

Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity



Perspectives on Challenges from the Modern West

A REPORT BY THE BRIDGING VOICES CONSORTIUM
OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY & THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
EDITED BY BRANDON GALLAHER & GREGORY TUCKER

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*Perspectives on Challenges
from the Modern West*

Interim Report
of the British Council Bridging Voices
Consortium of Exeter University & Fordham
University, New York on “Contemporary Eastern
Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of
Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age”
edited by Brandon Gallaher & Gregory Tucker

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Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all those who have participated in our project as a whole. Issues of sex,

gender, and sexuality are extremely sensitive within the Orthodox context and it is by no means easy to discuss them today, especially in situations in which views contrary to the presently declared position of the Church are expressed. Furthermore, there is growing pressure from some quarters for Orthodox leaders to prohibit participation in open discussions of this sort and for “conservatives” to withdraw voluntarily from the conversation, lest they unwittingly contribute to the furtherance of an imagined “liberal agenda.” Indeed, our project and participants in it have been subjected to sustained public assaults, many of which have deliberately misrepresented our goals and presuppositions and the positions taken by participants, and some of which have included vicious ad hominem attacks. We are therefore grateful most of all for and to those who entered into our dialogue with courage, compassion, and generosity. Without you, there would have been no project, and you have shown that another way of love is open to all.

Brandon Gallaher & Gregory Tucker

13th November, 2019

Commemoration of Saint John Chrysostom

Executive Summary

- The Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC) is one of the largest Christian bodies in the world today. It is a family of independent churches which regard themselves collectively and individually as the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” The EOC is neither Protestant nor Catholic; it is also distinct from the Oriental Orthodox churches (e.g. Armenian, Ethiopian, and Coptic churches). Its approximately 200 million members are today mostly found in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, but there is a large and influential “diaspora” located mainly in Western Europe, North America, and Australia. The *primus inter pares* of Orthodox bishops is the Ecumenical Patriarch.
- Today, the EOC remains committed to models of gender and sexuality and related disciplines which were formulated in pre-modernity. Many Orthodox subscribe to a version of “gender essentialism” which regards biological sex, gender, and gender roles, as stable, transhistorical realities, such that all human beings are essentially and permanently either male or female. The Church’s disciplines include, among other things, an understanding of marriage as the union of a male and a female and only sexual activity within its bounds is morally sanctioned. Other gender identities and sexualities, whether publicly acknowledged and actualized or not, are officially condemned, but pastoral responses vary, especially according to country and culture.
- Most Orthodox (especially those in post-Soviet Eastern Europe) accept the Church’s teachings and disciplines on sexuality as

part of a complete package of received traditions which is beyond scrutiny. These teachings and disciplines are widely believed to derive from a universal and univocal Orthodox discourse on gender and sexuality that is clearly and unquestionably manifest in the Church's tradition (which includes the Bible). It is popularly believed that the truth of current Orthodox teachings, disciplines, structures, and practices can be "proven" by demonstrating their historical continuity within the Church as an institution. In many cases, attitudes to sexual diversity correspond to a generally socially-conservative attitude.

- Many of the same Orthodox (in Eastern Europe, but also some Western converts) regard the Church's opposition to sexual diversity not only as a *de facto* reality but as a matter of dogmatic truth, which must be defended in the contemporary world against the decadent secularism of "the West" and its rejection of "traditional values." Defenders of current practice often regard the Church as being under attack. The small number of Orthodox who do speak or act publicly against the Church's current teachings often face exclusion from Church life and in some cases they are subjected to defamation of character, harassment, and threats (and acts) of violence. In many traditionally Orthodox countries, rejection by the Church is sometimes accompanied by rejection by family, friends, and the wider community, according to wider social norms.
- A minority of Orthodox today publicly challenge the Church's teachings and disciplines concerning sexual diversity, and more hold contrary opinions in private. The status quo is often questioned, in the first instance, as a result of pressing pastoral realities on the ground. Some accommodation of sexual diversity already occurs in the shadows and without open acknowledgment, particularly outside Eastern Europe. A very small number of communities practice open hospitality

towards LGBTQ+ persons and many more pastors practice functional inclusion while maintaining the official positions of the Church when pressed to do so. In some larger cities, “LGBTQ+ friendly” parishes exist with the knowledge of the bishop and his blessing for the priest to extend as much pastoral and sacramental care as possible.

- The 2017 Pew report on Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century shows that a majority of Orthodox in the USA and Greece say society should be more accepting of homosexuality, and a majority in the USA (which has civil same-sex marriage) are in favour of allowing gay couples to marry. At least one local Orthodox Church in Western Europe permits a service of celebration for same-sex couples in civil marriages and integrates gay couples into many of its communities. There is a noteworthy difference of opinion on many topics between post-Soviet and non-Soviet countries.
- Among Orthodox theologians, there is a wide range of opinion on the received teachings and a growing recognition that these realities need to be grappled with openly. A small but increasing number advocates for the open inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in Church life and same-sex marriage. Intellectual challenges are often expressed in terms of the historical contingency of theorizations of gender and sex (and especially shifts between pre-modernity and modernity) and the absence or inconsistency of theological reasoning in this area.

Introduction

This interim report emerges from the first phase of work undertaken by a consortium of scholars, pastors, activists, and policy-makers on the topic, “Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age.” The research is taking place under the auspices of the second iteration of the British Council’s Bridging Voices project, funded primarily by the British Council, Friends of the British Council, and the Henry Luce Foundation.

1.1 Project Goals and Overview

The project seeks to enable a sustained, complex, and respectful conversation about the challenges of pluralism in general and sexual diversity specifically to Eastern Orthodox identity in a secular age. The project is exploring themes of religion and identity, diversity, human rights, and social justice in regard to the identity of Eastern Orthodox Christianity as it faces the challenge of increasingly pluralistic societies and, in particular, sexual diversity, by which is meant the existence, legal acknowledgement, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in traditional Orthodox communities at home and abroad. The phrase “the challenges of . . . sexual diversity” is broadly construed to include issues related to both gender (e.g. the role of women in contemporary church leadership, trans self-identification and inclusion) and sexuality (e.g. approaches to same-sex sexual relations and marriage), since they are inextricably intertwined—but the

emphasis of our research falls primarily on questions related to the theorization and acceptance (or rejection) of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities, sex, and relationships within Orthodox contexts.

The project is working with theologians, historians, philosophers, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, medical researchers, sociologists, and cultural anthropologists, as well as pastors and activists, to identify how, why, and in what ways opposition to “sexual diversity” was characteristic of Eastern Orthodox religion and culture in the past and remains so today. This involves the careful investigation of intellectual and cultural practices and their historical contexts, and subtle analysis of how this has played out in the modern, secular West, which has developed discourses about sexuality that are disjunctive from those of Orthodoxy. We are collaborating to explore the relationship between traditional Orthodox values and secular government and law in different contexts and question the extent to which the Orthodox Church seeks and require the conformity of secular power to its own moral system and assumes a voice in the public sphere in defence of “traditional values.” We are investigating the potency and appropriateness of the language of “universal human rights” in an Orthodox setting and consider alternative ways of discussing the LGBTQ+ experience.

The project thus involves two overlapping and interrelated processes: the first is the articulation and clarification of the theology and discipline of the Orthodox Church on matters of sex, gender, and sexuality (an “internal” conversation); the second is the re-articulation and exploration of this conversation within the context of secular and pluralist political frameworks (an “open” conversation). The internal conversation includes the expression and analysis of different positions within the tradition and development of an understanding of how Orthodox language (theological, canonical, etc.) is and is not compatible with contemporary (secular) terminology and understanding.

The open conversation can perhaps best be understood as an exercise in translation, seeking to develop greater intelligibility between theological and secular discourses. Both processes are taking place simultaneously and model the mutual respect and generous dialogue that is necessary for this conversation to advance.

1.2 Report Goals

The aim of this interim report is to delineate some contours of debate on issues of sexual diversity in the Eastern Orthodox Church in light of the first phase of conversation with members of the project consortium. It is a step towards attaining one of the primary goals of the project as a whole, which is the articulation and clarification of the theology and discipline of the Eastern Orthodox Church on matters of sex, gender, and sexuality. Thus, on the one hand, this report will serve as a point of reference and departure for ongoing conversations (within this project and beyond) about Orthodoxy and sexuality in terms familiar to the Orthodox Church, and, on the other hand, it will serve subsequent efforts towards the project's second major goal, of re-articulating and exploring the topic of Orthodox identity and sexual diversity within the context of secular and pluralist political frameworks.

The report includes ten summary arguments presented by participants at the project's first digital workshop, which involved 21 participants in total. Five broad topic areas (theology and biblical studies; church history; philosophy; ethics; science and psychology) were identified in advance and two speakers were invited to present a short stimulus paper in each of the topic areas. After each pair of papers, time was allocated for discussion, and a plenary discussion concluded the workshop. Speakers and respondents raised what they considered to be the most salient points in each topic area. These topic areas are not discrete,

however, and many points of debate cross disciplinary boundaries. Participants were chosen to represent a range of disciplines, approaches, and points of view on issues of sexual diversity, but the project leaders did not seek to predetermine the specific content and direction of their contributions.

In the spirit of giving voice to diverse positions, this report presents the summary arguments as submitted by presenters, without alteration (§4). No attempt has been made to harmonize the perspectives given and the resultant discord and lack of cohesion reflects the state of the dialogue at present both within our project and within world Orthodoxy more generally. However, given that all the speakers self-identify as either Orthodox or culturally tied to Orthodoxy, they share many basic theological suppositions even when they are at variance on an issue like sexual diversity. Thus, we have attempted to provide a sketch of this broad theological vision in the section prior to the perspectives (§3). The short summary and commentary that follows the summary arguments of our speakers attempts to highlight the most salient points and draw attention to areas of conversation that developed during the digital workshop (§5).

This report obviously does not offer a comprehensive survey of all issues and points of debate relevant to the topic of Eastern Orthodoxy and sexual diversity and should be treated very much as an interim stage in our project.

1.3 Consortium Profile

The project is spearheaded by academics from the University of Exeter, UK, and the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University, New York, USA.

Principal Investigator Rev'd Dr Brandon Gallaher (Senior Lecturer in Systematic and Comparative Theology, University of Exeter) is an expert on modern Orthodox theology in both Greek and Russian traditions and has written on politics, sec-

ularization, and modernity. His current book project looks at Orthodoxy and modernity through four post-secular challenges to Eastern Orthodox identity, which it is argued is pre-modern, that is, sexual diversity, religious plurality, science and technology and the authoritarian religious authority of the episcopate in a democratic age. He works closely on theological projects with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the *primus inter pares* of the local Orthodox Churches, and was a Theological Expert at the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church held at Crete in 2016. He is a deacon in the Archdiocese of Thyateira & Great Britain, an eparchy or territorial diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the United Kingdom.

Principal Investigator Prof. Aristotle Papanikolaou (Archbishop Demetrios Chair in Orthodox Theology & Culture, Fordham University) is an internationally recognised scholar of Eastern Orthodox and political theology. He is currently engaged in projects focused on the relationship between theological anthropology, violence, and virtue ethics as well as a large international project on Orthodoxy and human rights. He is Co-founder and Co-director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University, which has become a leading academic forum for the study of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world, regularly hosting international conferences and publishing a series of books with Fordham University Press, *The Journal of Orthodox Studies* (John Hopkins University Press), and the popular academic blog, *Public Orthodoxy*.

Additional Partner Dr Edward Skidelsky (Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Exeter) is a moral philosopher with a particular interest in the relationship between religion and ethics, including sexual ethics. He has extensive contacts in Russia, where he worked for several years with an NGO promoting democratic values in the early years of the post-Soviet era. He has written on the ethics of capitalism, the value of happiness, and

the philosophical importance of the history of ideas. He is currently working on a book project on the history of the virtues.

Additional Partner Prof. George Demacopoulos (Father John Meyendorff & Patterson Family Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies, Fordham University) is an expert on the history of Christianity in Late Antiquity, the early Medieval West, and the Byzantine East. His current research includes a study of war and violence in the Greek patristic tradition, and a reappraisal of Eastern Christian experience (from the Crusades to the present) through the lens of postcolonial theory, as well as a large international project on Orthodoxy and human rights. He is Co-founder and Co-director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University.

Additional Partner Gregory Tucker (Research Assistant, Chair for Liturgical Studies, University of Regensburg) specializes in Patristic and Byzantine theology and the history and theology of Orthodox liturgy. He has also written on secularism, human rights, and contemporary issues in Orthodox hermeneutics. He was previously an editor of the popular journal of Orthodox thought and culture, *The Wheel*, which published a landmark issue on Orthodoxy and sexuality in 2018 that included many essays from members of the project including Papanikolaou and Gallaher.

The consortium as a whole includes over fifty contributors from a wide range of backgrounds. Though the report draws material directly and indirectly from a very large group of contributors, it was drafted primarily by Brandon Gallaher and Gregory Tucker, after consultation with the other core consortium members (Aristotle Papanikolaou, George Demacopoulos and Edward Skidelsky). Those whose voices are reflected in the report include: Demetrios Bathrellos, Antonios Basoukos, John Behr, Peter Bouteneff, David Bradshaw, George Demacopoulos, Brandon Gallaher, David Heith-Stade, Davor Džalto, Ian Graham, Andrej Jeftic, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Marilisse Mars, Aristotle

Papanikolaou, Richard Rene, Bryce Rich, Edward Siecienski, Edward Skidelsky, Richard Swinburne, Gregory Tucker, and Gayle Woloschak.

1.4 Notes on the Chatham House Rule

Topics related to sexual diversity are extremely controversial in the Orthodox world. In order to facilitate the participation of a diverse group of persons in the consortium, the project is being conducted under a version of the Chatham House Rule:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.¹

The implementation of this rule is necessary in order that free and frank exchanges may take place between participants without the threat of the exposure of and personal association with controversial views, which would then be open to aggressive scrutiny (particularly online) by those who wish to foreclose or predetermine the result of the dialogue.

