, Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching. Their answer was, “Judge for

yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required. There is no more eloquent defense of the rights and duties of religious conscience than the one offered by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Writing from an explicitly Christian perspective, and citing Christian writers such as Augustine and Aquinas, King taught that just laws elevate and ennoble human beings because they are rooted in the moral law whose ultimate source is God Himself. Unjust laws degrade human beings. Inasmuch as they can claim no authority beyond sheer human will, they lack any power to bind in conscience. King's willingness to go to jail, rather than comply with legal injustice, was exemplary and inspiring.

Because we honor justice and the common good, we will not comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia, or any other anti-life act; nor will we bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God's.

¹Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

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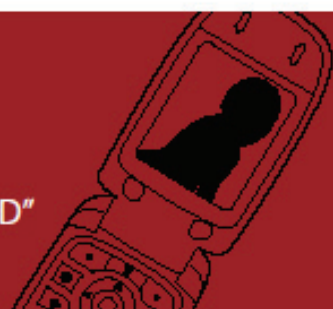
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Many other Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Leaders have signed...

There are nearly 3,000 additional signatures to this document as of December 2009

SEX AND TECH

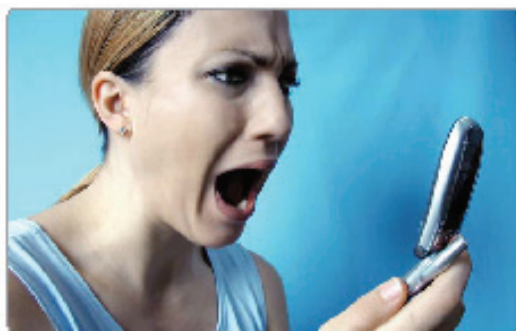
5 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE PRESSING "SEND"



1

Don't assume anything you send or post is going to remain private.

Your messages and images will get passed around, even if you think they won't: 40% of teens and young adults say they have had a sexually suggestive message (originally meant to be private) shown to them and 20% say they have shared such a message with someone other than the person for whom it was originally meant.



2

There is no changing your mind in cyberspace—anything you send or post will never truly go away.

Something that seems fun and flirty and is done on a whim will never really die. Potential employers, college recruiters, teachers, coaches, parents, friends, enemies, strangers and others may all be able to find your past posts, even after you delete them. And it is nearly impossible to control what other people are posting about you. Think about it: Even if you have second thoughts and delete a racy photo, there is no telling who has already copied that photo and posted it elsewhere.

3

Don't give in to the pressure to do something that makes you uncomfortable, even in cyberspace.

More than 40% of teens and young adults (42% total, 47% of teens, 38% of young adults) say "pressure from guys" is a reason girls and women send and post sexually suggestive messages and images. More than 20% of teens and young adults (22% total, 24% teens, 20% young adults) say "pressure from friends" is a reason guys send and post sexually suggestive messages and images.

4

Consider the recipient's reaction.

Just because a message is meant to be fun doesn't mean the person who gets it will see it that way. Four in ten teen girls who have sent sexually suggestive content did so "as a joke" but many teen boys (29%) agree that girls who send such content are "expected to date or hook up in real life." It's easier to be more provocative or outgoing online, but whatever you write, post or send does contribute to the real-life impression you're making.

5

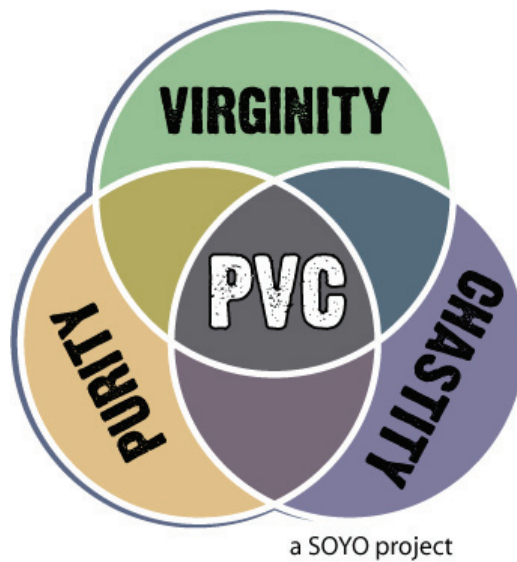
Nothing is truly anonymous.

Nearly one in five young people who send sexually suggestive messages and images, do so to people they only know online (18% total, 15% teens, 19% young adults). It is important to remember that even if someone only knows you by screen name, online profile, phone number or email address, that they can probably find you if they try hard enough.

REMEMBER

- Everything we do, whether in word, deed or “text”, we are accountable for. “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36-37.
- We should assume that anything posted on facebook, text to friends or emailed is not going to remain private.
- Digital cameras and video cameras are on everyone’s cell phones these days. Something that seems innocent when hanging out with friends can come back to haunt us later on.
- Once something is out there on the World Wide Web, there’s no taking it back. It’s there for good! Think about how easy it would be for something to copy and paste, for instance, an AIM conversation and post it anywhere!
- As with other things, resist peer pressure and pressure from the opposite sex. 47% of teens say “pressure from guys” is a reason girls send sexually suggestive messages and images.
- Viewing sexually explicit images takes away from our ability to focus on God. When viewing graphic sexual images our mind is on anything but Christ. These images cause us to direct our focus on ourselves and our own pleasure, instead of on Christ.
- Remember that we are made in the image and likeness of God and our bodies are our temples. Is sending sexually explicit photos of yourself the right way to honor yourself and God?
- 15% of teens say they have sent sexually suggestive images or texts to someone they know only online. In other words, someone they’ve never met in “real life”. That person could be a sexual predator! Let them know that they should not be talking to strangers online at all.

Source: Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America



Material compiled by the PVC Committee of NAC Teen SOYO 2009 and 2010
www.teenSOYO.org