

Homosexuality from a Contemporary Orthodox Perspective

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Homosexuality, from an Orthodox perspective, falls in the category of sins that cry to Heaven for vengeance. The condemnation root of this sin has its basis into certain scriptural texts. However, the theological and the pastoral approach of homosexuality within the Orthodox Church is a taboo subject. On the one hand, the works and the studies which clarify how to relate to homosexuals within a parish are missing; on the other hand, the homosexuals' testimonies and the problems that they are face with, as members of the Orthodox Church, are also missing. The current study reviews certain more important Orthodox contributions on the theme of homosexuality, namely the challenges and the possible responses which it raises.

Keywords: *homosexuality, sexuality, sins that cry to Heaven, pastoral work within the Orthodox Church*

Introduction

In a manual of Orthodox moral theology, published in 1979, in Romania, homosexuality was placed among the deadly sins, namely the sins that cry to Heaven. "Sins that cry to Heaven are those who ask themselves for their penalty while still in this world, for the evil to be defeated, and the evils that flow out from them to be hold back. They are heavy sins against our neighbor and the society, and are also harshly punished by the society's laws. They are sins that are against the natural and the social order, and through them, harm is brought to the human dignity and to society"¹.

Thus, next to the sins directed against the social instinct (murder, oppression of widows, orphans and the poor, or stopping the payment of workers) and the lack of respect for parents, among the sins that cry to Heaven there are also listed the sins against the sexual instinct. It concerns "the Sodomites' iniquity", "which means any lechery against the human's nature (homosexuality, N/A), as well as the deliberate prevention of babies' conception. It is called thus because it was practiced by the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah citadels, cursed and destroyed by God (Gen. 18.20

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¹ Nicolae Mladin et al. (eds.), *Teologia Morală Ortodoxă*, vol. 1: *Morală generală*, 2nd edition, Alba Iulia 2003, p. 439.

and 19.13). Like murder, sodomy harms the conservation law of the species and of the individual”².

How current is such a perspective on homosexuality? Does it correspond to the pluralistic spirit of today’s world? Should there take place an aggiornamento in the Orthodox Church, regarding the gender theme, not as much as a response to society’s external challenges, but as an internal necessity to re-discuss the sexuality related issues? Or, finally, is there an irreducible incompatibility between the traditional vision, of patristic inspiration, expressed by the Orthodox theology, and the progressive vision, expressed by other Christian denominations?

It is not an easy task to find answers to the above questions. For many authors, the orthodox stance is something obsolete, conservative, a reflection of an intransigent ecclesiastical authority (and sometimes political) towards the homosexuals. This fact would be true regardless of region, fact perpetuated until today³.

² *Ibidem*, p. 440.

³ See for Russia: Brian James Baer, *Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity*, New York 2009; Heleen Zorgdrager, “Homosexuality and hypermasculinity in the public discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church: an affect theoretical approach”, in: *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74 (3/2013), p. 214-239; Igor Kon, “Lackmustest. Homophobie und Demokratie in Russland”, in: *Osteuropa* (10/2013), p. 49-67; Konstantin Michajlov, “«Propaganda der Sünde». Die ROK und die Rechte der sexuellen Minderheiten”, in: *Osteuropa* (10/2013), p. 87-97; Nikolay Mitrokhin, “Gottes Wort und Priesters Tat Die Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche und die Homosexualität”, in: *Osteuropa* (10/2013), p. 71-85; Alexander Kondakov, “The Silenced Citizens of Russia: Exclusion of Non-Heterosexual Subjects from Rights-Based Citizenship”, in: *Social & Legal Studies*, 23 (2/2014), p. 151-174; Hanna Stähle, “Between Homophobia and Gay Lobby: The Russian Orthodox Church and its Relationship to Homosexuality in Online Discussions”, in: *Digital Icons. Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* (14/2015), p. 49-71 (available text at: http://www.digitalicons.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/DI_14_2_Staehle.pdf, accessed September 30, 2016). For Romania: Voichița Năchescu, “Hierarchies of Difference: National Identity, Gay and Lesbian Rights, and the Church in Postcommunist Romania”, in: Aleksandar Štulhofer, Theo Sandfort (eds.), *Sexuality and gender in postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, New York 2005, p. 57-77 (this collective volume offers data about Russia and other eastern-european countries, as it is Serbia); Adela Moraru, “Social Perception of Homosexuality in Romania”, in: *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Science* (5/2010), p. 45-49; Viviana Andreescu, “From Legal Tolerance to Social Acceptance: Predictors of Heterosexism in Romania” in: *Revista Română de Sociologie* 22 (3/2011), p. 209-231. For Bulgaria and Romania: Nicholas Spina, “The Religious Authority of the Orthodox Church and Tolerance Toward Homosexuality”, in: *Problems of Post-Communism* 63 (1/2015), p. 1-13. For Serbia: Katja Kahlina, *Local histories, European LGBT designs: Sexual citizenship, nationalism, and “Europeanisation” in post-Yugoslav Croatia and Serbia*, Edinburgh 2015; Miloš Jovanović, “Silence or condemnation: The Orthodox Church on homosexuality in Serbia”, in: *Družboslovne razprave* 29 (73/2013), p. 79-95; Rada Drezgić, “Orthodox Christianity and Gender Equality in Serbia: On Reproductive and Sexual Rights”, in: Christine M. Hassenstab, Sabrina P. Ramet (eds.), *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics*

In this study I set myself two main objectives. First, I want to present the Orthodox theological conception regarding homosexuality through an overview of the most important contemporary works on this subject. (These works target in particular the theological Romanian space, without ruling out other important Orthodox contributions on the same topic.) Secondly, beyond the theoretical presentation, I will try to find some pastoral means through which the priest and the members of a parish can relate themselves to their homosexually orientated neighbor. The task is not an easy one: on the one hand, the number of studies and works that clarify how to relate to homosexuals within a parish are precarious; on the other hand, in general, there are lacking the testimonies of some homosexuals and the problems they are faced it, as members of the Orthodox Church.

“The unseen face of homosexuality”: an orthodox approach from a medical perspective

The title of this subchapter is at the same time the title of a book written in collaboration by two orthodox writers⁴. As it says on the back cover of the book, the volume constitutes itself in a “new warning for the Romanian people, but also for the rest of the world.” The volume is “an exceptional monograph of the phenomenon of homosexuality and of the pro-homosexuals movements over the last four decades”, which “through a close documentation, reveals scientific facts that blow up the whole ideological edifice on which the propaganda of homosexuality leans today”.