The project leaders interpret the rule in the spirit espoused by Chatham House: “‘The Rule is . . . about the dissemination of the information after the event—nothing should be done to identify, either explicitly or implicitly, who said what.’”² However, they dissent from the Chatham House guideline forbidding the public naming of participants, in the interest of transparency and academic integrity. Thus, a list of participants and their professional affiliations will be made available, but no details of the

¹“Chatham House Rule,” <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule>

²“Chatham House Rule FAQ,” <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule-faq>.

contributions made by participants will be disclosed. Planned future publications (including a volume of essays and short communications issued through Fordham's *Public Orthodoxy* blog) will be subject to normal academic peer-review procedures and published under the author's name but any references to the internal dialogue of the project will maintain the anonymity of those involved.

As an interim output of the project, this report applies the Chatham House Rule liberally. Therefore, while information contained below is derived from presentations, conversations, and materials exchanged between participants, it seeks to maintain the anonymity of all ideas, opinions, and positions espoused herein. No rightful ownership of intellectual property is thereby denied. A list of those who have contributed to this report is given above (§1.3).

2

Overview: Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity

The Eastern Orthodox Church is one of the largest Christian bodies in the world today. It is a family of independent (often national) churches which are in Eucharistic communion and which affirm one another's traditions of worship, teaching, and discipline as authentically that of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."¹ These churches subscribe to the ultimate authority of their bishops-in-synod and recognise the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as de facto *primus inter pares* of Orthodox bishops.² The Orthodox Church understands itself to be, collectively and individually, at macro and micro levels, the earthly manifestation of the one, indivisible Church of Jesus Christ.

¹This phrase characterizes the nature of the church according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). It is used by many Christian groups today, including the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant churches, but the Orthodox Church understands it to apply properly *only* to the communion of Orthodox Churches.

²The recognition of the primatial status of the Ecumenical Patriarch is occasionally withdrawn by individual churches in times of internal discord (e.g. by the Church of Russia during the crisis over the independence of the Church of Ukraine beginning in October 2018) but the identification of these churches as Orthodox generally remains unless the withdrawal of recognition solidifies into permanent schism.

2.1 The Eastern Orthodox Church & Other Churches

Properly speaking, the above-mentioned communities regard themselves not as the “Eastern Orthodox Church”—one church or family of churches among many—but rather as simply and definitively “*the Church*” affirmed in the ancient Christian creeds. The ultimate existence of a single Church is confessed by both the Orthodox and most Western Christians, but with different understandings of this unity. Qualifying adjectives (including “Eastern” and “Orthodox”) may be admitted only for the purpose of clarification and contradistinction from other groups that lay (contrary) claim to identification, in whole or in part, with the one Church.³

Thus, the Eastern Orthodox Church is a community distinct from the (Roman) Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, although there is a long and complex history of interaction between all of these bodies. Eastern Orthodox Christians do not recognize the primacy of the Pope, *in the mode in which it is currently exercised*, although they do for the most part recognize the past reality and future possibility of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, both as patriarch of the West and *primus inter pares* of all Christian bishops, if exercised within a more limited sphere proposed in accordance with Orthodox theology, ecclesiastical order, and discipline. There are also crucial differences of theology, discipline, and culture between Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics. The Eastern Orthodox Church may be distinguished from most Protestant groups by its emphasis on tradition and continuity, hierarchical and institutional structures, and highly ritual and ascetic modes of life, as well as in doctrinal matters.

³The common use of the qualifying terms “Eastern” and “Orthodox” is Early Modern in origin and causes many problems. See Zachary Ugolnik, “Names Matter: How to Better Represent the Orthodox Churches in Textbooks and the Academy,” *Journal of Religion* 96.4 (2016): 506–43.

From the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, with their historical base in Western Europe, the Orthodox churches may be regarded as “Eastern,” since the enduring historical territories of these churches are primarily in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Most of these Eastern Orthodox local churches trace their ancestry to the ancient local churches scattered throughout the primarily Greek-speaking Byzantine Roman Empire (e.g. Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem). Furthermore, Orthodox Christians have often accepted their designation as “Eastern,” insofar as they identify themselves and their culture in opposition to “the West.” But the lack of the common application of geographical epithets to the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches reinforces the problematic idea that these forms of Christianity are “normative” and the Orthodox experience is “other.” The spread of Christian churches of various traditions (including Orthodox churches) beyond their long-established European centres also challenges the use of East-West designations.

Further issues arise when it is necessary to disambiguate between those ancient local churches which share a common theological tradition and recognize the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (normally, designated the “Eastern Orthodox Church”) and those which are also often referred to as “Orthodox” today but differ in matters of faith and order and can be regarded (from the Eastern Orthodox perspective) only as cousins of the contemporary Orthodox Church (e.g. the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church). This latter, looser group of churches is usually divided into two further groups: the quite small Orthodox Church of the East (or Assyrians who broke from the Council of Ephesus in 431) and the much larger family of churches often referred to as “Oriental Orthodox” (who broke with the Council of Chalcedon in 451). Yet these descriptions are hardly satisfactory, both

because “oriental” means “eastern,” and, because these groups of churches do not regard themselves as a unified body and are treated as such by the Eastern Orthodox since they hold different Christologies.

The preceding remarks notwithstanding, this report concerns, primarily, the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, the project as a whole also involves a small number of participants from an Oriental Orthodox background, and many of its observations and conclusions may also be extended to those Christians who are members of the so-called Eastern Catholic Churches, i.e. communities (usually existing in parallel to Eastern Orthodox churches) which mostly follow Eastern Orthodox traditions, worship, discipline, and so forth, but are in communion with the Pope of Rome. Many of these communities regard themselves as faithful to the Orthodox tradition, despite or sometimes because of their acceptance of Roman primacy as currently exercised. The Orthodox themselves reject this claim and often refer pejoratively to the churches in communion with Rome as “Uniate,” because many of them emerged as a result of Counter-Reformation efforts by the Roman Catholic Church to “return” errant (Orthodox) Christians to communion with Rome by setting up parallel Eastern Rite jurisdictions under the pope.

2.2 The (Eastern) Orthodox Church Today

The Orthodox Church today numbers some 260 million members worldwide and represents approximately 12% of the total Christian community and 4% of the global population.⁴ Approximately 80% of this population is “Eastern” Orthodox, while the remaining 20% is “Oriental” Orthodox. The traditional territories of the Orthodox churches are Eastern Europe, Asia Minor

⁴Formoreprecisedemographic analysis, see the 2017 Pew report, “Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century”: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century>. Some data and analysis in this section are derived from the Pew report.

and the Caucasus, the Middle East, parts of the Indian subcontinent, and northern Africa, although Orthodox Christians are now found in communities spread across the globe. Yet 77% of Orthodox Christians still live in Europe; unlike for Protestants and Catholics, Europe remains the demographic heartland of Orthodoxy.

There are currently fourteen universally-recognized autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches (which are self-governing and self-determining but interdependent and ultimately subject to the supreme authority of a global council of bishops, when convened),⁵ two autocephalous Orthodox churches whose status is only partially accepted,⁶ and a number of autonomous Orthodox churches (which are ultimately dependent upon a Mother Church but operate with a large degree of self-determination).⁷ The relationship of these churches with the Ecumenical Patriarch and one another is one of “communion” in which mutually recognized and affirmed faith and order are celebrated ritually through the sharing of Holy Communion in the Eucharist and participation, when necessary, in worldwide (“ecumenical”) synods of bishops presided over by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

⁵In order of canonical precedence, the fourteen universally-recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches are: the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (based in Istanbul, Turkey), the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Church of Russia (Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate), the Church of Serbia (Serbian Orthodox Church), the Church of Romania (Romanian Orthodox Church), the Church of Bulgaria (Bulgarian Orthodox Church), the Church of Georgia (Georgian Orthodox and Apostolic Church), the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Poland (Polish Orthodox Church), the Church of Albania (Albanian Orthodox Church), and the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

⁶The two autocephalous Orthodox churches of disputed canonical status are the Orthodox Church in America (granted independence in 1970 by the Moscow Patriarchate) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (granted independence in 2019 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate).

⁷e.g. the Church of Finland (under the Ecumenical Patriarchate) and the Church of Japan (under the Moscow Patriarchate).

The Eastern Orthodox Churches recognise the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch as *primus inter pares*, that is, first among equal brother bishops. The Orthodox concept of primacy is quite different from that found in the modern Roman Catholic Church (which ultimately concentrates all authority in the office of the Pope or Supreme Pontiff) and even the obligations and rights traditionally ascribed to the Ecumenical Patriarch (e.g. summoning universal councils, mediating disputes between local churches, and confirming autonomy and autocephaly) are hotly disputed today—especially by the Moscow Patriarchate. The Eastern Orthodox are also ranked within themselves in a strict order of canonical precedence, reflecting the hierarchical nature of Orthodox polity.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is often broadly divided between those churches which aligned themselves with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and those which align with the Russian Orthodox Church and accept the de facto leadership of the Patriarch of Moscow. This division reflects and is reflected by differences in historical realities, political circumstances, wealth, language, liturgical tradition, interpretation and application of disciplinary norms, approaches to engagement with modernity, and more. The Russian Orthodox Church—though not an ancient church and ranking only fifth among the autocephalous churches (a status achieved in 1589 through Moscovy's wealth)—is the largest and wealthiest of the autocephalous Orthodox churches, and has consequently exercised much power.

More recently, this classic division, which was in many ways an effect of and dependent upon the division of the Orthodox world for so many centuries into the Ottoman and Russian Empires, has started to give way, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. The Romanian Church (of roughly 17 million members) now regularly asserts a line independent from that of Greece and Russia, and this independent tendency can also be seen in other local churches, such as Serbia and Antioch. Furthermore, with

the assertion of the independence of the Church of Ukraine in early 2019 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the membership of the Moscow Patriarchate has been somewhat reduced.

2.3 Orthodoxy, History, Theology

In Orthodox theology, the Church exists both as an eternal and eschatological reality and also one in time and space, so it is possible—perhaps, in fact, necessary—to speak of the Church not only in *theological* terms but also in *historical* ones.⁸ Indeed, the Orthodox Church is well accustomed to speaking and being spoken of in historical terms—for example, as the church of the “ancient faith” which (alone) maintains the tradition of the Apostles.⁹ Many accounts of Eastern Orthodoxy begin with a historical narrative that draws a golden thread of continuity from the Apostles to the faith, order, and practice of the contemporary Orthodox Church—or, rather, from contemporary practice back to the Apostles. Attempts are often made to “prove” the truth of received Orthodox teachings, disciplines, structures, and practices by showing the historical continuity of the Church as institution.¹⁰ In popular piety, the dogma of historical continuity is held

⁸Orthodox theologians are not unaware of the complexity of this claim. Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), who would have affirmed the possibility of a history of the Orthodox Church as an institution, nonetheless upheld a sort of ecclesial antinomy: “Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth. The Church of Christ is not an institution; it is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit” (Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988]), 1.

⁹One of the most successful contemporary Orthodox media outlets is named “Ancient Faith Radio” and in the USA, in Orthodox circles, one can often see the popular bumper sticker “The Orthodox Church: Founded 33AD”. These are just two examples of the popular embrace of an Orthodox identity defined by history/tradition.

¹⁰It is not uncommon for Orthodox theologians, historians, and ecclesiastical leaders to read contemporary teachings and practices back into the past—even when these are of obviously later development (e.g. Palamite theology of the divine *energeiai*, Eucharistic ecclesiology, the developed Neo-Sabbaitic

as sacrosanct and is believed to guarantee and legitimizes the life of the contemporary Church, including teachings and practices of recent provenance. Furthermore, history has undoubtedly taken on a greater significance for the Orthodox since the rise of historical consciousness in Modernity, which brought with it a far-reaching transformation of theology into an academic discipline preoccupied with historical questions.¹¹

The confidence of the Orthodox Church in history is grounded theologically, insofar as “Christianity is basically a vigorous appeal to history, a witness of faith to certain particular events in the past, to certain particular data of history.”¹² In his classic essay, “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” first

form of the Byzantine liturgy)—as part of a rhetorical program to promote the idea of continuity and purity within Orthodoxy. This is often especially true when the “Greek East” (i.e. Orthodoxy) is polemically differentiated from the “Latin West” (i.e. Roman Catholicism and, to a lesser extent, Protestantism). See, for example, Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition* (London: Clarendon Press, 1959), 22–107; Benjamin D. Williams and Harold B. Anstall, *Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple, and the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1990); Alexey Young, *The Rush to Embrace* (Richfield Springs, NY: Nikodemos Orthodox Pub. Soc., 1996); and Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh, “The Dogmatic Tradition of the Orthodox Church” (1998) at <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-dogmatic-tradition-of-the-orthodox-church>. While it may be legitimate to search for the seeds of later Orthodox doctrines, disciplines, structures, and practices in earlier periods, this must not be done in such a way that anachronism is dogmatized.

¹¹For a brief introduction, see Garrett Green, “Modernity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 162–179. It should be noted that history is no less significant for those Orthodox who dissent from canonical histories or reject aspects of the Church’s contemporary life which are (supposedly) grounded in historical practice, since, in current Eastern Orthodox discourse, it is potentially possible to correct or expand the historical narrative, but it is impossible to dispense with it altogether.

¹²Georges Florovsky, “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” in Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings* (London: Bloomsbury–T&T Clark, 2019), 193–219, at 193.

published in 1959, the influential Orthodox thinker Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) argues that, “the true history of man is not a political history, with its utopian claims and illusions, but *a history of the spirit*, the story of man’s growth to the full statue of perfection, under the Lordship of the historical God-man, even of our Lord, Christ Jesus.”¹³ Within such a perspective, the Church is not to be regarded in primarily political or social terms but rather, in the words of John McGuckin, as “God’s unstoppable energy of salvation in the world.”¹⁴ Thus, Orthodoxy makes certain claims on and about history from its theological starting point—this may be referred to as “Church History,” and it can be distinguished at some level from a secular “history of the church,” which examines the Church as only or primarily a human phenomenon, using critical lenses and beginning from presuppositions and metanarratives not explicitly determined by ecclesiological commitments.¹⁵

¹³Georges Florovsky, “The Predicament of the Church Historian,” 218. Emphasis original.

