

Homosexuality And The Church

By His Holiness Pope Shenouda III



I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak to the pastors of the Church of England, I mean, to speak to the angels of the Church and to the ministers of our Lord; those who were mentioned in the Book of Revelation as stars in the right hand of our Lord. I thank God because He has given me a chance to speak to those to whom the Lord said, 'You will be witnesses to Me.' 'Witnesses to Me' means witnesses to the truth, to the Holy Bible, to the commandments of God, to what the Holy Spirit has said to the churches. I want to speak to you about many things, and hope that should you desire to discuss any point, we will have time to do so.

The first matter is the holiness of the Church. In the Holy Creed we say, "We believe in One, Holy Church." This Holy Church is Apostolic and Katholik. In the apostolic age, all believers were called saints. A believer in the language of the Bible means a saint, because we are sanctified with faith, sanctified in baptism, sanctified in the holy Chrism, sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts." We are not merely human beings, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is abiding in us as it is written in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapters three and six. As temples of the Holy Spirit, we should have communion with the Holy Spirit. The work of any believer is not only the work of a human individual, but is actually the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are also the image of God and we carry the image of God to the world. They see in our conduct, in our behavior, the proof that we are the real children of God. If we read the beginning of some of the epistles of St. Paul to the Romans for example, he writes, 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God" to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.' The Apostle is writing to the saints of Rome, and in another epistle he writes, 'To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.' Again he also says in his second epistle, 'To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia.' When he writes to Ephesus, he sends his greetings to all the saints in Ephesus. To the Philippians he says the same, and when he writes to the Hebrews in chapter three he writes to those who are called to the 'Divine call who are saints also.' If we are supposed to be saints, how must we behave as saints, charged as we are with carrying the holy iconic image of our Lord to the world?

In the Apostolic age, not everyone was allowed to enter the church; only those who were worthy to attend the holy Eucharist and partake of the Blood and Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. This holy life is what we are called to, because we are the children of a holy Father. St. Peter speaks about this point and says, 'as

obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy.' Holy persons do not live in the lust of the flesh, but they walk according to the Spirit. Holy persons have two characteristics. The first is that his flesh is guided by the spirit, by his human spirit. The second characteristic is that his spirit, his human spirit is guided by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God then is guiding the whole person, guiding the spirit and the body, and that person should be holy both in body and in spirit.

Let me remind you of some verses from the eight chapter of the epistle to the Romans about the body and the spirit. The holy Apostle says, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.' And again, 'For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.' Then he says, 'if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.' 'Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.' St. Paul mentions here that the sons of God are those persons who are led by the Spirit of God.

I am sorry to have to speak about an issue that has become a topic of popular discussion in the church of late. This subject is homosexuality, and it ought not to be a matter of discussion.

First of all, homosexuality is against nature. Sexual expression is permitted only within marriage, between man and woman, male and female. Anything else is an abnormality and is against nature. When our Lord Jesus Christ discussed this matter with the scribes and pharisees in St. Matthew chapter nineteen and St. Mark chapter ten, He said "From the beginning, God made them male and female," man and woman. This is the will of our God from the beginning of creation. When people walked according to the lust of the flesh in the Old Testament, they received severe punishment from God. At the time of the Flood, only the pure, only eight persons in the Ark of Noah were saved. All the people who were not clean, who walked according to the flesh, perished. Also, the people of Sodom, who were not clean, were burned with fire. They walked according to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the body; they were not clean in their spirit.

Carnal persons cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. They cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We read this in the book of Revelation chapter twenty-one. It speaks about the heavenly Jerusalem saying, "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination." Those who defile themselves with abominable acts cannot enter the city of God. In the Old Testament homosexuality is described as an abomination worthy of the punishment of death. For example, Leviticus chapter eighteen, verse twenty-two reads, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." In chapter twenty, verse thirteen, "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them."

Of course, the New Testament is not less pure than the Old Testament, and we find a proscription of homosexual acts there as well. In Romans chapter one it is

written, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." How? Verse twenty-four teaches, "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves." "Gave them up" means that the grace of God left them, abandoned them and left them to their uncleanness to dishonor their bodies. In such abnormality, they dishonor their bodies. The honor of the body is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. But if it is abused then it is a dishonor to the body. "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Like wise also the men, leaving the natural use of woman, burned in their lust for one another, man with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

St. Paul spoke about the debased mind of the homosexual using the phrase 'exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.' We take this to clearly mean that homosexuality is clearly against nature. This he avers is uncleanness and dishonor of the body, also receiving penalty. Again, 'Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use' means that this is abnormal and against nature, 'committing what is shameful.' What I would like to ask is how such a matter which is so shameful and against nature have become such an important matter of discussion in the Church? If there were an attempt to make such acts lawful, it would be a disaster. If we change something shameful and worthy of penalty, something clearly against nature, to a thing accepted and lawful, we deserve the punishment of God both on earth and in the world to come.