Along the entire presentation, starting right from the so-called *born-gay hoax*⁵, the authors aim to dismantle the ten “scientifically alleged” myths regarding homosexuality: 1. People are born gay; 2. The sexual orientation cannot be changed; 3. The efforts to change the sexual orientation can harm

in *Southeastern Europe. A Question of Justice*, Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 297-317. Also, see: Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielnińska (eds.), *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, London 2011.

⁴ Virgiliu Gheorghe, Andrei Dîrlău, *Fața nevăzută a homosexualității*, Bucharest, 2014.

⁵ Ryan Sorba, *The born-gay hoax*, www.freewebs.com/theborngayhoax is the site cited by the authors. However this is no longer available (at 15.09.2016). The dismantling of *The Kinsey's Reports* represents a theme often met in the books and the studies made by the orthodox on the theme of homosexuality. The American biologist Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) is thought to be not only “the father of the sexual revolution”, but also “the father of the homosexual revolution.” Regarding this aspect there could be checked a recent contribution: Andrei Drăgulescu, *Adolescenții și revoluția sexuală. Dezvăluirea mijloacelor prin care societatea de azi încearcă să distrugă moralitatea noii generații*, Bucharest 2016, p. 21-46, here p. 41. Generally, the data from the book of A. Drăgulescu are based on the research done by Dr. Judith Reisman, *Kinsey and the Homosexual Revolution*, text available at http://www.sweetliberty.org/issues/bless/kinsey.htm#.WA3Ji_I97IU accessed September 30, 2016.

the homosexuals and are immoral; 4. The homosexuals represent 10% of the population; 5. The homosexuals do not suffer from mental disorders to a greater extent than the heterosexuals; 6. The homosexual behavior is not dangerous for the physical health; 7. The children brought up by homosexuals are no different from other children brought up by heterosexuals; 8. The homosexuals do not molest children to a greater extent than the heterosexuals; 9. The homosexuals are strongly disadvantaged and discriminated within the society; 10. The homosexual relationship is the same as the heterosexual one, only the sex of the partners differs⁶.

Next we will summarize the conclusions drawn by the two authors on some of the issues presented (1, 2, 3, 7 and 8), and in the footnotes we will specify some of the scientific researches on which they base their results:

Myth 1: People are born gay / The studies show that there is no proof in this direction⁷, on the contrary, homosexuality would be caused by a complex of environmental and educational factors.

Myth 2: The sexual orientation cannot be changed / The studies would show that thousands of people who manifested a homosexual behavior or attraction have changed over time; some had been engaged in homosexual relations not before the age of 15. The analysis of over 30 studies conducted between 1954 and 1994, concluded that 33% of the treated homosexuals became heterosexual. Regarding the results of the therapy of conversion through faith - involving priests and sacramental practice - the success rate was 38%⁸. There are also brought into discussion the studies of the psychiatrist Robert Spitzer, who, by interviewing 200 people who underwent therapy, he found that there is an obvious rate of success of it regarding everything that means behavior, identity, attraction, arousal, as well as other aspects of a homosexual's life and psychology⁹.

Myth 3: The efforts to change the sexual orientation can harm the homosexuals and they are immoral / The authors are evoking studies that confirm the opposite. For example, one of them shows that out of the 800 people who underwent the therapy of returning to heterosexuality only 7.1% have

⁶ V. Gheorghe, A. Dîrlău, *Fața nevăzută*, p. 17-20.

⁷ William Byne, Bruce Parsons, "Human Sexual Orientation. The Biologic Theories Reappraised", in: *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (3/1993), p. 228-239.

⁸ Stanton L. Jones, Marc A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change In Sexual Orientation*, Downers Grove 2009.

⁹ Robert L. Spitzer, "Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? 200 participants reporting a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation", in: *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32 (5/2003), p. 403-417. There raises still a question: what about the other 67% that did not change?

claimed that they had suffered certain problems¹⁰. Analyzing the psychological stress, the spiritual wellbeing and other psycho-emotional factors, Jones and Yarhouse have found that there are no negative consequences regarding the process of changing the sexual orientation. Similarly, Robert Spitzer has confirmed this thing, and the fact that the change is real¹¹. The authors of the book conclude: persisting in the homosexual way of life brings the greatest suffering. In this context, there is no greater injustice brought upon a man with homosexual inclination than the fact of not helping him to change¹². *Myth 7*: The children brought up by homosexuals are no different from other children brought up by heterosexuals / The studies cited by the authors show conclusively that the best developed children from a psychosomatic point of view are those born and brought up by their biological parents¹³. In contrast, the children brought up and educated in homosexual families face a multitude of problems, primarily psychological ones, but also from a social point of view¹⁴. Thus, even if some studies carried out by homosexuals try to conceal these problems, we are confronting ourselves with researches that contain a lot of methodological errors¹⁵.

Myth 8: The homosexuals do not molest children to a greater extent than the heterosexuals do / The reasoning of both authors is that: pedophiles are, in most of the cases, men¹⁶; one third of the total of the sexually abu-

¹⁰ Joseph Nicolosi et al., "Retrospective self-reports of changes in homosexual orientation: A consumer survey of conversion therapy clients", in: *Psychological Reports* 86 (3c/2000), p. 1071-1088.

¹¹ R.L. Spitzer, "Can some gay ", p. 403-417.

¹² V. Gheorghe, A. Dîrlău, *Fața nevăzută a homosexualității*, p. 18. However, someone can underline also the opposite aspect: the suffering produced to persons by trying to change their sexual preference for the same gender; the resulting "freedom" by accepting the situation; finally, living further in a homosexual relationship that would give him fulfillment ...

¹³ Kristin Anderson Moore et al., *Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do About It?*, Washington, DC 2002; Kyle D. Pruett, *Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is As Essential As Mother Care For Your Child*, New York 2000; Branda Hunter, *The Power of Mother Love: Strengthening the Bond Between You and Your Child*, WaterBrook 2011.

¹⁴ Sotirios Sarantakos, "Children in three contexts: family, education and social development", in: *Children Australia* 21 (1996), p. 23-31; Mark Regnerus, "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study", in: *Social Science Research* 41 (6/2012), p. 1367-1377.

¹⁵ See Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, *No Basis: What the studies don't tell us about same-sex parenting*, Washington, DC 2001.

¹⁶ Dawn Fisher, "Adult Sex Offenders: Who are They? Why and How Do They Do It?", in: Tony Morrison et al. (eds.), *Sexual Offending Against Children*, London 1994, p. 11.

sed children are boys, which shows that a large number of homosexuals are pedophiles¹⁷; moreover, many pedophiles recognize the fact that they are homosexuals¹⁸.