¹⁴John McGuckin, “The Role of Orthodoxy in World Christianity Today—Historical, Demographic, and Theological Perspectives—An Introduction” in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre and Dietrich Werner (Volos, Greece: Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC Publications, Geneva, and Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2014), 3–8, at 7.

¹⁵It cannot be over-emphasized that such a “history of the church” must not be regarded as “presuppositionless” or “objective,” and its “scientific” claim on truth cannot simply be asserted over and against that of “biased” Church History. History, like all intellectual disciplines including the natural sciences, involves interpretation and judgment according to criteria which are accepted as a “good working model” but cannot ultimately be proven to be true, except insofar as they continue to function as a good model for the interpretation of data. There is a vast literature on this topic. For introductions see Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) and Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

In its crudest manifestation, Church History presents a reading of the past which is determined by the principle that the Church's doctrinal formulae, disciplines, structures, and practices in the past must be plainly identical with those of the present.¹⁶ Such a history might be said to have a strong teleology conditioned by belief in the immediately intelligible continuity of doctrinal formulae, disciplines, structures, and practices, understood not as the historical epiphenomena of Orthodox theology but as themselves the content of Orthodox theology. A Church History that fully embraced this vision would operate on

¹⁶One variation on this model, which aims to critique contemporary practice from a "traditionalist" point of view, argues that the faith, order, and practice of the Church were consistent across time until a certain point in the (recent) past when they deviated from the straight path of Orthodoxy, to which they must now be returned (see note 10 above). Occasionally, one also encounters the argument that the Church's faith, order, and practice were somehow deficient in the past precisely because they cannot be made to stand in complete historical continuity with contemporary faith, order, and practice, but such arguments are rare among the Orthodox because of resistance to the notion of "the development of doctrine." The idea that Christian doctrine develops was classically articulated in the 19th century as a way to understand and explain the problem of continuity within the framework of a modern historical consciousness, especially in regard to claims of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction, the centrality of tradition, the authority of the Fathers, and the burgeoning ecumenical consciousness. See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 1976 [1845; rev. 1878]) and, from an Russian Orthodox perspective, Vladimir Solov'ev, *Dogmaticheskoe razvitie tserkvi v sviazi s voprosom o soedinenii tserkvei* [*The Dogmatic Development of the Church in Connection to the Question of the Reunion of the Churches*] (1886) in *Sobranie sochinenii Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, sup. vol. 11: 1–67 (Brussels: Izdatel'stvo Zhizn's Bogom, Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1969) [trans. François Rouleau and Roger Tandonne, *Le développement dogmatique de l'église* (Paris: Desclée, 1991)]. See also Andrew Louth's more recent re-statement of the consensus position of Orthodox theologians in his essay, "Is Development of Doctrine a Valid Category for Orthodox Theology?" in *Orthodoxy & Western Culture: A Collection of Essays Honouring Jaroslav Pelikan on His Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Valerie Hotchkiss and Patricia Henry (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 45–64, and a Catholic reply to Louth and others from Daniel J. Lattier, "The Orthodox Rejection of Doctrinal Development," *Pro Ecclesia* XX.4 (2011): 389–410.

the basis that it is true by definition that the history of orthodox (that is, right-believing and right-worshipping) Christianity is the history of the Orthodox Church, and, conversely, that practices which differs from the norms determined by the contemporary standards of the Orthodox Church can be regarded only as deviant, and so ultimately unorthodox, on which grounds they are legitimately excluded from Church History.

Of course, most appeals by Orthodox to the past are not nearly so heavy-handed and, in fact, demonstrate a great deal of sensitivity both, on the one hand, to the complexity of historical sources and the task of historians, and, on the other hand, to the reality of the historical contingency of many features of contemporary Orthodox life. Their work is consistent with the concluding observations made by Florovsky in the essay mentioned above:

The Christian historian will attempt to reveal the actual course of events in the light of his Christian knowledge of man, but will be slow and cautious in detecting the “providential” structure of actual history, in any detail. Even in the history of the Church “the hand of Providence” is emphatically hidden, though it would be blasphemous to deny that this Hand does exist or that God is truly the Lord of History. Actually, the purpose of a historical understanding is not so much to detect the Divine action in history as to understand the human action, that is human activities, in the bewildering variety and confusion in which they appear to a human observer.¹⁷

This more nuanced historical work draws on the methods, arguments, and conclusions of scholars engaged in narrating “merely” a “history of the church,” and this approach may itself be justified theologically, since the presence and action of God in the world is not limited to or by the Church. The Spirit “blows where

¹⁷Georges Florovsky, “The Predicament of the Church Historian,” 219.

it wishes” (John 3:8) and the Church itself, the Body of the *Living* Christ, exists in the state of a kind of perpetual Pentecost.

A sophisticated approach to history is crucial for the credibility of Orthodox history (and theology) to non-Orthodox audiences, which would otherwise dismiss it as wholly determined by faith commitments to the exclusion of evidence which complicates simplistic narratives. Increasingly, Orthodox audiences also demand a more nuanced approach to the past, as Orthodox intellectual monopolies give way in the traditional heartlands to secular, pluralistic models, in which Orthodoxy is one voice among many. The supposed inherent truthfulness of “objective” histories of the church has long been effectively weaponized against partial Church Histories, in part because the latter have too often been transparently crude and narrow. When awareness grows of the quantity and quality of data from the past that cannot be accommodated to simplistic Church Historical narratives, the result can be that *theology* itself is held accountable and consequently dismissed from public (and even, sometimes, ecclesiastical) discourse, and secular frameworks are accepted wholesale—not only in relation to history but all aspects of intellectual life.

It is therefore clear that the integrity—and, perhaps, longevity—of Orthodox theology depends, at least at this time, on the one hand, on an informed reckoning of the past which is not too quick to limit itself to a narrow institutional history or to identify the “hand of Providence,” and, on the other hand, a rigorous engagement with philosophical questions concerning the relationship between theology and history. For the Orthodox, secular “histories of the church” cannot be granted unquestioned canonical status as “true history” over and against Church History, but neither should the Church lose sight of the fact that its theological claims (and the Church History which depends upon them) are primarily and irreducibly *theological* in nature, and cannot be “demonstrated” by history in terms acceptable to

secular history that would render the mystery of God's incomprehensible activity simply another object of study in the world. Any self-conscious Orthodox Church History will continually run into these conceptual difficulties, but they cannot be ignored in favour of a reductive Church History or a history of the church uninterested in theology.

2.4 The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy: a Sketch

Within the scope of this report it is possible to provide only a very brief sketch of the main avenues in the history of the Orthodox Church.¹⁸ We will attempt to identify, in an extremely rudimentary fashion, a small number of key historical trends and moments which give shape to Orthodoxy as it is known today and which loom large in the historical consciousness of contemporary Orthodox believers. The cautions of the preceding section (§2.3) notwithstanding, these notes on the historical road of Eastern Orthodoxy largely reflect canonical, confessional histories of Orthodoxy. They do so both because, while the general contours of Christian history are quite well known, those of the Orthodox Church are less so, and because it is this history that most powerfully shapes Orthodox identity today.

Nevertheless, an important implication of the theological conviction that the Orthodox Church simply is “*the Church*” is that, insofar as the history of the Church is the history of an institution, with certain formal structures, offices, and practices, and persons populating these structures, holding these offices, and

¹⁸Those wishing to begin a more thorough investigation of the history of the Orthodox Church might start with one of the following introductions: Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2015); John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010); and Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity*, vol I. *The History and Canonical Structure of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Basil Bush (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015). A more detailed overview is provided by the volumes of “The Church in History Series” published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press.

engaging in these practices, one is compelled by the evidence to say that the geographical, linguistic, canonical, and formal limits of contemporary Orthodox communities are not necessarily or always identical with those of the Orthodox Church in the past. This historical reality is generally more clearly and necessarily the case the further back into the past one travels, and here the Orthodox Church embraces as its own the history of the “undivided church.”¹⁹ Moreover, from the point of view of Orthodox theology, and therefore within the perspective of Orthodox Church History, the claim to be the “undivided church” at all times means that all schisms, including that between East and West, are construed as the separation of heterodox communities from the one perpetually (orthodox) Church.

Histories of the Orthodox Church conventionally begin with the apostolic missions following the resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (recorded in Acts 2), which are celebrated by all Christians as the origins of the Church. The Orthodox Church sees itself in the first centuries as constituted by and in all those communities which taught and practiced the orthodox faith, and it distinguishes itself from groups which preached an alternative message (sometimes called “gnostics”), although the distinctions between the groups are often fuzzy in the historical sources or even so polemical to be historically dubious, such as in the accounts of the heresiologists (e.g. Irenaeus of Lyons [c. 130–c. 202], Hippolytus of Rome [c. 170–c. 236], and Epiphanius of Salamis [c. 315–403]). With the rising public profile of Christianity in the fourth century, which culminated in the Edict of Thessalonica in February 380 by Emperor Theodosius (347–395) making Nicene Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire, the shape of the

¹⁹This somewhat imprecise phrase usually refers to the Church in the first millennium, before the “Great Schism” between Greek (Orthodox) East Latin (Catholic) West, which is often associated with events in Constantinople in 1054, but it can also refer to the period before the schisms which resulted from the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Church's institutional structures begins to come into focus for historians, as does the diversity of relatively well-developed liturgical practices which once characterised the orthodox Christian world.

From the fourth to the eighth centuries, the Orthodox Church identifies itself with those bishops and communities whose faith and practice shaped and was confirmed by the seven Ecumenical Councils, as well as those who formed the ascetic tradition which continues to be a defining feature of Orthodox piety, both for "professional" ascetics (i.e. monastics) and "non-professional" secular clergy and laity. During this period, the theology of the Orthodox tradition increasingly comes to be expressed exclusively in Greek and acceptable forms of church life are increasingly defined by the norms of the church administration in Constantinople, as first the far-eastern ("Oriental") churches and then the Western (Latin) churches separated and became estranged.²⁰ As Andrew Louth has written, in the period from 681 to 1071 we see the beginnings of a separation of "Greek East" and "Latin West" into "two Christian civilizations that, for all they shared in common (and that was a very great deal), were beginning to define themselves differently, and sometimes in opposition to one to the other."²¹ From the early seventh century, the

²⁰The separation of the "Oriental" churches is often associated with the decisions of the third (Ephesus, 431) and fourth (Chalcedon, 451) Ecumenical Councils, while that of the "Western" church is pegged to events in Constantinople in 1054. In reality, there are few absolutely decisive moments in these schisms, and we must think rather in terms of drawn-out processes of separation. Indeed, intercommunion between "Greeks" and "Latins" seems to have existed in some parts of the Mediterranean as late as the seventeenth century and the crystalization of the relationship between East and West in schism does not seem to have taken place until c. 1725–50, following a Latin-Greek split in the Patriarchate of Antioch in 1724. See K. T. Ware, "Orthodox and Catholics in the Seventeenth Century: Schism or Intercommunion," *Studies in Church History* 9 (1972): 259–276.

²¹Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681–1071* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 3. For an assessment of the power of "the West" as a cultural construct in the Orthodox imagination see

new religion of Islam arose in Arabia and North Africa, depriving the Orthodox Churches of much of their historic episcopal territory and populations.

The history of the Orthodox Church in the Middle Ages is dominated by the impact of sustained conflict between the historically Christian Eastern Roman (Byzantine) territories and rising Islamic powers, the entrenchment of disagreements with the Western Church and multiple failed attempts at reconciliation (e.g. Lyon [1272–1274], Ferrara-Florence [1438–1445]) leading to deeper division, and the spread of Christianity throughout the Slavic lands.

During these centuries, the political territory of the Byzantine Empire (long the polity most identified with Orthodoxy) was reduced to a rump and, during the first half of the 13th century, effectively eliminated by the Latin conquest and sack of Constantinople (1204)—an act of inter-Christian violence which Orthodox Christians have never forgotten (and have interiorized as part of their non-Western identity).²² At the same time, Orthodox Christianity became firmly rooted in the areas that today constitute the heartlands of Orthodoxy. Many theological, disciplinary, and political disagreements with Western Christians also hardened, eventually leading to the formal schism which persists between the Orthodox and (Roman) Catholic Churches until today. The Middle Ages also saw the creative flourishing of many of the features of Eastern Orthodoxy which today most distinguish it from other forms of Christianity: the Orthodox

George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) and *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008).

²²See Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000 [1971]); J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Timothy E. Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); and George Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

liturgical services in their present form; Athonite hesychastic monasticism; and wide-spread rich, figurative iconography.

During the late Middle Ages and the early Modern period, the modern-day Orthodox territories in the Balkans and Asia Minor disintegrated into small kingdoms before being incorporated into the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923), thus solidifying their separation from Western Christianity.²³ Although the Orthodox Church was afforded certain protections and status within the Ottoman political system, it became nonetheless a minority tradition fighting for survival and subject to periodic persecution. The late Middle Ages also saw the growing independence and power of the Russian Church, which achieved *de facto* independence from Constantinople with the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453 and *de jure* independence as an autocephalous church in 1589 with the creation of the Patriarchate of Moscow and All Rus' by Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople (c. 1536–1595).²⁴ Subsequently, the Russian Church was subjugated to the Russian imperial state and remained so until the early 20th century—the Patriarchal office was abolished in 1721 and the Church was run by a Synod headed by a lay Ober-Procurator until the election of Patriarch Tikhon (Belavin) in 1917. Despite the precarious situation of Orthodoxy in early Modernity, there were efforts towards wider theological education (albeit under strong influence from counter-reformation Latin and reformed Calvinist theology)²⁵ and the revival of

²³Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Kallistos Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church Under Turkish Rule* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014 [1964]).