In the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter six, the Apostle says, 'Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, will inherit the kingdom of God.' None of these will inherit the kingdom of God. How is it then that some employ unimaginable devices in an attempt to circumvent a Biblical text so clearly written? Have we come so far as to challenge the Apostle of God who 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?' Your body is not your own; your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The homosexual is sinning against the temple of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes, 'Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.' When a person sins against the Holy Spirit, that means he is separating himself from the Holy Spirit. Light and darkness cannot exist together in one place. From the beginning God separated light from darkness. The Holy Spirit cannot abide in such a case.

The apostle exhorts, "glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's," because the body is for God and the spirit is for God. In chapter three of his epistle to first Corinthians he adds, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." Further along in chapter six St. Paul writes, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!" These are the members of Christ because we are His body and His bones. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." If Christ then lives in me, how can we abuse the body or the members of Christ or the temple of the Holy Spirit? How can we abuse or dishonor the image of God and lose our holy image and live in the lust of the flesh? This is against a holy life and against chastity.

In his epistle, St. Jude writes, "as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." And in his first epistle to St. Timothy, St. Paul reminds, "knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites." St. Paul includes this word "sodomites" or homosexuals among the murderers, among the lawless, among the ungodly. This sin then was condemned in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. So can we disobey God in order to please some sinful persons? Is it not better to correct them?

In our present day I believe that our Lord has given all of us something quite remarkable to consider. AIDS has come to many that persist in a lifestyle that places them in both temporal and eternal risk. Death, as a predictable consequence of infection, usually comes slowly. It is possible that those who have been infected may reflect upon what God has willed for them, rather than what they have willed for themselves. I do not mean the disease itself, but rather the holy life to which they have been called. Unfortunately, many do not even fear such a warning, even though they suffer a defilement of the body.

What may be said of Christianity in its supreme ideology? Christianity teaches the sublime ideas of spirituality. How can other religions have any idea about this spiritual life if they know that there is homosexuality in the Church and that the Church is discussing whether it is wrong or right? The life of the Church should be a life of holiness. A holy person is a member of the Church, but the unholy one is not considered a member of the Church at all. In Acts chapter two it is mentioned that 'the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.' To add to the Church those who were being saved, means exclusion from impure forms of living for the Church is a group of saints. Homosexuality is against the good name of Christianity.

I believe that homosexuality is against the Mysteries of the Church. What can we say about the renewal of life, the transfigured life in Christianity if such defilement exists within the Church? How can we claim to have been received into a new life in Christ, clothed in ourselves in Christ from the baptismal font, and carrying the stain of a defiled, fallen life? If the new birth that we have received includes defilement amongst its members, what can be said of salvation itself? Baptism is called into question. Chrismation is called into question. Marriage is called into question. And further as we will see, Holy Orders is called into question. Persons who suffer from a homosexual orientation should be ashamed. If they truly know the meaning of spiritual life, they cannot confess or otherwise advocate a deviant lifestyle.

What rights are there for homosexuals? The only right is to be led to repentance. To live in such defilement of the body, in such dishonor, in such abomination, while all the time asking for liberties the Church cannot grant, is unbelievable. But what is even more unbelievable is that these purported rights are being encouraged by misguided members of the Church. For their part, and emboldened by such misplaced demonstrations of allegiance, homosexual rights advocates have even called for ordination to the priesthood.

The nature and character of a homosexual priesthood as icon is against everything that holy Tradition has handed down to us as Orthodox. Members of this Tradition, the laity, charged with the responsibility of confessing the

worthiness of the candidate for ordination by replying *Axios, Axios, Axios*, could hardly preserve the centuries entrusted them by admitting such a one. How could an individual incapable of repentance himself, lead another to repentance? If he cannot control himself, how can he guide others to such control? If he finds no peace or beauty in the holy life, how can he speak with confidence to others about the holy life? Will he rely upon the experience of others, speak of it as theory, or what's even worse, as fantasy, a thing for the childish? If he is carnal, how will he guide others to the spiritual? Moreover, what will people say about Christianity if such abomination happens in the Church?

It is claimed that homosexuality is a kind of love between man and man. No, my brothers. Love should be spiritual; love should be pure. We love others in purity. We love others in the Spirit. And loving others should not be against our love of God, because our Lord Jesus Christ has said, 'He who loves father, son, wife, sister, or brother, more than Me, is not worthy of Me, is not worthy to be My disciple.' We cannot love any other person more than our Lord Jesus Christ. Every love which we have, should be love in the Lord. We love in the Lord, not against. The homosexual love is not love, but lust, and there is a great difference between love and lust, lust of the flesh. The word love is not suitable for such a relation, because in the Gospel we say, 'God is love.' How can we say, 'Homosexuality is love?' It is not love; it is a bodily lust, a deviated lust of the flesh, a lust that should be corrected. If a man loves another man, can he abuse the man whom he loves? Is this love or destruction? If a person loves a man, can he lead this man to lose his eternity and be punished in the next life? Is this a kind of love, to lose one's image, the image of God?