At the end of my brief presentation regarding the book written by Virgil Gheorghe and Andrei Dîrlău I think I have to give an answer to the question: why is it included in the current study, which analyses the contemporary theological literature regarding homosexuality? Of course, the book *Fața nevăzută a homosexualității* is not a theological one; furthermore, wishing to be a book written in a scientific, objective manner¹⁹, it is not even written from an Orthodox perspective. However, the impact that it has within the circle of today's Romanian Orthodox theologians is very high. The book also highlights the relevance of scientific issues for the theological-pastoral vision. The aim of the authors is more than obvious: to bring to light a marginalized scientific literature by the dominant mainstream on the phenomenon of homosexuality.

Moreover, this phenomenon is more complex than some researchers allows it to be understood. Then another question arises: aren't there any scientific researches to justify, from a theological point of view, other perspectives regarding homosexuality than the currently prevalent one? If so, then the book becomes highly relevant for the traditional Orthodox position, because it proves that this position is not an obsolete one, an ideology which has appeared somewhere in the obscurantist Medieval Ages and which refuses to disappear. Stepping forward along this path does not mean being unrealistic. The traditional Orthodox hermeneutic line is not in opposition with the facts of reality – but these facts are made “invisible” by the vision of the postmodern world, where homosexuality is no longer a sin, but something natural.

Summarizing, the Orthodox theological view regarding homosexuality – which will be further presented – reflects an anthropological vision

¹⁷ Kurt Freund, Robin J. Watson, “The proportions of heterosexual and homosexual pedophiles among sex offenders against children”, in: *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 18 (1/1992), pp. 34-43; K. Freund et al., “Pedophilia and heterosexuality vs. homosexuality”, in: *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 10 (3/1984), p. 193-200; K. Freund et al., “Heterosexual aversion in homosexual males”, in: *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 122 (567/1973), p. 163-169.

¹⁸ W. D. Erickson et al., “Behavior patterns of child molesters”, in: *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 17 (1/1988), p. 77-86. Without any doubt, there has to be made a difference between pedophilia and homosexuality: there are pedophiles who are heterosexuals, as well as there are heterosexuals who are not pedophiles!

¹⁹ In fact, as it has been seen, the authors have not conducted their own research, but they do a review of the researches done already – more exactly, of “the unseen part”, concealed by the contemporary scientific mainstream. Consequently, the book *Fața nevăzută a homosexualității* does not represent a scientific treaty about homosexuality.

of biblical-patristic inspiration. In such a hermeneutical line, the main text against homosexuality is the very text about the creation of the woman (Gen. 2.21 to 22): if it was not good for man to “be alone” then the communion is accomplished by making a woman, not another man ... This text has as a corollary another text: “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19.6). The Sacrament of Marriage, as the exclusive union between a man and a woman, remains indisputable in the Orthodox theology, though the biblical texts mentioned – like many others – can be interpreted in other (contextual, gender, and so on) ways. But for the Orthodox theology, the anthropology possesses an unquestionable revelation character, which it does not change, it does not adapt itself to the needs of the society. But the discussion deviates to other directions, exceeding the topic of my research here...

Christian Faith and Same Sex Attraction: An Orthodox Theological Perspective

The book written by Thomas Hopko²⁰, for a long period of time the dean of the St. Vladimir Institute of Crestwood, NY, deals with the manner in which homosexuality is viewed from a contemporary Orthodox perspective: from those who believe in the “final solution” of extermination (literally evoking the episode of Sodom) to those who see in the gay prides and the legitimating status of homosexual couples as passing “the ultimate test” on behalf of freedom of speech and democracy. Both the excellent introduction to the Romanian edition, signed by Mihail Neamtu, and the text of rev. Thomas Hopko addresses the issue of “same sex attraction” from a balanced orthodox perspective, without nuances of resentment or hatred.

There is an attempt to overcome the complexity of the theme by appealing to biblical and patristic texts. The short 27 chapters grouped after the pattern “homosexuality and... goodness, passion, choice, God’s will, holiness, asceticism, the joyful sorrow, joy, children, the human rights” and so forth are true lessons of a case for: “condemn the sin, but love the sinner”. There are offered useful pieces of advice for the use of spiritual fathers who provide counseling for certain persons founding themselves into this situation, but also as guiding marks in order that each of us to be able to relate in a Christian manner to these brothers and sisters of ours in God: not aggressively and with hypocrisy, but driven by a sincere desire to help them – endowed, thus, with power of judgment and love, always looking for a healing solution.

²⁰ Thomas Hopko, *Christian Faith and Same Sex Attraction – Eastern Orthodox Reflections*, 2nd Edition, Chesterton 2015. See the Romanian edition: *Homosexualitatea: o abordare ortodoxă*, foreword by Mihail Nemțu, trans. by Marian Rădulescu, Oradea 2009. We will use during the following pages the Romanian version.

“The Whole of Christ” (*Totus Christus*) encompasses both Jesus Christ and His Body – the whole Church, with saints and sinners alike – and, one may add, with homosexuals, inclusively. These fall in the category of sinners because, according to the orthodox vision, the legitimate sexual relationship is only the relationship between a man and a woman (later transfigured in the relationship between Christ as Groom and its Church as Bride, see *Mk* 2.19; *Jn* 3.29 or *Rev* 21.9). The phenomenon of attraction between same sex persons is due only to the rebellion directed against God, for He does not make people to be homosexuals²¹.

The cause of passionate relationships – which include, but are not limited to homosexual relationships – there is a passionate desire which distorts the natural impulses of human nature. Therefore, the sexual passions – either hetero- or homosexual – are bad, being exclusively selfish. In the case of same sex sexual relationships these cannot express and shape human relations according to the will of God. And again, according to the Orthodox teachings, love can be faithfully expressed and fruitfully accomplished exclusively through the sexual activity of the complementary and life giving communion between a man and a woman, following the analogy given by Christ, who becomes one “body” with His Church (*Eph* 5.21 to 33)²².

The biblical text in Romans, chapter 1, verses 18-32, shows that men need women in order to fulfill their humanity, and vice versa.²³ Nevertheless, these “needs” do not represent excessive desires so that one may satisfy his or her passionate impulses. Paradoxical as it may seem, to have loving desires for same sex persons is not condemnable; on the contrary, what is condemnable are the exclusively sexual thoughts and bodily desires towards other persons, even towards heterosexual persons.²⁴

What happens then with those who have “always” felt sexual attraction for same sex persons? This is something that actually happens and, even if people do not choose their feelings or sexual orientation, they can choose to fulfill them or to oppose them, when these are sinful. On the other hand, there are those who get sexually involved with same sex persons not because of imperative impulses, of irresistible attractions, but because of other rea-

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 51.