²⁴The Russian Church also incorporated the Ukrainian lands in 1686. This incorporation has recently been undone with the establishment by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in January 2019 of an autocephalous Church in Ukraine, after a reunion council earlier in November 2018. The actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are controversial and it remains to be seen whether they will result in a lasting schism between the Greek and Russian churches.

²⁵During this whole period, Orthodoxy came under the strong influence of both counter-reformation Latin and Calvinist theology. Much of the twentieth

ascetic life, among the fruits of which are the great compendia of Orthodox spiritual writings, the Greek *Philokalia* (Venice, 1782) and its Slavonic cousin, the *Dobrotoliubie* (Moscow, 1793).²⁶

Late Modernity brought widespread changes to the political situation of Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe and greater freedoms for their institutions. The rise of nationalism and the gradual disintegration of Ottoman hegemony in the Balkans over the course of the 19th century led to the creation of a number of autocephalous Orthodox Churches first by their earlier self-proclaimed autocephaly and then later by decree of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (e.g. Church of Greece [1850] and Church of Romania [1885]). Many Orthodox intellectuals were influenced by trends in Western thought and began to engage Western philosophical ideas while, at the same time, Orthodoxy began to be associated with a strongly non-Western national identity in some places (although it must be noted that not all Eastern European nationalism was pro-Orthodox). The influential Russian Church began an ambitious (but ultimately unsuccessful) program of reform which culminated in the reconstitution of the Patriarchate of Moscow at the 1917–1918 All Russian Sobor,²⁷ precisely

century can be viewed as an escape from this “Latin captivity” through a return by theologians, then individual local churches, to Orthodoxy’s patristic, spiritual and liturgical roots. See Georges Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” in Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, 129–151. Also see Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology* [1937] in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Gen. Ed. Richard Haugh (Vaduz, Liechtenstein/Belmont, MA: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1974–89), Volumes 5 and 6, and Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006 [1992]).

²⁶See *The Philokalia*, trans. G. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, 4 vols. (London: Faber & Faber, 1979–[final volume forthcoming]). For an introduction see most recently *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Christopher Johnson, *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation* (London: Continuum, 2010).

²⁷See Hyacinthe Destivelle, *The Moscow Council (1917–1918): The Creation of*

as World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 heralded the transformation of the Eastern European political landscape once again.

For much of the 20th century, most of the traditionally Eastern Orthodox lands were subject to Soviet rule, either directly or via satellite regimes. Although Orthodoxy (like other religions) was sometimes tolerated and even encouraged by Soviet regimes, it was more often suppressed, and adherents were subjected to periodic persecution. There was also widescale collaboration with Soviet regimes, which included many churchmen acting as agents of the secret police, some of whom have risen to the highest offices since 1991.²⁸ Even in areas of relative religious freedom, such as Greece, Orthodoxy declined throughout much of the 20th century, with very poor levels of education among clergy, few monastic vocations, and shrinking church attendance and social influence. Yet, in some respects, the Orthodox Church also flourished: in situations of extreme difficulty and violence, there were many acts of heroic virtue; the emigration of theologians to the West and the foundation of new Orthodox academies revitalised the Church's intellectual life; and diaspora communities grew up in areas where Orthodoxy was previously unknown and attracted converts.

The situation has changed once again following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe since 1989. On the one hand, this has resulted in the resurrection of many local churches from a state of extreme persecution or servitude.²⁹ The revival

the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church, trans. Jerry Ryan and eds. Michael Plekon and Vitaly Permiakov (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

²⁸See Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917–1982*, 2 vols. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

²⁹See e.g.: John and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008); John P. Burgess, *Holy Rus': The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in the New Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *In Albania—Cross and Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press,

of monasticism which began on Mount Athos in the 1970s has spread throughout the Orthodox world and is especially impressive, for example, in Romania.³⁰ On the other hand, it has ushered in new nationalisms which are, perhaps more than ever, yoked with Orthodoxy, and often render the church beholden to corrupt regimes,³¹ uncritical anti-Western ideology, and quasi-phyletist nationalist teachings on the sacred nature of the nation and the people. This constellation of identity markers is often linked with a pointed illiberalism which, for example, opposes human rights, collaborates with the far-right, and is extremely hostile to notions of sexual diversity and LGBTQ+ persons).³² While the result is, in some regards, a rebirth of Orthodox

2018); and Luke Veronis, *Go Forth: Stories of Mission and Resurrection in Albania* (Chesterton, IN.: Conciliar Press, 2010).

³⁰See Graham Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise*, 2nd ed. (Limni: Denise Harvey, 2014); Ines Angeli Murzaku, ed., *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics* (London: Routledge, 2018); Nicolas Stebbing, *Bearers of the Spirit: Spiritual Fatherhood in Romanian Orthodoxy* (Kalamazoo, ME: Cistercian Studies, 2003); and Metropolitan Serafim (Joanta), *Treasures of Romanian Christianity: Hesychast Tradition and Culture* (Whitby, Ontario: Cross Meridian, 2013 [1987]).

³¹See e.g. Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

³²For example, one can see nationalism at work in the Russian Orthodox Church since the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin in 2000 and the election of Patriarch Kirill in 2009, who is himself in close collaboration with Putin's regime and helped develop the quasi-phyletist church-state ideology, *Russkii mir* ('Russian world'). Out of this ideology has come a full critique of human rights as well as active collaboration with the far right. See Sergei Chapnin, "A Church of Empire: Why the Russian Church Chose to Bless Empire," *First Things*, November 2015, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/11/a-church-of-empire>; Brandon Gallaher, "A Tale of Two Speeches: Secularism and Primacy in Contemporary Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy," in *Primacy in the Church: The Office of Primate and the Authority of the Councils*, vol. 2, *Contemporary and Contextual Perspectives*, ed. John Chrysavgis (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016): 807–37 and "The Road from Rome to Moscow," *The Tablet*, February 20, 2016: 8–9; Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (London/NY: Routledge, 2014); Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon, Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2018).

culture and practice, and a renewed position for the Orthodox Church in society, in other respects the Orthodox Church now finds itself increasingly enlisted as a bulwark against supposedly “Western” values and the Church once again must fight to be more than the divine confirmation of political regimes which are uninterested in her gospel.

2.5 Notes on Historical and Theological Approaches of Eastern Orthodoxy to Sexual Diversity

As with the general overview provided above (§2.2), only a sketch of issues in historical and theological approaches of Eastern Orthodoxy to sexual diversity can be offered within the scope of this report. Since it is not possible to provide a comprehensive chronological and/or geographical survey, the following brief notes are grouped according to key ideas, topics, and issues, and challenges in the historiography of sexual diversity. Such a model of categorization risks anachronism by re-inscribing frameworks and points of reference assumed by many today to be normative, but it is hoped that the documentation of historiographical issues will mitigate this danger to a large extent, and we begin with these issues.

Historiographical Challenges

Locating Discourses on Gender, Sex, and Sexuality in Historical Sources

As we have already seen above, Orthodoxy has a complex relationship with the past in general, perceptions and narratives of which are often very much shaped by contemporary ideas and practices. The same is no less true with respect to issues of sexual diversity specifically. Here, perhaps more than in any other area of current Orthodox discourse, simplistic “Church History” narratives of the continuity and purity of teachings and

practices tend to prevail, often despite contradictory evidence from within past Orthodox experience and rigorous historical argumentation. At the same time, unlike other popular and persistent Orthodox narratives that are strongly shaped by theological concerns,³³ these histories often lack decisive events, iconic personalities, and emblematic texts held in corporate memory, such that they appear quite vague. Moreover, broadly speaking, specialist historical research seems as yet to have made little impact on the ways in which Orthodox historians, theologians, and ecclesiastical leaders regard approaches to sexual diversity in the past and utilise this information in response to contemporary questions.

Contemporary Orthodox discourses on sexual diversity all too often marshal historical evidence to demonstrate a confident, clear, and univocal tradition in answer to muddled and confusing modern questions—but historical theological reflection on these topics is, in fact, very difficult to isolate in and from the sources. There are at least three reasons why this is the case: firstly, theological writings and theologians are not unconditioned by their cultural contexts, so it is often hard, if not impossible, to differentiate between theological principles and assumptions drawn from ambient culture (and this problem generally intensifies the more texts are placed in their historical cultural contexts); secondly, when it can be located, much thought on these topics is incidental or implicit rather than stridently programmatic, which invites questions about how deliberative and deliberate this material may be considered; thirdly, most (if not all) contemporary frameworks for debates on matters of gender, sex, and sexuality are incommensurate with those assumed by pre-modern writers (who form the core of the authoritative Orthodox theological tradition) and so historical sources run the risk of being plundered for proof texts

³³See the discussion above (§2.3 Orthodoxy, History, Theology) about theological teleology in Orthodox historical writing.

underwriting the present theological status quo whose status is precisely what is at issue. These fundamental historiographical challenges cannot be ignored.

Language of “Sexual Diversity” and the Past

Any discussion of historical and theological approaches to “sexual diversity” must acknowledge that many commonplace terms, definitions, and categories employed in contemporary discourses on gender, sex, and sexuality are of relatively recent genesis and should be applied to sources from the past only with great caution and care.³⁴ Among the Orthodox, commentary on these topics (which is frequently provided by persons without specialist knowledge) is often lamentably unreflective and imprecise in its use of modern terminological and conceptual frameworks in conjunction with historical sources. From the point of view of informed historians, this is highly regrettable, since it gives the false impression that there exists a universal, transhistorical, and univocal Orthodox discourse on these matters, whereas it is very difficult to locate such a discourse in the sources. Thus, for example, it is sometimes said that John Chrysostom (c. 349–407) was opposed to “homosexuality.” However, this term only came into existence in the mid-nineteenth century, with the development of the whole notion of “sexuality.”³⁵ In the case of

³⁴For perspectives on historiographical challenges see e.g. David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Theresa A. Mead and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks eds., *A Companion to Gender History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); J.W. Scott, “Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis,” *Diogenes* 225 (2010): 7–14; S. Stryker, *Transgender History*, rev. ed. (New York: Seal Press, 2017).

³⁵See influential contributions from Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vols 1–3 (London: Allen Lane and Penguin, 1979–1990 [1976–1984]); David M. Halperin *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Chrysostom, the responsible historian can certainly examine his marked opposition to same-sex sexual relations, which is largely focused on certain sexual *acts* (e.g. pederasty), but the content of his comments—crucially—must be established in historical context and he cannot be simplistically cited for his opinions on “homosexuality.”

Gender & Sexuality in Histories of the Church & Historical Theology

Gender, sex, and sexuality have for many decades been lively topics of study by historians of Christian cultures and the Church, as well as theologians engaged with historical texts. There are now a very large number of specialist historical studies on topics related to gender and sexuality within historical fields that are relevant to the Eastern Orthodox tradition (e.g. the Bible and Christian origins, Patristics, Early Christianity/Late Antiquity, Byzantium, the Western Middle Ages, Pre-Modern Slavic and Balkans cultures, Modern Eastern Europe), as well as authoritative handbooks and introductions to some of them.³⁶ Many of these studies employ highly-theorized and sophisticated frameworks for the understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality, formed in conversation with other disciplines including philosophy and the natural and social sciences.

Most of this research has been undertaken by historians and theologians who work outside the Orthodox tradition and are not concerned explicitly with orthodox/Orthodox theology. Only recently have constructive theological accounts from an Orthodox perspective begun to appear, which take account

³⁶For recent scholarly handbooks and introductions, see e.g.: Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2012); Judith Bennet and Ruth Karras eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); Lynda Garland & Bronwen Neil, *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Adrian Thatcher ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* (Oxford: OUP, 2014); Benjamin J. Dunning ed., *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford: OUP, forthcoming 2019).

both of these specialists histories and the historiographical challenges associated with writing about sexual diversity. The fruits of this extensive historical and theological research have yet to be gathered and organised with a view to addressing the topic of sexual diversity and Eastern Orthodoxy explicitly, and so much remains unknown and inaccessible except to highly specialised academics. This poses a serious challenge to Orthodox intellectuals who wish to explore these topics in a historically-informed manner. Furthermore, the conceptual categories and theoretical approaches at work in much of this literature (including theories of gender and sexuality that presuppose the normativity and universality of sexual diversity) are highly contested by many Orthodox, who speak from within a tradition which has barely come to terms with the procedural liberalism (e.g. human rights) of Western modernity, let alone more recent developments in the understanding and acceptance of sexual diversity.

Key Ideas, Topics, and Issues

The following notes are arranged under headings which are the most essential nodes of any discussion of sexual diversity in the past from an Eastern Orthodox perspective. They are by no means exhaustive but merely suggestive, as is the associated bibliography.