Some people try to provide an excuse for the homosexual saying that he was born in this manner, that there was no express choice, and so unfairly burdened, he should not be held accountable. I tell you that if he was born in the manner described, we need to heal him, to purify him, to correct him, to pray for him, to guide him to repentance, to treat him medically and spiritually. But we may not say to him, all right, we accept you as a member of the Church and give you the Body and Blood of our Lord. While he remains in such a state, he is an abomination. I personally do not believe that one is homosexual by nature, certainly not in the way that is claimed by social theorists. We have had too many saints throughout the history of the Church who were fornicators before repentance, and they were corrected. They may not have been homosexuals, but they were fornicators, essentially the same sin, but without the deviation. St. Augustine is a good example, St. Moses the black another, and St. Pelagia still another. Through the grace of God, through the work of pastoral care, they were corrected. But we cannot say to the homosexual, your case is exceptional, your case is lawful. This cannot be accepted at all. Because if we give him this lawful status, that means we permit him to remain in sin and not to repent.

We must keep in mind, my beloved, that we cannot flatter persons at the expense of the commandment of God. May I read you one or two verses from the first epistle to the Galatians, 'For do I now persuade men, of God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.' If I go on pleasing men in contradiction with the commandment of God, then I will not be the servant of Christ. If I want to please men in a correct way, then I should guide them to repentance. This is the spiritual way of pleasing others. We should persuade them so that they do not remain in sin and perish. There is no way to reconcile the pleasure of man, if it comes at the displeasure of God. What then is the benefit of pleasing men? In the kingdom of heaven no person who lives in defilement is allowed to enter. No fornicator can enter the kingdom

of God. No sodomite can enter the kingdom of God. Or can we cancel all the words of St. Paul and St. Jude, and St. Peter, and all the others?

Once I read a book written by one of the clergy, I am ashamed to say, a Bishop, who was defending homosexuals. He began to attack the doctrine of St. Paul, to say that St. Paul was abnormal. Can it be that we, in our desire to please men, have sunk so low as to speak against the Apostle, against those elect, elected by God Himself in a miraculous apparition and chosen to be the Apostle for the Gentiles, to be our Apostle, in order to please homosexuals? To please men more than God? Is this acceptable? Let me now return to the first words I said to you. I said I am happy, I am glad to be among the persons who are chosen to witness to the Lord. Our Lord said, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me.' Of the homosexual He said, without repentance, you will perish. This judgement of our Lord was repeated twice in the thirteenth chapter of the gospel of St. Luke in verses three and five. He said, 'I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.' Can we find excuses for the homosexual in spite of all that the Lord has said? Is this love? No. It is not within the power of the Church. It is not within the power of the Church to justify the case of sinners, or to please sinners. We must guide them to repentance.

The clergy is bound with this responsibility. In St. Matthew chapter eighteen, God, our Lord Jesus Christ, gave His servants the Apostles, the priests, authority saying, 'I say to you whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Now we know that the authority to bind or to loose must be in harmony with the Bible, in obedience to the commandment of God. But if one should bind or loose in disobedience, then it will most certainly not be accepted by God. This is known to us from the epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians, chapter one, verses eight and nine. 'But even if we (the Apostles), or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.' And again, 'If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.' We are pastors to guide people through the commandments of God. We have not any power, nor any, to give any law contrary to the law of God. Why did our Lord give this authority, of how can this authority to bind and loose be explained? I think we may put beside it what was written in the prophecy of Malachi, chapter two, verse seven. 'For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.' The people take the law of the Lord from his lips, from his mouth, because he is the person who knows quite well the law of God, more than any member of the congregation. He is the teacher. He is the guide. So he binds according to the law of God which he knows, and he looses according to the law of God. But again, not in contradiction. St. Basil reminds us that the holy Apostle St. Paul dared to anathematize angels if another, or contrary gospel were preached.

The responsibility of the clergy to the people is grave. It is repeated twice in the prophecy of Ezekiel, in chapter three and also in chapter thirty-three. 'Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.' We are pastors. How can we suffer that the blood of these wicked persons who will perish be required from us? We should warn them and say to them that their present course will lead to destruction. And at the same time God says, 'Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he

does not turn from his wickedness, not from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.' The same words are again mentioned by our Lord in chapter thirty-three emphasizing this point. 'So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefor you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die! and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.' We should fear such condemnation. We should warn wicked persons and say to them that their path leads to death. If you continue to walk in the way of flesh you will die. You should obey the commandment of God.

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