²³ There can be, of course, other interpretations to this text – as generally referring to the sin against God and the various shapes it may take.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

sons: out of curiosity, boredom, revenge, rebellion, for sexual gratification or in order to make a political statement²⁵.

To believe in God means to freely choose to follow God's will, even against the calling of your nature. Believers consider themselves dependent on divine love, which commands them to be and to behave in a certain manner, to make certain things and to reject others. From this perspective, believers do not "choose" their professions and do not "decide" upon their deeds, including those pertaining to sexual behavior.

Are the sexual orientations towards same sex persons the will of God? An adequate answer would imply a definition of what "God's will" means. Time and time again in history one has seen that the essential goodwill of God towards humanity was manifested as providential mercifulness. In other words, God desires only the best for the human being whom He has created and whom He loves. Nevertheless, love cannot manifest itself but in freedom. Even if the human being chooses an opposing path to the divine path, God continues to love His creatures (see the Parable of the Prodigal Son).

The Holy Scripture mentions the manner in which God has used bad creatures – people and daemons – and bad deeds for His providential goals. Only in this sense one could say that homosexuality is, for certain people, "the will of God". Due to the sinful nature of man, homosexual desires and passions are "viewed upon with mercy" or "tolerated" by God and are not categorically "wanted" by Him. "According to this perspective, same-sex attraction in its perverted form, including the desires for sexual relations with persons of one's own sex, is a providential cross which deserves to be carried and not a divine gift worthy of gratitude. In saying this, we have to bear again in mind that the love between same-sex persons, when properly experienced and purely expressed, is always a sacred gift on behalf of God. Such a love is a necessary, normal, and natural part of God's essential goodwill for humanity. When such a love is missing or, voluntarily or involuntarily, violated, there appear bodily desires orientated towards same-sex persons that must be acknowledged and dealt with as such, as a part of God's providential permission for those in question."²⁶

Is the above perspective in accordance to the teachings of the Gospel? And, if so, do these reflect the true will of God? Quoting some contemporary

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64. It is still debatable to what extent one may impose abstinence to a great number of people, as long as it represents a personal gift from God. See, in this respect, 1 *Cor* 7, 7.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

authors,²⁷ Thomas Hopko reminds us about the view according to which the teaching that rejects homosexual relationships would be an ignorant and false teaching, which was invented and imposed in order to keep the grip upon the “others” (women included). However, the acceptance of such doctrine would entail the rejection of God’s essential goodwill towards the entire humankind, ultimately rejecting Christ Himself. One can in no way speak about a homophobic patriarchal domination which would necessitate an emancipation of the Bible from the “fundamentalist stereotypes”. Hopko underlines that refusing to consent to homosexual impulses represents an extraordinary occasion of following Christ and to share in His salvation Passions. The path to holiness is thus open not only to heterosexual people, but also to homosexual ones.

On the other hand, this path includes the manner in which they refer to the effects of the original sin; there are required personal ascetic needs and a spiritual life that is lived under the guidance of improved spiritual fathers. This is what treading upon this path concretely implies: “First of all, the Christians attracted to same-sex persons will ceaselessly pray, alike to all Christians, in the ways provided by God. They will take part in the liturgical worship of the church. They will pray unseen in their dwelling places. They will devote themselves to the unceasing prayer of the heart. They will read spiritual books. They will constantly read the Bible, especially the Psalms, the writings of the New Testament, the lives and the teachings of Christian saints. They will practice silence, both the exterior and the interior one. They will fast and will refrain periodically from certain foods. They will guard their senses. They will work in wholesome occupations for the good of others and engage in wholesome hobbies essential to their own well-being, physical and mental. They will share their possessions with others, especially with those poorer than themselves and with those in special need. They will also support the Church’s missionary, philanthropic, and pastoral work. They will discipline their bodies with vigils and prostrations. In addition, these Christians will do whatever it takes to control their carnal, emotional, and spiritual lusts.”²⁸

Practicing ascetics in order to obtain the virtue is something to be done during their entire existence, praying to God not to be tempted above their strengths (see 1 *Cor* 10.13, 2 *Cor* 12.5 to 10).

²⁷ Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up, A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, San Francisco 1993; Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength, The Erotic Power and the Love of God*, San Francisco 1989; Elisabeth Steward, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies, Repetitions with Critical Differences*, Burlington 2003.

²⁸ T. Hopko, *Homosexualitatea*, p. 78.

The biblical texts are interpreted in an Orthodox key, as clearly rejecting homosexuality. Next to the “classical” texts, such as the episode of Sodom and Gomorra (*Gen* 19.1 to 26), or the fragment from the Epistle of St. Paul to Romans, one also has to recall *Lev* 18 to 21, or *Jude* 7. These texts as well are an indirect testimony that the true love relationship is that between a man and a woman. In what concerns those who are mainly or exclusively attracted by same sex persons, these will have to try and to pray to find, and thereafter, to develop same sex profound and lasting friendships with no erotic sexual relationship. Same sex marriage is by no means to be accepted. In the Bible, the verb “to know” denotes sexual relationships; when two people “know” each other, a psycho-spiritual connection is created between them, that affects their lives in a radical manner, but blessed physical “knowing” take places only when married men and women have sexual intercourse according to the order of love given to us by God. All other types of “knowing” are contrary to the divine spiritual life. These do not give life, but necessarily lead to dissatisfaction, unhappiness and death.²⁹

Just as it rejects marriage between same sex persons, the Orthodox Church also rejects the adoption of children on behalf of gay and lesbian families. One does not imply here that these persons could not be committed to children through love and affection. But unmarried persons, who nevertheless do have sexual relationships (sometimes even multiple ones), should by no means be allowed to adopt or to take care of children. Same sex persons that take care of children should not present themselves as the children’s “parents”, no matter the nature and the type of their sexual relationships.