Theological Anthropology

Questions concerning sexual diversity do not stand alone but always within the context of discussions of what it means to be human (anthropology) in a theological perspective. For the Orthodox, this means, first and foremost, that these questions are shaped and answered in relation to Jesus Christ, *the* perfect human being (*anthrōpos*), alone sinless (Heb. 4.15), who reveals in himself the definition of humanity in right-relation to God. Theological anthropology takes its bearings not from protology, a hypothetical Adam or first man in Eden, but from Christology

insofar as Christ is the second or last Adam (1 Cor 15.45). Questions of gender, sex, and sexuality are therefore contextualised within—and, to an extent, relativized by—a wholistic reflection on the human being in light of Christ. While there are theological sources from the past that are focused on anthropological issues, much reflection is scattered elsewhere and must be located. Focusing on treatises concerned exclusively with topics which appear to be directly related to contemporary discussions of sexual diversity (e.g. sexual abstinence, condemnations of pederasty, injunctions to women, commentaries on certain biblical “proof texts”) runs the risk of missing the wood for the trees and decontextualizing secondary reflections from their primary theological context. The consideration of questions of sexual diversity within a historical perspective will certainly require the situation of those questions within the field of theological anthropology (and so Christology) broadly conceived, both as it is explored in historical sources and unpacked in contemporary reflections.³⁷

Asceticism

The Eastern Orthodox Church maintains a strong ascetic tradition for monastics, clergy, and laity, which includes the regulation of sexual intercourse and intimate relations during fasting periods and before receiving the Eucharist. If married couples follow the strictest regulations, then more than half the year is spent “fasting from sex.” Unsurprisingly, it is in texts composed

³⁷The field of theological anthropology has yet to be treated in a landmark work of contemporary Orthodox theology, but it has been identified by a number of theologians as the major subject of discussion in the twenty-first century. See Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012); John Behr, *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013) and “From Adam to Christ: From Male and Female to Being Human,” *The Wheel* 13/14 (Spring/Summer 2018): 19–32, and *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), especially Part II.

within and for professional ascetic contexts (e.g. monasteries) that we find some of the most explicit reflections on matters of sexual diversity.³⁸ These texts have been highly influential on the theological anthropology of the Orthodox Church as a whole (which may be characterised as an “ascetic anthropology”), as well as influencing the way specific issues are dealt with which arise in single-gender monastic communities.³⁹ In some respects, the texts of the ascetic tradition maintain and extend the radical rejection of sex, marriage, and family life (at least as goods in themselves) found in some other early Christian texts which were conditioned by immanent eschatology and the belief that it was better to be celibate and prepared for the coming of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 7). But texts from the ascetic tradition also contain some of the most surprising reflections on sex and gender (e.g. in monastic hagiographies), which challenge modern assumptions about the construction of gender and segregation of the

³⁸See, e.g.: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988); Elizabeth A. Clark, “Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5.2 (1989): 25–46; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); Bernadette J. Brouten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Albrecht Diem, “Organisierte Keuschheit: Sexualprävention im Mönchtum der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters,” *Invertito: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 3 (2001): 8–37; Caroline T. Schroeder, “Prophecy and Porneia in Shenoute’s Letters: The Rhetoric of Sexuality in a Late Antique Egyptian Monastery,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65.2 (2006): 81–97; Caroline Schroeder, “Queer Eye for the Ascetic Guy? Homoeroticism, Children, and the Making of Monks in Late Antique Egypt,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77.2 (August 2009): 333–347; Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

³⁹See John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Nonna Verna Harrison, *God’s Many Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

sexes.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the vast modern industry of studies on every aspect of sex and sexuality in the desert perhaps says more about the sexual obsession of the modern West than it does about the traditions from which the texts that are examined have emerged. Finally, it should be noted that questions arise about the “under-theorization” of sex, marriage, and family life in Orthodox theology because of the strongly ascetic character of many classic theological and spiritual writings.

Ecclesiastical Discipline & the Canons

The canonical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church contains many *kanones* (“rules”) pertaining to matters of sexual diversity including, but not limited to, prohibitions on same-sex (predominantly male) intercourse.⁴¹ These canons have a quasi-sacral character and exercise a great deal of authority and imaginative power but they are not easy to interpret and their application is complex.⁴² Furthermore, most of the canons originate as occasional rulings addressed to specific contexts, and so their role over time in many Orthodox cultures as general or universal “laws” requires careful scrutiny but cannot be easily gainsaid. It is therefore necessary to study the contexts of the canons in order to understand how it is that they apply evangelical justice in any given situation. In addition to the canons, early

⁴⁰See e.g.: Liz James ed., *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London: Routledge, 1997); Matthew Kuefler, *Manly Eunuchs: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Rebecca Wiegel, “Reading Matrona: The Sixth Century Life of a Trans Saint,” unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 2019.

⁴¹Konstantinos Pitsakis, “Ἡ θέση των ομοφυλοφίλων στη βυζαντινή κοινωνία,” in C. A. Maltezos, ed. *Πρακτικά Ημερίδας. Οι περιθωριακοί στο Βυζάντιο* (Athens: Ίδρυμα Γουλανδρή-Χόρν, 1993): 171–269.

⁴²See David Wagschal, *Law and Legality in the Greek East* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

modern Orthodoxy developed confessional manuals which contain elaborate examinations of penitents, including in regard to their sexual practices. These manuals offer another window onto Orthodox perspectives on sexual diversity but, again, it must be noted that they often lack an explicit theoretical framework or rationale for their prescriptions and penances.

Marriage

The overwhelming impression gained from early Christian literature is one of deep ambivalence towards marriage and family life, so it is difficult to identify a developed “theology of family” in the sources of the Orthodox tradition, though some Orthodox have recently turned to the scant positive references to marriage and family life in Chrysostom, and the *vitae* and liturgical services for married saints.⁴³

The ecclesiastical blessing of marriage was not made a universal requirement in the Eastern Roman Empire until 893 (by Leo the Wise, Novel 89), and, even then, slaves were not granted the right to legal, ecclesiastical marriage until 1095 (by Alexios I Komnenos, Novel 35). By far the most important function of marriage appears to have been the legitimization of male heirs for the purpose of guarding family wealth and power.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it is certainly the case that marriage took place in Byzantium

⁴³See St John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003); Brian A. Butcher, *Married Saints in the Orthodox Tradition: The Representation of Conjugalit in the Sanctoral Hymnography of the Byzantine Rite* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009); David and Mary Ford, *Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints*, Second Edition (Waymart, PA.: St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2013).

⁴⁴See John Meyendorff, “Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44 (1990): 99–107; Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700*, 2nd ed (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995); Peter Barta, ed., *Gender & Sexuality in Russian Civilisation* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Niki Megalommati, “Women and Family Law in Byzantium,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 43 (1) (March 2017): 19–32.

only between males and females. The late Byzantine marriage service (which remains in use), with its lavish praise of married life and focus on the importance of producing children, can no doubt contribute to our understanding of historic perceptions of sexual difference.⁴⁵

Brother-Making

Much has been made in recent decades of the Byzantine rite of *Adelphopoïësis* (brother-making), which has anachronistically been identified by some as a form or prototype of same-sex marriage.⁴⁶ More rigorous scholarship has decisively challenged this conclusion, but nonetheless highlighted the variety of relationality sanctified by the Church in Byzantium (though marriage was clearly central given central importance for its role in the upbuilding of society).⁴⁷ This in turn perhaps draws attention to the reductiveness of contemporary theology and teaching, which focuses only on the institution of (male-female) marriage in terms of the blessing of relationships.

Medicine & Pre-Modern Human Biology

Christian approaches to sexual diversity in the past were not isolated from ambient cultural and intellectual efforts to understand human existence and experience. Thus, theology often drew upon (or, perhaps, simply assumed) medical knowledge

⁴⁵See John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*, 2nd Ed (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975) and David and Mary Ford, Alfred Kentigern Siewers, eds., *Glory and Honor: Orthodox Christian Resources on Marriage* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016).

⁴⁶John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (New York: Villard, 1994). See also John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the 14th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980 [2015²]) and Stephen Morris, *When Brothers Dwell in Unity: Byzantine Christianity and Homosexuality* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016).

⁴⁷Most recently, Claudia Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (Oxford: OUP, 2016).

and that of other “human” sciences in conceptualising sexual diversity. Much has been written on the history of medicine, gender, and sex, which shows that pre-modern frameworks are incommensurate with the kinds of modern assumptions held even by those who adhere to the theological frameworks formulated in conjunction with the former.⁴⁸

As these notes reveal, Orthodox historians and theologians are stepping into a conversation that has already begun and they have much to learn from the many specialist historical studies in these areas. The overarching lesson to be learned is that it would be historically (and, by implication, theologically) irresponsible to read pre-modern texts which comment on gender, sex, and sexuality without both an awareness of the broad intellectual context in which they made their meaning and caution concerning how much can be extrapolated from those texts into a radically different modern context. Any new Orthodox synthetic response must avoid anachronism and, while theologians will wish to read the sources and literature through the phronema of the Church, they must do so carefully, critically, and without short-circuiting complex historical evidence and narratives that may question the theological and disciplinary *status quo*.

2.6 Eastern Orthodoxy & Modernity

In cultural terms, the Eastern Orthodox Church is the product of societies whose histories are markedly different than their Western Christian counterparts, especially since the advent of Modernity. They mostly trace their teaching, polity and worship back to the

⁴⁸See, e.g.: R. Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 1–33 and 255–374. See also T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) in its entirety, as well as the nuanced critique of Laqueur’s one-sex theory in H. King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 1–27.

churches of Byzantium and have not undergone anything like a Western Reformation or even Reforming Councils like Trent and the Vatican I and II. Yet this *Eastern* Christian Church is in some sense also Western if not in its history and self-consciousness then by the very fact that as an institution it exists in a Western world which has changed it radically and must now face new challenges presented by this “Western” reality.⁴⁹ It is a church which exists in multiple societies which are only partially “modernized” and partially “secularized” in the Western sense of these terms. It is important to note that leading sociologists of religion now largely agree that there is no one determinative path of modernization for different global societies with one privileged Western cultural programme of ever increasing secularization with one relationship of religion to the secular allowing for the privatization of religion, the existence of a neutral public sphere and one normative morality and modern ethos.⁵⁰ There are instead multiple modernities and secularities in multiple global non-Western contexts, often at odds with one another in their basic structure and content.⁵¹ Orthodoxy and its multiple Eastern contexts are no

⁴⁹See Brandon Gallaher, “A Secularism of the Royal Doors: Resources for an Orthodox Christian Secularism,” in *Tradition, Secularization and Fundamentalism: Orthodox/Catholic Encounters*, eds. Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Demacopoulos (Forthcoming 2019, Fordham University Press) and “Orthodoxy and the West—The Problem of Orthodox Self-Criticism in Christos Yannaras” in *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras’ Thought*, ed. Sotiris Mitralaxis (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2018), 206–225.

⁵⁰See S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” in *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, 2 vols. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 2: 535–560 (cf. eds. Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg, *Comparing Modernities: Pluralism Versus Homogeneity: Essays in Hommage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt* [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005]); José Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *Hedgehog Review*, 8.1–2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 7–22 and “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism* eds. Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Van Antwerpen (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Grace Davie, *Europe, the Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

⁵¹See De Gruyter’s series *Religion and Its Others: Studies in Religion, Nonreligion and Secularity*.

exception to this new picture of modernization and it is precisely because the various societies in which it exists are still struggling to define their modern identities, often in reaction to the West and with “secularization” as a point of attack, that issues like sexual diversity and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals are so fractious. Sexual diversity, in fact, has become the preeminent locus for debates in Orthodoxy about modernization, secularization and the influence of the “West.”

In 2016, after some 55 years of planning, bishops from 10 of the 14 local Orthodox churches met in Crete in a Church Council to try to articulate their common identity in a modern, westernized world and to discuss common challenges faced by all the churches.⁵² Much rhetoric around the event was reactionary and anti-western in character. The council’s documents strongly attack “evil in the world,” seen in the pluralism of modern societies, broadly understood to precipitate everything from secularism to substance abuse, and biotechnology to “moral laxity.” This was particularly apparent in the document, “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World.”⁵³ Pluralism in this document and others is understood to threaten the stability and integrity of Orthodoxy’s perennial identity.

2.7 Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity Today

Today, the Orthodox Church remains, for the most part, committed to conceptions of gender and sexuality and sexual disciplines

⁵²See Brandon Gallaher, “The Orthodox Moment: The Holy and Great Council in Crete and Orthodoxy’s Encounter with the West: On Learning to Love the Church,” *Sobornost* 39.2 (2017): 26–71.

⁵³See Davor Džalto, Effie Fokas, Brandon Gallaher, Perry Hamalis, Aristotle Papanikolaou, and Gregory Tucker, “Orthodoxy, Human Rights and Secularization” (Nathanael Symeonides, ed., *Toward the Holy and Great Council: Decisions and Texts*, Faith Matters 2 (New York, NY: Dept. of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2016), 103–107, also at <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/04/05/orthodoxy-human-rights-secularization>

which were formulated before the advent of modernity. These disciplines include, among other things, an understanding of marriage as the union of a male and a female and the restricting of sexual activity to vaginal penetration by a male of his wife. The occasions for sexual intercourse are limited by the Church's fasting practices for the reception of Holy Communion, the ecclesiastical calendar, and the wife's menstrual cycle. The Church's commitment to its pre-modern sexual disciplines holds true both for the majority of clerics, who are charged with teaching the Orthodox faith and cultivating observance of practices which cohere with it and, according to research by Pew, for the laity, who broadly support the Church's teachings on controversial social issues.⁵⁴ Most publications on topics of sexual diversity from a specifically Orthodox perspective seek to undergird the received practices and identify theological explanations for them and, more recently, tend to attack the phenomenon of sexual diversity as the toxic bi-product of "secular culture."⁵⁵

Many Orthodox accept the Church's teachings and disciplines on sexuality as part of a complete package of received traditions which cannot be subjected to individual or collective scrutiny. In contexts in which Orthodoxy exercises religious and ethical influence within society in general and ambient cultural views

⁵⁴Pew, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century," §4.

⁵⁵See e.g. William Basil Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage—An Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992); John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 108–25; Thomas Hopko, *Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction: Eastern Orthodox Reflections* (Chesterton: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2015); John Edgar Parker III, "The Sanctity of Chastity: An Orthodox Approach to Homosexuality," unpublished MDiv Thesis, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2004. Also see the papers at the recent conference "Chastity, Purity, Integrity: Orthodox Anthropology and Secular Culture in the 21st Century," Holy Trinity Seminary, Jordanville, NY (https://www.jordanville.org/news_190227_1.html). The keynote speaker was Rod Dreher, the well-known conservative journalist and Orthodox convert, who has authored *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (NY: Sentinel, 2018).

broadly align with those of the Church (e.g. in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox “old world”), the teachings and disciplines of the Orthodox Church may not appear particularly distinctive and there may therefore be little cause for most people to reflect on the Church’s stances. In other contexts in which Orthodoxy is a minority tradition, and especially when there are many ideological converts (especially North America), the teachings and disciplines of the Orthodox Church on sexuality may be prized precisely because they stand in opposition to prevailing social views which are considered to be morally bankrupt and they are thus an important constitutive feature of a distinctively Eastern Orthodox identity.