The Orthodox Church also rejects any means of conception by homosexual men or lesbian women that would lead to the birth of children, either by donation or reception of sperm, be it from known or unknown donors. Still, in the case that such procreation means are used, the Orthodox have the duty to love and take care of the children who are born in this way with the same love and care that they owe it to all people in Christ and the Holy Spirit.³⁰

²⁹ See *Ibidem*, p. 102. All these biblical texts can also be interpreted in another “key”, such as a contextual key. For example, one may say about Sodom and Gomorra that these texts do not condemn homosexuality, but sexual abuse, rape. In what concerns the interpretation of the most known New-Testamentary text against homosexuality (Rom. 1, 26-27), see Jeremy Townsley’s study “Queer Sects in Patristic Commentaries on Romans 1:26–27: Goddess Cults, Free Will, and «Sex Contrary to Nature?»”, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81(1/2013), p. 56-79.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 103-104.

The Orthodox Church does not consider that through these interdictions it may have gone against the fundamental rights of men and women who have homosexual orientation. It is true that these persons interpret almost in all cases the rejection to acknowledge a “civil communion” or a “familial partnership” as an expression of hatred and despise.³¹ This association may be tolerated by the orthodox but cannot, in any circumstances, be blessed in the same manner in which one blesses the communion between a man and a woman in the Holy Sacrament of Marriage.³² According to Orthodox theology, marriage has been conceived, from its very beginning, as the union between a man and a woman in order to become “one body” in God. Its purpose is to express the completion of man, through the integration of the two sexes in the Godly love. There are also added the procreation, starting up a family, the salvation of the soul, the service to the others (enemies included), the sanctification of the world and, above all, praising God.

The ritual that is still preserved in some Orthodox churches, that of “brotherhood” (*adelphopoesis*) has not been and is not the religious service equivalent for “same sex marriages”³³. The persons who are united through such a connections do not have sexual-erotic relationships and can be married to other persons outside the brotherhood. The reason behind brotherhood communions is of a spiritual nature, and sometimes juridical or practical.³⁴

³¹ Some of these false interpretations are discussed by Vigen Guroian, *Homosexuality & Same-Sex Union*, New York 2007; “Let No Man Join Together: An Orthodox Christian View of a Besieged Sacrament”, in: *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, January/February 2011, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=24-01-028-f> accessed 30 September 2016; “If Love Has Won, Has Marriage Lost? An Orthodox Response to Obergefell v. Hodges”, <http://www.aoiusa.org/if-love-has-won-has-marriage-lost-an-orthodox-response-to-obergefell-v-hodges1/> accessed 30 September 2016.

³² Among the most recent orthodox contribution to articulating a theological vision upon marriage see: Theodore Grey Dedon, Sergey Trostyanskiy (eds.), *Love, Marriage and Family in Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, Piscataway 2016; David C. Ford et al. (eds.), *Glory and Honor. Orthodox Christian Resources on Marriage*, New York 2016. As references for the patristic commentaries regarding the Sacrament of Marriage are, especially at St Ioan Hrisostom, in: David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church. The Full Views of St John Chrysostom*, South Canaan 1994; Archpriest Josiah B. Trenham, *Marriage and Virginity According to St. John Chrysostom*, St. Herman of Alaska Monastery 2013. Among modern orthodox theologians, one may recall John Meyendorff, *Marriage. An Orthodox Perspective*, New York 1975; Philip LeMaters, *Toward a Eucharistic Vision of Church, Family, Marriage, and Sex*, Minneapolis 2004. In the Romanian theological area: Ilie Moldovan, *Teologia Iubirii* 2 vol., 2nd Edition, Alba Iulia 2014.

³³ There are, nevertheless, authors that go into this direction: Stephen Morris, “*When Brothers Dwell in Unity*”: *Byzantine Christianity and Homosexuality*, Jefferson 2016.

³⁴ T. Hopko, *Homosexualitatea*, p. 109.

The fact that the HIV/Aids pandemics, which devastates the world today, causing the death of millions of people, is closely connected to sexual activity, represents a reality that the Orthodox theologians cannot ignore it³⁵. This aspect also raises the problem of life and death for the today's man. The Orthodox theology, in spite of what some may think, does not oppose man's experience, not even his sexual experience. It is equally true that also in orthodoxy one may find a sectarian attitude – “we are the good”, and “the others are the bad.” The fanatic will always try to save the other, even against his own desire to be saved. The risk is that such a person does not even consider the possibility that he or she may be wrong in any respect that he or she may never be in a state fit for dialogue. These types of persons never do listen, never do discuss, they are never at peace with themselves and with the rest of the world. Regarding themselves as empowered by a special calling from God, these persons always lead a crusade, in a war that they – *they*, not God – have to win by any means.

The orthodox believers' true meaning does not consist in their competence of judging the others for something (*Mathew 7.1 to 5*). Full of love, they should consider themselves a gathering of sinners, ready to be “anathema” from Christ for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, regardless of their sexual orientation. They have to know that nobody is infallible, that every man must be ready to listen, to accept to be corrected and to repent for his or her sins. Therefore, homosexuality is an issue that must be healed within the Church, and not outside it.

In that case in what why must be understood the barring from the Holy Sacraments' partaking for those who affirm and publicly promote a homosexual behavior? Their main mistake is that they break the following principle: “In Orthodoxy, partakers in the sacramental mysteries are not only obliged to be steadfast in Christian faith and perpetually repentant over their failures, they are also obliged to take full responsibility for the Church's teachings and practices, and to be ready, at least in intention, to defend them unto death”³⁶.

Bared from communion, people with homosexual desires and passions sometimes leave the Orthodox Church in order to join other Christian confessions in which the homosexual behavior is considered to be compatible with Christian faith and love. Of course, the strong Orthodox attachment for liturgical rituals and strict moral rules are rejected here, as considered to

³⁵ See Genoveva Tudor (ed.), *Bolile homosexualilor*, București 2005.

³⁶ T. Hopko, *Homosexualitatea*, p. 129.

show little respect or even despise for the others. But barring somebody from sacramental communion in the Church, as a consequence of rejecting the Church's teaching concerning the Christian faith and life has a therapeutic sense, not a punitive one. Therefore the orthodox persons who feel attraction towards same sex persons in order to be victorious in this "unseen war" that they are waging, it is necessary that they reveal their sexual feelings to their spiritual fathers. To the same extent, it is crucial that the Church' priests are honest Christians, loving and companions in suffering, aware of their own wrongdoings, repenting their own mistakes and striving to combat their own sins. "On behalf of the pastors, parents, counselors, and friends there is necessary a strong willingness in order to stand by those attracted by same sex persons to carry on with them until the end, no matter what. Such a pastoral care requires the confessor's faith and love being constantly tested, his refusal to condemn others, and his readiness to sacrifice his life so that others may live. It also requires – on behalf of the Christians attracted by same-sex persons – love and patience regarding their confessors, being obedient towards them, praying fervently that they will serve them well and bring no harm upon them."³⁷

An efficient counseling implies first of all that the Christian spiritual fathers would give up all the stereotypes referring to homosexuals. They must see in every human being a unique person, with his or her genetic heritage and his or her personal past. They must acknowledge the complexity of sexual issues in general and of those pertaining to homosexuality in particular. They also have to resist the temptation of oversimplifying things and to avoid being too confident in their evaluations.