Crucial for understanding the stringent ideological opposition of some Orthodox to sexual diversity, at least in the New World, is the “turn to tradition” in recent decades among North American Catholic and Protestant Christians who become Eastern Orthodox. These converts often arrive at Orthodoxy with a strong opposition to elements of secular culture which they feel have attenuated the “traditional values” of their former western Christian communities. In addition, since 1991, citizens of formerly Socialist countries have “returned” to Orthodoxy as part of a search for their cultural and ethnic roots and new moralities—sometimes as part of an exploration of other options in the religious marketplace. There is often an identification of sexual diversity (and ecumenism) as being the most recent imported ideology of the “corrupt West,” with Communism understood to be a similarly failed Western import. The return of Eastern Europeans to their “native” Orthodoxy after 75 years of Communism is all the more difficult to understand in terms of “conversion” because there is a denial in these cultures that conversion was even taking place with respect to the millions who have been received into the church since 1991. In these cultures, Orthodoxy is conflated with ethnic and national identity, which is

simply regarded as being “reclaimed” because you cannot convert to what you always already are “in your bones.”⁵⁶

Alternative sexual and gender identities, whether publicly acknowledged and actualized or not, are broadly condemned as sinful, deviant, and unnatural by the Orthodox Church. The sexual diversity of Western societies is condemned specifically in the documents of the 2016 Council of Crete, and same-sex unions are highlighted as being completely at odds with the teaching of the Church and authentic Orthodox Christian identity. The Orthodox Church works consistently in many parts of the world to ensure that its moral vision is broadly supported by law wherever possible. For countries within the European Union or adjacent to it, this effort is frequently pursued with zeal since the legal protections afforded to LGBTQ+ people which have swept the EU over the last decades are perceived to be a pressing threat to received moral order. Orthodox hierarchs and theologians frequently comment in the public sphere in opposition to the extension of rights and freedoms to LGBTQ+ persons, both in traditionally Orthodox countries and in places where the Orthodox Church represents a small minority.

In 2015, in reaction to the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA issued a statement saying the court had “overstepped its purview by essentially re-defining marriage . . . It is immoral and unjust for our government to establish in law a ‘right’ for two members of the same sex to wed.”⁵⁷ In October

⁵⁶Mathijs Pelkmans, ed., *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Berghahn, 2009); Stephen Headley, *Christ after Communism: Spiritual Authority and Its Transmission in Moscow Today* (Rollinsford: Orthodox Research Institute, 2010); Amy Slagle, *The Eastern Church in the Spiritual Marketplace: American Conversions to Orthodox Christianity* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); and Oliver Herbel, *Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of an American Orthodox Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁷“Response of Assembly of Bishops to Obergefell v. Hodges,” <http://>

2018, Romania, driven by its conservative government, held a referendum on a constitutional amendment to prohibit same-sex marriage, even though under its civil code, same-sex marriage and civil partnerships are not yet legal though legislation is in the pipeline. The referendum was the result of a campaign led by a “Coalition for the Family” which collected 3 million signatures in a petition. The most powerful member of this group is the Romanian Orthodox Church. The referendum was an attempt to pre-emptively cut short any future pro-gay legislation. In the end, the referendum, which required a 30% threshold of voter turnout to be valid, was legally null as only 20.4% turned out—this was perhaps the result of a successful campaign by human rights activists to boycott the vote. The failure of the vote points to the instability of the power of the Orthodox Church, though around 90% of those who did turn out voted in favour of the proposition.⁵⁸ The coalition against same-sex marriage is well-funded and consists of some far-right organizations, many of which have close ties to the political forces of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church, who have collaborated across the Orthodox world with the World Congress of Families to promote anti-LGBT+ political agendas.⁵⁹ In Greece, there is great dissension in society and an outcry from its state Church because in October 2017 the centre-left government passed legislation that enabled Greek citizens from the age of 15 to determine their gender identity without (as was previously required) undergoing enforced sterilization. This was denounced by the Holy Synod of the official state Church of Greece as a “monstrous” attack on the family life and traditional Orthodox values.⁶⁰ These are just a

www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2015/response-of-assembly-of-bishops-to-obergefell-v.-hodesges.

⁵⁸See “A pitiful turnout blocks an anti-gay marriage move in Romania,” <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/10/08/a-pitiful-turnout-blocks-%20an-anti-gay-marriage-move-in-romania>.

⁵⁹“World Congress of Families” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/world-congress-families>.

⁶⁰“A row over transgender rights erupts between Greece’s politicians and

few of the many instances of live “post-secular conflicts”⁶¹ in the Orthodox world.

The above description can be considered representative of the situation in which the vast majority of Orthodox find themselves. Many Orthodox regard the opposition of the Church to sexual diversity not only as a reality but as a reflection of truth which must be defended in the contemporary world. However, the Orthodox Church is not a monolith and it is possible to note some features of its contemporary life with respect to sexual diversity which may constitute a “minority report.”

Orthodox who live in predominantly non-Orthodox contexts—and, increasingly, those who do live in traditionally Orthodox contexts—are frequently confronted today by understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender which conflict with those espoused by the Church. These understandings are often presented with supportive argumentation and evidence which is readily intelligible, and they often cohere more satisfactorily with lived encounters by Orthodox Christians with LGBTQ+ persons than do the Church’s condemnatory attitudes. Social forces exert powerful influence and it is increasingly difficult for Orthodoxy to *both* maintain its traditional disciplines and teaching *and* keep a foothold in broad social discourse. At the very least, the presence of alternative visions for gender and sexuality in parallel to traditional Orthodox visions requires the Church to make a compelling case for its positions.

While the sexual disciplines of the Orthodox Church were formed in pre-modern intellectual contexts (generally speaking, within the thought world of Late Antique Greco-Roman culture, which gave way to the Medieval Greek culture known to us as Byzantium), no Orthodox today can claim uninhibited access to these contexts. No matter how much a person today

its clerics,” <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2017/10/13/a-row-over-transgender-rights-erupts-between-greeces-politicians-and-its-clerics>.

⁶¹See the project of Kristina Stoeckl and the University of Innsbruck, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/projects/postsecular-conflicts/index.html.en>.

may have saturated themselves in ancient Christian culture and learning, they have nonetheless been shaped by modernity and postmodernity, and can access pre-modern cultures only across a great historical chasm. This has several important implications. First, we must exercise great caution when reading the pre-modern sources which undergird the Orthodox Church's sexual disciplines, since we must not assume a correspondence between their conceptual framework and our own. Second, we must understand that, while the formulations and practice of Orthodox sexual discipline *may* have remained consistent from pre-modernity to the present, their meaning may have shifted in significant ways as they passed into new frameworks of meaning. Third, though the Orthodox Church may have great confidence in its pre-modern understanding of gender and sexuality and sexual disciplines, it nonetheless must be able to express these in terms which are intelligible in modernity and postmodernity.

While official representatives and documents of the Church for the most part emphasize the continuity with tradition of the Church's teaching and practice on sexual diversity, individuals and groups at all levels within the Church have begun to explore the Church's theology and history more critically and, in a few places, new approaches are beginning to be put into pastoral practice.

Thus, over the past few years, there have been a number of small initiatives to study perspectives on sexual diversity, including a closed meeting of scholars in Amsterdam in 2017 and a three-year program of meetings in Oslo (2016–18) under the auspices of the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion (both of which involved participants in this project). There have also been efforts towards publishing articles on this topic including a volume supported by the European Forum for LGBT Christians, *For I am Wonderfully Made: Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion* (2017) and the Spring/Summer 2018 issue of

The Wheel.⁶² Anecdotal evidence suggests that pastors are becoming more aware of the need to minister effectively to LGBTQ+ persons in their communities and are beginning to seek out advice (in confidence) from trusted theologians. However, public efforts in this area remain divisive and those who speak openly in favour of LGBTQ+ inclusion frequently find themselves vilified, ostracised, or subject to official ecclesiastical censure.

There are also instances of the tacit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of sexual diversity demonstrated in concrete pastoral practice. A very small number of communities both in traditionally-Orthodox countries and the so-called diaspora practice open hospitality towards LGBTQ+ persons and many more pastors practice functional inclusion while maintaining the official positions of the Church when pressed to do so (e.g. by giving Holy Communion to same-sex couples and quieting dissenting voices in their community by appeal to the tradition of not scrutinizing the soul of another). In some larger cities, “LGBTQ+ friendly” parishes exist with the knowledge of the bishop and his blessing for the priest to extend as much pastoral and sacramental care as possible (e.g. by baptizing children adopted by same-sex couples or permitting them to serve on the parish council). At least one local Orthodox Church has permitted in practice the celebration of a “Doxology” for same-sex couples in civil marriages and this same local church has a broadly liberal Western tolerant attitude to the integration of gay couples in many of its communities.

Much of this work, both intellectual and pastoral, towards accommodating sexual diversity in various ways takes place at a grass roots level, in the shadows, and without the acknowleg-

⁶²Misha Cherniak, Olga Gerassimenko, and Michael Brinkschröder, eds., *“For I am Wonderfully Made”: Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion* (Warsaw: European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christian Groups/Esuberanza, 2016). See also Bryce E. Rich, “Beyond Male and Female: Gender Essentialism and Orthodoxy,” unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2017.

ment (or sometimes the knowledge at all) of the hierarchy. From the perspective of those in Western societies in which LGBTQ+ identities and sexual practices are broadly accepted and celebrated and there is, in fact, social stigma increasingly attached to remaining “in the closet” or accepting any discrimination or secondary status, this situation will appear far from optimal or even tolerable. But for many Orthodox, even these small signs of acceptance are evidence of the powerful negative influence of decadent secular Western morality in the Church or tokens of hope and gradual change in the direction of the eventual acceptance of sexual diversity, depending upon one’s perspective. The fragility of the realities that supply evidence for this “minority report” must always be kept in mind.

3

An Eastern Orthodox Theological Vision

As background to the “Ten Perspectives on Eastern Orthodoxy and Sexual Diversity” offered below (§4), the following essay sketches out the common theological vision of Eastern Orthodoxy drawing on, in particular, the theologies of Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c.202) and Georges Florovsky (1893–1979), two well-known “pillars of Orthodoxy” in the ancient and modern periods. Theology is not something distinct from the life of the average Eastern Orthodox believer, from his or her spirituality and ethics, as is often the case with Western forms of religion, which mirror modernized Western societies with a practical differentiation between the spheres of law, morality, and religion. In other words, Eastern Orthodoxy is opposed to the general secular shift seen in many more modernized forms of Christianity. We shall see in all the perspectives in the next section, even when they are in manifest contradiction, certain core ecclesial commitments, and we shall lay these out in what follows.

The Orthodox theological vision is **Christocentric**, affirming as the ground of hope and the basis of the interpretation of the Bible, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Insofar as it is Christocentric it is, secondly, also **Trinitarian**, in that Jesus Christ is understood to be the Son of the Father whose good news is spoken to believers through his Spirit, which is given to the Church ever anew in the apostolic teaching mediated through the Body of Christ, specifically by bishops who are

understood to “rightly divide/divine the Word of [God’s] truth” (2 Tim 2:15, mentioned in various Eastern Christian liturgies in reference to the episcopate). Thirdly, it is **eschatological**, and as we shall see this makes it, fourthly, **Eucharistic** or worship driven, for Christ is understood as the Coming One (Mat. 11:3) and so in him, the Kingdom of heaven, which is understood as the revealed reign of God over all things (i.e. the Kingdom of God), is a coming Kingdom (Mat. 6:10, 16:27–28), ever made present in the midst (Luke 17:21, Mark 1:15) of his body, the Church, in and around the bishop, as the icon of Christ, until its full consummation at the end of the age. Finally and fifthly, an Orthodox theological vision is also **traditional** in that the Eucharist is a gathering in which past, present, and future meet as a living whole, revealing the Church as having one common mind.

3.1 A Christocentric & Trinitarian Vision

An Orthodox theological vision is concerned above all with the discernment of the face of Jesus Christ: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). It is Christocentric in that its object is a vision of Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments and it is also thereby ecclesial, since the “you” in this verse is Peter, who replies that “You are the Christ,” and Peter is taken as the symbol of the Church, the rock upon which it is built, the quintessential bishop, the one to whom the good news is given and the one who is charged with its proclamation.

Christ is revealed in a shadowy, anticipatory fashion to reason, through the Holy Spirit, in the foundation of creation. Indeed, it is believed that the cross of Christ specifically shows forth visibly what has always existed on the invisible level, because Christ himself is the primordial idea (*logos*) of creation. Many Church Fathers (including Justin Martyr, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine) see the cross as

a cosmic reality and look for its form in creation, including in the four elements, the four directions of the cosmos, hands stretched out in prayer, military standards and banners, spread oars, tools to dig in the land like a plough, and the mast of a ship.¹ The cross is understood, as the modern Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) put it, as the “watermark of divine love in every single created being and in the totality of nature as a whole,” imprinted on the book of creation. Once this mark is revealed by Christ, worldly being and even history itself becomes intelligible.²

As in creation, Christ is also revealed in Scripture (that is, the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament) in a shadowy, anticipatory fashion, by the same Spirit of Christ, in and through faith.³ According to Irenaeus we can see in Scripture the Father is truth,⁴ and as truth he is known in the Son⁵ by the “Spirit of truth” (John 15:26),⁶ both in the world and in Scripture. But the truth which was once given in a shadowy fashion in the world and Scripture is now spoken clearly in our midst in the Apostolic proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel,

¹See Justin Martyr, 1 *Apol.* 60; Irenaeus, *Dem.* §34; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 13; also St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. cat.* 32; *In Christ. res. or.* 1. and *Cont. Eun.* 3.3.40.

²See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 142.

³Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus omnes Haereses* [=AH]/*Contre les Hérésies*, Sources chrétiennes [=SC], trans., ed. Adelin Rousseau et al. (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82) (*Against the Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts (I–II), and W. H. Rambaut (III–IV), *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325 Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. [=ANF.]. American Edition. eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Revised, Arranged with Prefaces and Notes by A. Cleaveland Coxe. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, [1885] 1995), IV.v.5, vi.7, xx.5, xxvii.2 and xxviii.3. Moreover, this faith in Jesus Christ (and the salvation born from it) presumes the Decalogue or natural inborn law implanted on the heart since he is understood to be the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (cf. *AH* IV.xiii.1–4, xv.1, xvi.3).

⁴*AH* III.xiii.2.

⁵*AH* IV.ii.6 and v.1.

⁶cf. *Dem.* §6, *AH* III.xxiv.1 and IV.xxxiii.7.

Christ reveals the divine hypothesis (argument) or Trinitarian canon (rule) of faith by which we can see in Scripture that God is one and has created and redeemed us for himself.⁷ The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the clear and present recapitulation of what was only announced obscurely to be coming in the Law and the Prophets because, as a recapitulation, it summarizes⁸ and, in summarizing, unlocks what was formerly known only in “types of things to come.”⁹ In other words, for the Orthodox, the revelation of God, as the revelation of his truth in Jesus Christ, can be seen to be one in the résumé of the Gospel, in both the old and new dispensations of his economy of grace.¹⁰ Jesus Christ, in giving us the canon of truth, allows us to see this oneness of revelation: Christ “is always one and the same”¹¹ whether in Scripture as in a shadow or in the Gospel in the light.

Irenaeus likely structured his *On the Apostolic Preaching* on the model of a contemporary baptismal confession of faith (creed). First, this confession or canon of truth asserts that there is one Lord, the only Redeemer, the only Creator and the only Father, who contains all things and commands all things from nothingness into being.¹² Second, it asserts that this Father has a Son who came into our midst as a human being amongst human beings¹³ to save us by abolishing death, showing forth life in himself which brings union and communion between God and humans. Third, it tells us that there is a Spirit from the Father sent to us by the Son who spoke of Christ through the prophets and patriarchs and who in these last times renews the face of the earth, effecting

⁷*Dem.* §6.

⁸So we read that “Moses recapitulated everything, recounting the great deeds of God up to that day” (*On the Apostolic Preaching [=Dem.]*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), §28).

⁹*AH* IV.xiv.3.

¹⁰*AH* IV.xxxvi.2.

¹¹*AH* IV.xxxvi.4.

¹²*AH* II.i.1.

¹³*Dem.* §6.

justice through a new outpouring of God.¹⁴ Thus we see that an Orthodox theological vision is both Christoform and Trinitarian, demonstrating, as Augustine said, “*In vetere novum lateat et in novo vetus pateat* [The New in the Old is concealed; the Old in the New is revealed].”¹⁵

Moreover, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ we have a short and clear form of the “gift of paternal grace,” that is, the gift of our “new calling”¹⁶ to adoption whereby, in loving God and our neighbour, we are made “godly, just, and good.”¹⁷ This gift was formally made known in the world and in Scripture as a “treasure which was hid in the field” and which, in Scripture, was “pointed out by means of types and parables.”¹⁸ According to the Orthodox understanding, these shadows of things to come are now illuminated by Christ crucified, so we may see God and become one of the sons of glory in Jesus Christ:

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling [W]hen it is read by the Christians, it is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ, and explained, both enriching the understanding of men, and showing forth the wisdom of God and declaring his dispensations with regard to man, and forming the kingdom of Christ beforehand, and preaching by anticipation the inheritance of the holy Jerusalem, and proclaiming beforehand that the man who loves God shall arrive at such excellency as even to see God, and hear His word, and from the hearing of His discourse be glorified to

¹⁴*Dem.* §6.

¹⁵Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum Libri Septem* [Questions on the Heptateuch in Seven Books], 2, 73, *PL* 34.623.

¹⁶*AH* IV.xxxvi.4, xxvi.1.

¹⁷*Dem.* §87.

¹⁸*AH* IV.xxvi.1.

such an extent, that others cannot behold the glory of his countenance . . . ¹⁹

3.2 An Eschatological & Eucharistic Vision

An Orthodox theological vision is not only Christoform, Christocentric, staurocentric (cross-centred), and Trinitarian, but it also is fixated on the coming Kingdom of Christ the King, the Coming One (Matthew 11.3). In other words, any Orthodox theological vision must also be eschatological. The Kingdom is in our midst because it is Christ himself as God and King of creation made manifest,²⁰ and where the Spirit of this King is, there is his Kingdom, which is the Church²¹ whose body and head is Christ the King.²² As the eminent Greek theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas (b. 1931) put it, the Church is eschatological all the way down as it “has its roots in the future and its branches in the present.”²³

For the Orthodox, the first advent of Christ in the flesh, made known in in the Church, looks forward to his second advent in the flesh.²⁴ This second advent will manifest in the world with assurance what we only now know as a foretaste, that is, the “times of the Kingdom”²⁵ which is the perpetual Sabbath of the Lord when all who have served the Lord in gratitude²⁶ shall, in the new flesh which has arisen, rest by feasting at the Lord’s table, drinking the new wine from the new earth in the new cup,²⁷ served by

¹⁹AH IV.xxvi.1.

²⁰AH III.ix.1.

²¹AH III.xxiv.1.

²²AH III.xvi.6.

²³John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood in the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 59.

²⁴Irenaeus, AH, IV.xxxiii.1.

²⁵AH V.xxx.4.

²⁶AH IV.xvi.1.

²⁷AH V.xxxiii.1.

Christ himself.²⁸ All things are renewed in Christ's Kingdom and are moving already towards ever greater renewal in him.

As a foretaste of this Kingdom, one has the Eucharist, in which the community gathers around its bishop. The Eucharist is the eschatological age to come in our midst. The Divine Liturgy (Eucharist) and all the various services of the Orthodox Church are in some sense one long meditation of Scripture on Scripture—a body whose joints, tissues, bones, organs and skin are all composed of the words of the Old and New Testaments.

For the Orthodox, Christ's coming Kingdom is not only "glorious" but "priestly"²⁹ and, as befits a Kingdom in which all things are renewed in the advent of the High Priest of our salvation, a new worship³⁰ of the Lord God Creator or "new oblation of the new covenant"³¹ was instituted by Christ for his priestly Kingdom. This worship is in Spirit and in truth, where the Church makes a free and pure sacrifice of praise,³² offering the creation to the Father in Christ as King. This pure sacrifice is the Eucharist, the definitive sacrament of the Kingdom. But what is the form of this sacrifice of praise? The Church offers up creation to God at the terrestrial altar and this offering is Jesus Christ's own self-offering at the celestial altar.³³

The Church's Eucharist is Christ's recapitulation of his saving Pascha, understood in terms of the whole economy of God as expressed in the cross. The Church's sacrifice of praise is understood to be the one offering of Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, as a perpetual memorial of his Pascha of salvation. The creation (bread and wine) offered as a memorial in Christ by the Church once it receives the calling upon of the Word³⁴ is

²⁸AH V.xxxiii.2 and xxiv.3.

²⁹AH IV.xx.11.

³⁰AH III.x.2.

³¹AH IV.xxvii.5.

³²AH IV.xvii.5-xviii.4.

³³AH IV.xviii.6.

³⁴AH IV.xviii.5 and V.ii.3.

returned as communion in his Spirit which is the participation in the everlasting and incorruptible life of God himself.³⁵ This life is nothing less than the Body of God made present fully in bread and wine as understood by the Orthodox.

For the Orthodox, the offering of the Offerer is the embodiment of the whole faith of the Church in Jesus Christ as interpreted and proclaimed at the synaxis by those elders, like Irenaeus, who “have been assigned a place in the ministry of the word [in administratione sermonis]” (cf. Acts 6:4).³⁶ Here these elders are understood as the bishops who rightly divide/divine the Word of God’s truth (2 Tim 2:15), both leading the community, as icons of Christ, in worship which includes not only the right praise of God but also the right teaching given in their proclamation of the Gospel. The Eucharist is, then, for the Orthodox, a kerygmatic act which proclaims the union of God and creation in Jesus Christ. It does this by, in the breaking of the bread (Acts 24: 30–31, 35), proclaiming Jesus Christ, who makes the incomprehensible comprehensible, the Son of the Lord, Father, Creator.

3.3 A Traditional Vision

We have seen that the Orthodox theological vision is Christological, Trinitarian, eschatological, and Eucharistic. All these characteristics point to the fifth, and perhaps most renowned, feature of Orthodoxy, which is its fidelity to tradition. When we say that that the Eastern Orthodox theological vision involves Church Tradition, we mean that it involves an inherited form of hermeneutics, a living organic memory of the Church by which all who participate in it continuously remember and participate within the living Word of God embodied and witnessed to in Scripture. It is a form of ecclesial consciousness.

³⁵“fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit” (*AH* IV.xviii.5).

³⁶*AH* V.pref.; cf. III.iii.3.

God, according to this approach, reveals himself in Jesus Christ who is his perfect self-revelation. Yet this revelation in a person is not naked and wordless but clothed and word-bound. It is in and by the Scripture that God speaks to us in Jesus Christ. But if this revelation is in and by Scripture and Scripture is in language, and language is always the language of particular persons (albeit inspired), then one must conclude that for the Orthodox the revelation we have in and by Scripture is a revelation that is always already interpreted. Thus, we do not have Jesus Christ apart from Scripture and insofar as he is Scriptural, he is understood to be always already interpreted or in the process of being interpreted, and this interpretation when correct (i.e. Christoform, Trinitarian, eschatological, and Eucharistic) is the authentic apostolic preaching. This apostolic preaching is rightly received and continuously handed down and renewed in each new age and context by the Church Fathers as the inheritors of the Apostles and the whole cloud of witnesses who are the saints who bear the apostolic preaching as the memory of the Church which is living Tradition. For the Orthodox, the site of this preaching is the liturgical synaxis of the Eucharist—the community gathered around Christ himself worship the Holy Trinity in the Kingdom that is to come. These witnesses to Christ all share a common mind or catholic consciousness which is the same as that of the Apostles. This is believed to be the mind of Christ, the mind of the Scriptures, which is manifested in all forms of Church life but above all in worship from the liturgy to icons.

Georges Florovsky articulated this traditional approach to hermeneutics in his writings. He argued that the Body of Christ, as a divine-human organism, is “knit together” and “grows” (Col. 2:19) in unity of the Spirit and love through its perpetual renewal in the Eucharist, guaranteed by the uninterrupted sacramental succession of the hierarchy. Being a divine-human unity, the Church for the Orthodox is not bound by time, but,

in the celebration of the Eucharist by the bishop, eternally embraces the living and the dead who are all one and alive in Christ through His Spirit. This time-conquering aspect of ecclesial unity is symbolised by “tradition,” which is the living, ever-renewed connexion to the plenitude of the Church’s experience in all ages as founded on the experience of the Apostles in being breathed on by Christ in the Upper Room and in their participation at Pentecost: “Tradition is the constant abiding of the spirit and not only the memory of words. Tradition is a *charismatic*, not a historical, principle.”³⁷ Hence, tradition, for Florovsky, and for the Orthodox of all different shades of opinion more broadly, is not merely a guarding of the apostolic deposit or a conservative principle, but “it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration.”³⁸

For the Orthodox, within the life of tradition, through which the Spirit moves, witnesses, reveals and proclaims, the shape and form of the unity of the Church becomes visible as the Gospel itself given within Scripture as a “God-inspired scheme or image (*eikôn*) of truth, but not truth itself.”³⁹ Scripture, according to the Orthodox vision, only lives and breathes within tradition. It exists in the Body of Christ, who is truth himself, and in this Body, Christ “unchangeably and unceasingly reveals himself.”⁴⁰ The unity of the Church is simultaneously salvific, curative, eucharistic, traditional-Scriptural, and pneumatic in character. It is a unity of the one whole Jesus Christ in both his head and his body through his Spirit, that is, Christ is one both in himself and in Christians also. The divine–human unity of the Church above all reflects the unity of the Trinity in whom many become one, which Florovsky referred to as *sobornost*’ or catholicity.

³⁷Georges Florovsky, “Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, 265.

³⁸Florovsky, “Sobornost, 265.

³⁹Florovsky, “Sobornost, 265.

⁴⁰Florovsky, “Sobornost, 266.

This catholicity, completeness in the life of grace by being bonded together in a union of common life and love with one's fellows reflecting the Trinity, is, for the Orthodox, a call to all Christians in the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21) to participate, in the famous émigré coinage, in the "churching (*otserkovlenie*)" of their very being. Florovsky, in a notion popular in the period, variously refers to "the catholic transfiguration of personality," "catholic consciousness," and "the catholic regeneration of the mind." Each Christian is commanded to freely love his neighbour as himself by rejecting, denying, and even dying to himself. He sees himself so wholly in the other because, in the other, he is freely responding to Christ himself. The Christian life consists of the free cultivation in history of an ecclesial consciousness whereby in faith in Christ "we enclose the many within our own ego" imagining the Holy Trinity in whom many become one.⁴¹ In taking on Christ through treating our brother as our life, we become for the Orthodox incorporated into Christ and "become inheritors of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). This latter idea is called divinization or deification (*theosis*) and it might be said to be the key Orthodox theological conception and that by which other Christian bodies know it along with tradition and the liturgy.