The spiritual fathers, during their pastoral activity, they have to be open for dialogue. They always have to start by praying, so that they may be able to ask and listen as appropriate, and never by preaching, teaching, prophesying or judging. They will not go into polemics or contradictory discussions, but they will try to establish a relationship based on communion and mutual understanding, because only in such a context the person who is confessing can talk freely, without fear for consequences. Ultimately, both the confessant and the spiritual father are nothing else but companions in ascetics, looking for the same thing, namely the will of God, in the concrete context of their lives.

Considering what has been said so far, Fr Thomas Hopko considers that Orthodoxy has the role to affirm and guard, in a brave manner, the truth in what concerns persons who are involved in sexual relationships with

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

same sex persons, even if these claim to be love relationships, these are actually betraying forms of the divine love.³⁸

“How do we regard homosexual persons?”: An Orthodox Pastoral Approach

How do we relate ourselves to homosexuals? More exactly, what would be the right approach from a pastoral perspective, for their “recovery”? Hieromonk Savatie Bastovoi attempted to answer these questions³⁹ in an article which had a large circulation on the Orthodox sites⁴⁰. (Before presenting this author’s argumentation, I underline the following aspect: in my opinion, from the point of view of the theological argumentation, of the attempt to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality “from within”, the book written by rev. Hopko is superior to that of hieromonk Bastovoi).

First of all, the harsh position, as presented in an article published by the Romanian “right wing” journal *Scara*⁴¹, is rejected. Here were mentioned some of the methods of “fighting against” homosexuality: the stoning to death from the *Leviticus*, the harsh (*Pravila*) laws of the Romanian ruler Vasile Lupu (1595-1661), which were also stipulating the burning of the bodies of those who had been killed for this sin. Distancing himself from this position, the author shows that the pastoral approach of homosexuality must be a spiritual one. In order to do that, homosexuality must be rightly understood: is it a disease? sexual preference? the consequence of education or of psychological and emotional accidents through which some may undergo at some point in life?

The answer offered by Bastovoi is the following: homosexuality is not a disease, it cannot be inherited, instead there is the possibility of “orientation towards perversion in general”. Without providing any examples, he considers the activation of this potentiality as the result of an “artistic inclination”, of a certain “sensitivity”: “Almost all the great names within art and modern literature have been either homosexual, pedophiles, zoophiles, or all of these together”⁴² (sic! N/A). Homosexuality – just like pedophilia

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

³⁹ Bio-bibliographical data on hieromonk Savatie can be found at <http://savatie.trei.ro/despre.htm> accessed September 30, 2016.

⁴⁰ See <http://acvila30.ro/ierom-savatie-bastovoi-scrisoarea-ii-despre-sansele-de-recuperare-ale-homosexualilor/> accessed September 30, 2016. It has been published in the sixth edition of Savatie Bastovoi, *Între Freud și Hristos*, Bucharest 2008, p. 92-102 and we will henceforth use this edition.

⁴¹ The text is partially available online: <http://acvila30.ro/despre-homosexuali-in-contextul-lumii-contemporane/> accessed September 30, 2016.

⁴² S. Baştovoi, *Între Freud și Hristos*, p. 95.

or zoophilia – go from potentiality to act also due to the negative influence exercised upon youngsters by erotic objects, such as movies, literature and journals that have erotic content. On the contrary, even if they can never be fully uprooted, these unnatural inclinations can be “put off” through abstinence, through ascetics. The ascetic struggle reveals in this manner its grandeur – although sin is specific to the fallen human nature, man finds the strength to rise above nature⁴³.

An ascetic principle, formulated by the Holy Fathers, affirms that “passion makes from what it has at hand a sexual object”. Therefore, the odds of homosexual activity are higher in prisons, army, even in monasteries. It is the reason for which Basil the Great recommends in his rules that brothers do not shake hands when they greet each other, and Avva Ioan Colov used to say that the monk who has satisfied his hunger and also talked with a child has also committed sin with him or her. These measures for extreme caution had as purpose the elimination of any temptation. Following the same principle the monk community on Mt. Athos prohibits not only the access of women, but also of young men (saint Nil of Mt. Athos compares the entrance of a beardless youngster in a community to embers which have fallen on a new dress). Savatie Bastovoi considers these cautions right because of the universal presence of a homosexual potentiality in the fallen human nature⁴⁴.

No matter which type of homosexuality is involved (passive or active), it can occur due to other reasons as well: the attempt to surpass one’s own limitations, the disagreement with the world they live into, boredom of natural sexual relations, or even falling to the temptation of the “demonic alternative”. “Homosexuals, just like killers, feel the monstrous pleasure of confronting God, of confronting the Limit... Homosexuality is an excess, just like drugs, just like the pleasure to kill, just like fashion, just like drunkenness. All of these are abnormal, all of these are sins, and all of these set us apart from God and the right course of things”⁴⁵.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 97-98.

⁴⁴ “Therefore, those who know the Orthodox asceticism and have reached certain spiritual heights know that no man can say that he never had homosexual, pedophile or other impulses. And not because he would look for them, but because the devil tempts with absolutely anything the person that leads the fight of chastity for Christ. Saint Isaac the Syrian says that, if anybody says that he or she does not have dirty thoughts it means that he or she commits them in act. It is another thing whether due to the barbarity of his passions he does not see these low impulses that even the most wonderful of the ascetics of Christianity blamed them upon themselves. If we were truly clean we would see that we are not sheltered from them either.” *Ibidem*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 102-103.

In an attempt to answer the question of whether homosexuals do come to the right path, the author takes as departure point the premise of a total opposition between homosexuality and Christianity. "All known homosexuals are at open war with Christianity, and those who are converted hide the fact that they were once homosexual."⁴⁶

An exact statistics regarding the conversion of homosexuals cannot be made and this is also due to the fact that, in countries with an orthodox majority, this is still regarded as a shameful thing. Being a taboo topic, some may get the false impression that homosexuals have no access to repentance. We have to admit, indeed, that there are absolutely no confessions of Orthodox homosexual believers regarding the drama they go through and the problems they try to solve. Considering the want of such confessions, the views of Orthodox theological literature upon homosexuality may appear to an outside observer as external and artificial.

The scarcity of information on homosexuality can also be noticed in patristic literature. Bastovoi mentions a case that is recorded in *The Ladder* of St. John of Sinai, in which some expressions can be considered as references to same sex sexual deviations: for example, expressions such as "he has given up his life which has been spent in sins akin to the animals" or "in great promiscuity" etc. One may talk here about a "typically orthodox decency"⁴⁷.

Taking as starting point these theoretical aspects, there are elaborated a few principles for pastoral work with heterosexual persons. First of all, one has to know that these persons are capable of a great deal of suffering. Since they are in a permanent opposition to the world, with its norms, these persons live with the complex of having been isolated, banished from the society of "normal" people, they go through the experience of being "different'. This very existence in isolation can, paradoxically, attract them to know more about Christ – a "God that is not from this world", who calls us "to be a fool for Him". At the same time, it is also Christ the one who has said that He did not come for the rightful, but for the sinners. The occasion for conversion can therefore come.

Homosexuals who "live" this condition in all its depth, not just merely practice it, as one does with food, or sleep, may find resources by striving to come out of the sinful state and live life in Christ. Here the author also makes another interesting comparison: he thinks that there is a great difference between the homosexual from Socrates' Greece and a modern day homosexual. "While a Greek back then was homosexual only out of pleasure,

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

nowadays the homosexual lives his condition as an existential commitment, as a drama. He actually assumes this condition in a world that he considers to be damned, he asks for the right to have a family, to be accepted, even for the right to have a church. He does not live homosexuality as a pleasure, but it is also conscious about all its sufferings. He accepts these sufferings, even more so, he sacrifices himself”⁴⁸.

The role of the Church is “to reach out”. Its members must prove compassion towards homosexuals, but not as they show towards incurable sick or dying people, but as towards potentially saint persons. It is a sin against divine love to believe that someone does not have chances to salvation. As long as there is time for repentance, any sin can be forgiven.

Another principle shows that “the greatest sin is the sin that you are in right now”. Man’s will must be exercised towards surpassing the sins that are in life, in spite of their nature. For some people it is not homosexuality that is the capital sin, but anger, avarice or smoking. In spite of what some may think, even in case of sainthood one encounters aspects that go beyond usual norms. “Christianity is not just a religion of normality, of good manners – underlines Savatie Bastovoi. We have the Holy Fools for Christ that defy any imagination on what it means to be well behaved. St. Andrew the Fool for Christ used to relieve himself in front of passers-by and used to get beaten for it. It is not, therefore, about breaking rules, but about the turbulent fight of repentance which, as any other fight, presupposes both wounds and falls.”⁴⁹

Then does homosexuality circumscribes itself among the sins that cry to Heavens, about which some moralist theologians claim that they cannot be forgiven? The answer pertains to the relation that each person has with God, committing the sin and assessing it, taking into account the person and the circumstances. Then the pyramid changes: “all the sins for which we do not repent are serious, even if they may seem insignificant and, on the contrary, all the sins for which we have repented ourselves are not serious any more, even if they seem and they are terrible”⁵⁰.

Then why is homosexuality fought against in the Orthodox Church? Savatie Bastovoi answers: “I fight homosexuality not because it is a moral deviance, but because it keeps me away from Christ”. From this point of view homosexuals are abnormal, “as they do not tend to liken themselves to Christ”⁵¹.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 109-110.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

Moreover, making a reference to the text that has determined himself to approach this subject, Bastovoi shows that the fate of homosexuals is not solved by referring to the burning of Sodom.

There are other biblical texts which prescribe equally terrible punishments for other sins as well that one may generally regards as light sins: Miriam, the sister of Moses, has been punished with leprosy for the sin of gossiping (*Num* 12.1 to 10), Nadab and Abiud have been burnt with fire because they toyed with the incense for sacrifice (*Lev* 10.1 to 2), and Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, have been punished by sudden death for avarice (*Acts* 5.1 to 10).

The conclusion that one reaches is as follows: "we are therefore all sick: the homosexuals, the adulterous, the gossipers. We all need correction. And if homosexuality is greater, it does not mean that Christ forgives not as easily as he does with gossiping, say, even if a homosexual will be accepted after a longer time to communion."⁵² What makes the difference here is the infinite love of God towards His creatures, but also the repentance of the one who made the sin and his sincere desire to correct himself. It is not the sin itself that is problematic. Christ's words: "Your sins are forgiven, son!" address any kind of sin. The problem lies elsewhere: how much time will the sinner be repentant. "From this respect, bodily sins, be they homosexuality, be they adultery, are very difficult to overcome. It is not that Christ forgives them with more difficulty, but that they work terribly in the body and the soul of the sinner, urging him to come back to them. These sins have hurt nature more than others, so the bleeding lasts longer, but the award is also bigger... These sins make the human nature to become stuck as in a swamp from which it is rather more difficult to pull oneself out than in the case of other sins."⁵³

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 117. In this respect, the 61st Apostolic Canon considers the bodily sin, adultery and homosexuality, as obstacles for the sacrament of Priesthood. In *Molifelnicul Mare*, Chişinău 1820, it is said that: "The adulterous (the married ones, committing adultery with other married persons, are called adulterous), the homosexuals (homosexuals are called those who have anal intercourse, man with man or man with his wife), those who come together with animals, those who come together with his wife more than necessary (more than necessary means that the man and the woman satisfy their devilish pleasure by kissing each other's inappropriate places), they should not receive the communion for 15 years". Parting from 1 *Cor* 6, 9, the canon 10 of John the Faster regulates that: "He who has masturbated for 40 days should be punished by eating dry food and making 100 genuflections". The 11th canon of John the Faster also condemns masturbations performed by two persons. *Malakos* rather names the effeminate ones, those who have sexual intercourse with other men, which is also homosexuality (a kind of male prostitution), but it can also be related to masturbation.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

Previous observations lead us to another pastoral principle, as the persistence in the passion of homosexuality, in such a way that this becomes a second nature for the human being needs a continuous fight but also support, and not condemnation from the others. Homosexuality cannot be overcome through fanaticism. The words said by Jesus Christ: “the one amongst yourselves that is without sin, that one should cast the stone first” are still valid. The inquisitorial attitude or the Nazi style treatment are outside the Orthodox morality. In an orthodox prayer God is called “very-compassionate”, an expression that comes from the Slavonic words *milosti* – “mercy,” and *serdze* – “heart”. Bearing in mind the one with “a merciful heart”, the author concludes that “therefore I cannot view people’s sins, be they homosexual, killers, or anything else, but with a merciful heart. Because I want to understand God.”⁵⁴

Instead of Conclusion

Gender related issues were also found on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Synod which took place in Crete from 16th to 26th of June, 2016.⁵⁵ Therefore, in the document entitled “The Holy Sacrament of Matrimony and Its Impediments”, there is an reinforcement of the Orthodox vision upon marriage as unity between a man and a woman, after the liking of Christ, the Groom, and His Bride, the Church⁵⁶. This vision is today threatened by “the phenomenon of secularization” and “moral relativism”. Homosexual relationships are also given as examples: „The Church does not allow for her members to contract same-sex unions or any other form of cohabitation apart from marriage. The Church exerts all possible pastoral efforts to help her members who enter into such unions understand the true meaning of repentance and love as blessed by the Church”.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

⁵⁵ The official documents are located at holycouncil.org.

⁵⁶ “The Orthodox Church teaches about the sacredness of marriage as being its fundamental and indisputable teaching. The free union between a man and a woman is a prerequisite. Within the Orthodox Church, marriage is considered to be the oldest institution of divine law, because it was instituted simultaneously with the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings (*Gen* 2.23). Since its origin, this union has not only implied the spiritual communion of a married couple—a man and a woman—but also has assured the continuation of the human race. As such, the marriage of man and woman, which was blessed in Paradise, became a holy mystery, as mentioned in the New Testament where Christ has performed *His first sign*, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and thus revealing His glory (*Jn* 2.11). The mystery of the indissoluble union between a man and a woman is an icon of the unity of Christ and the Church (*Eph* 5.32)”.

The same idea also becomes clear from article 14 in the section “The Mission of the Orthodox Church as Testimony of Love in Service”, part of another official document issued in Crete, with the title “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World”. Here one may find: “The Church’s special pastoral care for young people represents an unceasing and unchanging Christ-centered process of formation. Of course, the pastoral responsibility of the Church also extends to the divinely-granted institution of family, which has always been and must always be founded on the sacred mystery of Christian marriage as a union between man and woman, as reflected in the union of Christ and His Church (*Eph* 5.32). This is especially vital in light of attempts in certain countries to legalize and in certain Christian communities to justify theologically other forms of human cohabitation that are contrary to the Christian tradition and teaching. The Church hopes for the recapitulation of everything in the Body of Christ, it reminds every person coming into the world, that Christ will return again at His Second Coming *judging the living and the dead* (1 *Pet* 4.5) and that *His Kingdom shall have no end* (*Lk* 1.33).”

Taking into account that it is almost a taboo topic in contemporary Orthodox theology, and that not seldom the reactions it has triggered have been almost fanatic, one has to welcome the fact that the theme of (homo)-sexuality has been addressed in an official Orthodox document. Actually, the theme had also been included in another official document, issued by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.⁵⁷ Still, orthodox theologians should not avoid the subject in the future!

As conclusion we recall that Orthodox theologians generally support the traditional line of the Church, which can be resumed according to the following principles (valuable both from a theological and a pastoral point of view): 1) Homosexuality is a sin, as Biblical texts show us. The Orthodox Church underlines this fact through its canons, which prohibit the person who has same sex intercourse from the communion of Holy sacraments. 2) Still, this prohibition doesn’t have punitive purpose, but therapeutic purpo-

⁵⁷ “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church”, <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/> accessed 30 September 2016. See also Natallia Vasilievich, “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church and Anthropological Challenges”, in: Misha Cherniak et al. (eds.), *“For I Am Wonderfully Made”: Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion*, 2016, p. 61-70. Other official documents on this topic: *Statement on Marriage, The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America* (September 24, 2013), *Response of the Assembly of Bishops to Obergefell v. Hodges, The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America* (July 2, 2015), and *Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, Statement on Same-Sex “Marriage”* (July 11, 2015), in: D. Ford et al. (eds.), *Glory and Honor*, p. 433-437.

se. The purpose one follows is the healing of the sinner, helping him in the “unseen war” he fights, so that he may reach holiness. 3) Divine love flows on everybody, and this should be a model for orthodox believers as well. They have to treat homosexuals with love and compassion, not with hatred and fanaticism. 4) Those who have attraction for same sex persons have to discover in their parish a medium for dialogue in which they can speak openly about their problems (the first step towards healing). 5) An essential role in pastoral work belongs to the spiritual father. Each case needs maximum attention and finding the most efficient means of fighting against passions. The two persons – the penitent and the spiritual father – are companions in suffering and their confessions may be of help for other persons that need to overcome problems issued from same sex attraction.

At the same time, there appear also voices that call for a change in the orthodox approach of the theme of sexuality. Just as the Orthodox Church uses – for therapeutic purposes – the principle of economy in matters such as the acceptance of the second and the third marriage (when, actually, only the first one is considered to be a sacrament), why couldn't it apply the same principle in case of homosexuality as well? Why should they be banned from sacramental communion? Certainly, the book written by Stephen Morris, *When Brothers Dwell in Unity*, or the one edited by Misha Cherniak, *For I am Wonderfully Made*, focuses precisely on a reformatory line in contemporary orthodox theology⁵⁸. The fact that these discussions are far from being closed – and precisely because of this – being so necessary, it is also reflected in the roundtable discussion of the participants to a symposium organized by Misha Cherniak and which are to be found in the volume he edited⁵⁹. And, above all, the discussions should be sincere⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ See also Archbishop Lazar (Puhalo), *On the Neurobiology of Sin*, Dewdney 2010.

⁵⁹ “Pastoral Care and Confession: A Roundtable Discussion on the Needs of LGBT People in the Orthodox Church”, and “Family and Marriage: A Roundtable Discussion on the Needs of LGBT Families in the Orthodox Church”, in: Misha Cherniak et al. (eds.), *For I Am*, p. 265-281 and 282-298. See also the site www.orthodoxandgay.com (accessed 30 September, 2016). Its key administrator and main writer is Andriy (Partykevich), who was canonically ordained in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. By his own choice, Father Andriy no longer serves as an active priest.

⁶⁰ In this sense see the case of Andrei Kuraev, who was himself punished when he accused Monk Kirill (Iliukhin) of homosexuality, and was released from the Moscow Theological Academy. Kuraev's reflections can be found on his personal blog: diak-kuraev.livejournal.com. Details are to be found in H. Stähle, “Between Homophobia and”, p. 55-56. There have to be also mention here the scandals in which were implicated some orthodox hierarchy, (unofficially) accused of homosexuality and had to step down.