For the Orthodox, the saints, and, in particular, the Church Fathers, are the pre-eminent instances of this catholic consciousness, this *sobornal* traditional mind of Christ through which Scripture is interpreted. The Fathers have attained to such a fullness of catholicity, such a completeness of a life full of grace, that their faith once expressed is no mere personal profession but, as Florovsky expressed it in the final famous chapter ("Breaks and Links") of his *Ways of Russian Theology*, "the testimony of the Church. This is because they speak out of the Church's catholic fullness and depth, theologizing within the medium

⁴¹Florovsky, "Sobornost, 262.

of *sobornost*’.”⁴² The Fathers, who witness to the testimony of the Church and its life as tradition, are accordingly described everywhere by Florovsky (and here he is followed by many Orthodox) as not just teachers but “guides and witnesses” to the identity of the Church whose “vision is ‘of authority,’ not necessarily their words.”⁴³ The Fathers neither present to us “ready-made” answers, nor can one look to them for a simple *consensus patrum* as a binding empirical agreement of individuals. The Fathers help us face the problems that are of true importance in the new age and to construct a contemporary synthesis. For the Orthodox theological vision, one must follow the Fathers creatively and not through what Florovsky often referred to as a “theology of repetition,” quoting their sayings outside the context of their meaning and life.⁴⁴ The Orthodox are called, then, to creatively and spiritually return to the sources, to follow the Fathers by acquiring their mind (*phronema*), which is a consensus reflecting the very “catholic mind” or fundamental identity of the Church.⁴⁵

But what marks out the Fathers’ catholic mind for Orthodoxy? The Fathers are authoritative because they are inspired teachers of Scripture, as Joseph Ratzinger (b. 1927), later Pope Benedict XVI, commented: “Scripture and the Fathers belong together as do word and response.”⁴⁶ The Fathers, for the

⁴²“Breaks and Links,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*, 167.

⁴³“On the Authority of the Fathers,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*, 238.

⁴⁴“Theological Will,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*, 242.

⁴⁵“Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*, 225; see Brandon Gallaher, “Tangling with Orthodox Tradition in the Modern West: Natural Law, Homosexuality, and Living Tradition,” *The Wheel*, 13/14 (Spring/Summer 2018): 50–63, at 61–63.

⁴⁶Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press,

Orthodox, are such for many reasons: the fact that the canon can be traced back to them as they were literally responsible for its shape; they articulate the rule of faith expressed in the creeds through which that Word is interpreted; their exegesis cannot be understood outside the worship of the Church, since the reading of Scripture and confession and proclamation of faith are a corporate act of the whole community gathered around their Risen Lord in the breaking of the Bread; and finally they are the ones who have understood faith as Christian philosophy and placed it under the rubric of faith in search of understanding and so, as Benedict observed, took “rational responsibility for the faith and thus created theology as we understand it today.”⁴⁷ But there is one last reason for the Orthodox that we turn to the Fathers which is that they have the key for unlocking Scriptures, “the fundamental concept of patristic exegesis,” which is unity, the “unity that is Christ himself, who permeates and sustains all Scripture.”⁴⁸

The Orthodox theological vision is Christocentric, Trinitarian, Eschatological, Eucharistic and lastly Traditional. We have outlined here the broad theological and spiritual self-understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and now we will turn to the very different and even contradictory ways this vision is applied to questions of sexual diversity.

1987 [1982]), 147; compare Florovsky, “Scripture and Tradition,” in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*, 329–334.

⁴⁷Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 151.

⁴⁸Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 136.

Ten Perspectives on Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity

— A —

One of the burning issues of the day, perhaps even the defining question of our era, is what it is to be human and how our existence as sexed and sexual beings relates to our common humanity. The relationship between these two poles—being sexed/sexual and being human—is, moreover, inscribed in Scripture in a manner that seems to set the two at odds with each other, for while the opening verses of Genesis affirms that “God created the human being in his image . . . male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27), the Apostle [Paul] asserts that in Christ there is “neither male and female” for all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The two poles of the arc that runs from Adam to Christ, from being “in Adam” to being “in Christ,” is the fundamental polarity that defines our existence, from the moment that we enter the world to being born into life in Christ, and is the framework within which theology seeks to understand both what it is to be human and the role that sexuality plays within this.

That all things are not quite as they might initially seem is indicated by Ignatius of Antioch: approaching his martyrdom in Rome, he beseeches the Christians there not to impede his coming martyrdom in startling words: “Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die . . . Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall be a human being [ἐκεῖ παραγενόμενος

ἄνθρωπος ἔσομαι]” (Rom. 6). Ignatius is not yet born, not yet living, not yet human; only by his martyrdom, in imitation of Christ, will he be born into life as a human being.

The background for this lies in the Gospel of John, and specifically his depiction of Christ’s word from the cross: “It is finished,” or rather, “It is completed/perfected” (John 19:30). As he indicates, from the opening words of his Gospel—“In the beginning”—John is playing with Genesis. This allows us to see a new dimension in the opening verses of Scripture: having spoken everything else into existence—“Let there be . . .” and it was, and it was good—God announces his own particular project: “Let us make a human being in our image after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). God does not speak his project into existence with an imperative, but rather uses a subjunctive: his particular purpose, the only thing upon which he deliberates, is a project, initiated by God, but completed by Christ voluntarily going to the cross, with Pilate saying a few verses earlier, “Behold the human being” (John 19:5). By giving his own “Let it be!” Ignatius, following Christ, is born into life as human being. If, as I argue is fundamental to the Christian tradition, Christ shows us what it is to be God in the way he dies as a human being, he simultaneously shows us what it is to be human in the same way, in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis*. Moreover, and even more strikingly, for the only work that is said to be God’s own work—making a human being in his image—we are the ones who say, “Let it be!”

If God’s project is to create living human beings in his image and likeness, what he in fact does is to create males and females. When we look at the structure of Gen. 1:27, we see that being “in the image” and being “male and female” are put in parallel with one another:

[27] So God created the human being in his own image,
in the image of God, he created him;
male and female he created them.

[28] And God blessed them, and God said to them,

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.”

Reading the text in the light of Christ, the Fathers make a distinction between *the* image, who is Christ (Col. 1:15), and human beings who are made *in* the image. It is important to note that when the Apostle asserts that Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), it is in the context of hymning the one who makes peace by “the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). It is in laying down his life that Christ shows us what it is to be God and what it is to be human. Regarding male/female, although we tend to link this to the blessing to “be fruitful and multiply,” this same blessing is bestowed upon the other animals (Gen. 1:22), yet they are not said to be male and female (only in Gen. 6:19 is this said). Instead there is a parallel placed between being in the image and being male and female. If God’s project is to make human beings in his image, and his way of initiating this project is to make males and females, then our existence as sexed and sexual beings turns out to be the horizon in which we learn to become human: it is in fact the horizon in which we (or at least most of us) learn, through the power of erotic attraction, to lay down our lives for another: through the erotic drive deeply implanted in us by God, we are drawn out of ourselves, to “die” to ourselves and live our lives in virtue of another. In marriage, then, males and females are, quite literally, “humanized!”

Implications

Martyrdom

Marriage, just as much as monasticism, continues the fundamental Christian vocation of martyrdom: it is not that marriage and monasticism are the only two “legitimate” forms of Christian life; martyrdom is the form of Christian life, that is lived either through marriage or through monasticism or in the single state. The cross is one and the same for all.

Procreation

Although a blessing (and an increased opportunity for martyrdom!), children are not the goal of marriage (procreation is not even mentioned in Matt 19:4–6 or 1 Cor. 7:2–4). If males and females, men and women, become human in through martyrdom—for only a man or woman can say “let it be” and so become human—then males and females do not in fact beget human beings, but only procreate more males and females, each of whom are called to the fullness of being human. But this means that procreation (and sexual activity more generally) is inherently in Adam, not in Christ: one cannot procreate “in Christ.” To think so is a category mistake: one cannot give birth to an infant who is already baptized. In the resurrection, in Christ, we neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven (cf. Matt. 22:3). Marriage, then, is not, primarily at least, about or defined by procreation, legitimizing sexual activity, or providing a “safe space” for its exercise. Neither is it about preserving “traditional values”; it is not about the self-preservation of the “nuclear family”—it subverts and sublimates these, providing a horizon for achieving the fullness of the stature of being human that Christ has shown by the way of the Cross. Sexuality embodies the erotic drive towards transcendence, transforming those who love, with the martyric love shown by Christ, into another state, neither male nor female but human, through martyrdom and in Christ.

Eros

The erotic drive is perhaps the only force capable of making us overcome our fear of death; the erotic drive of our existence as males and females is that which leads us, as we have seen, towards the self-sacrifice that culminates in our becoming human. Eros is, of course, equally capable of driving us towards behaviour which is no more than animal. Our experience of eros, at least in this life, is not a black and white matter, but always “grey”; it is

never experienced as “pure” self-giving, but is always bound up with passion, selfish pleasure, and power; we must struggle with these passions to learn martyric love. Just as we take a decisive, once-for-all, step in baptism, dying with Christ so as to live in him, but until our actual death we remain in the paradox of the first-person singular, so too driven outside ourselves in love for another and ultimately for Christ, our erotic drive is enmeshed in passion until the grave: even for the aged St Anthony, after decades in the desert, the one passion that remained was *porneia* (*Sayings*, Antony, 11).

Male/Female to Being Human

Through sexual attraction and desire, then, most males and females are called to overcome themselves, and so become human in Christ. But it is not that in doing so we cease being males and females; rather that we both become human. To adapt the image first used by Origen (though borrowed from the Stoics): an iron knife is known by its particular properties (cold, hard, sharp), but when placed in the fire, while remaining the iron it is, it is no longer known by those properties but only by the properties of fire (hot, fluid, burning). So too an iron knife and a bronze knife, when placed in the fire become indistinguishable while remaining the matter they are. Males and females are called to enter into Christ through their death, anticipated sacramentally in baptism, and entering into the consuming fire that is God through taking up the cross, while remaining the males and females they are they become indistinguishably human in Christ, in whom there is neither male nor female.

Through our existence as sexed and sexual beings, then, our existence as sexed and sexual beings is transcended, though not abandoned; the erotic drive of males and females can lead to a transcendence in which it is sublimated in a divine Christ-like manner, in which both become human. Sexuality and the sexual drive has a positive role to play in this economy of God, driving

us towards an ecstatic existence in which we no longer live for ourselves, just as it is by using our mortal breath of life in a particular Christ-like manner that we enter upon a manner of living that is no longer that of a mortal breath but that of the immortal Spirit, immortal because entered into through death. Once again, we are, in the present, in the grey area of the paradoxical situation between our baptismal death to existence in Adam and our actual death to be raised in Christ. Yet even while in this grey area, to the extent that we identify ourselves by our sexuality, male or female (or, as is said today, anywhere on the spectrum in between), we are in Adam, not in Christ, merely iron or bronze, no longer transfigured by the divine fire.

— B —

Before looking at the biblical passages which are, or are assumed to be, relevant to this topic it is, I think, important to make explicit some of the difficulties that this exercise raises.

First, and perhaps the most question-begging of all: we often speak as if we assume the existence of something called “The Bible” or “Scripture”, as a single, univocal entity. But this conceals (even, perhaps from ourselves at times) the fact that this “entity” is a library of sacred texts from many times and places, firmly fixed neither in text nor in content. We cannot simply read off a text from the library in isolation and claim that the last word on the subject has been spoken. (Incidentally this problem is reinforced in Orthodoxy by the fact that the Church encourages us to work from what might be called a “mental Diatessaron” in some of our liturgical readings, especially at the high points of Holy Week. It is not surprising against this background that popular Orthodox works of scriptural exegesis, such as those of Joanna Manley or Fr Lawrence Farley, freely combine one Gospel with another in their explanations, without any indication of the problems that this might provoke.)

A second significant difficulty in exegesis is one that always appears in relation to texts from other times —that of translation. This is a twofold problem. First, of course, is the potential difficulty of understanding the language of the text. No matter how well one might read Biblical Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek, neither is anyone's native language anymore, and the full understanding of a word may prove elusive to even the best scholars. (A non-tendentious example would be the story recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges about Achsaph, daughter of Caleb and wife to Othniel. Given to Caleb's nephew Othniel as a reward for his part in the conquest of Canaan she urges him to ask for an extension of territory. "And," says the Authorised Version, "she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?" The verb for what she did appears only three times in the Hebrew Scriptures—once in each appearance of this story, and once more in Judges, where it is used for the action of Jael with the tent peg on Sisera. While not going as far as the notorious translation of the NEB: "she broke wind", one may need to suggest, as perhaps does the LXX tradition, that something more dramatic than a simple dismounting is intended here.)

Thus, when in 1 Corinthians (6:9) and 1 Timothy (1:10) the author(s) include(s) *arsenokoitai* among the "unrighteous" or "sinners", although the exact sense of this unique Pauline coinage may be unclear the two elements of "male" and "bed" make it probable that some form of sexual activity between males is what is being condemned (the more so as the scholarly consensus is that St Paul based his coinage on the prohibition of "*meta arsenos ou koimêthêsê koitên gynaikeian*" in Leviticus 18:22). However, in 1 Corinthians this class of sinner is followed by a reference to *malakoi*, which is much less clear. The root meaning of the word is "soft" or "gentle", but such behaviours are not obviously sinful. Liddell and Scott recognise the possibility of "a bad sense" of "soft" and give references to cowardice, lack of self-control and effeminacy. To a modern Greek, for whom it is

still an insult, the reference is to masturbation. The AV translates *arsenokoitai* as “those who abuse themselves with mankind” and *malakoi* as “effeminate”, while several modern English translations lump the two words together and translate them as one e.g. “sexual perverts” (RSV), “men who have sex with men” (NIV) or “men who practise homosexuality” (ESV) (in the last two cases a footnote explains that the terms refer to “the passive and active participants (NIV)/partners (ESV) in [ESV adds consensual] homosexual acts”.

Here we come to what might be called the second translation problem: the interface between exegesis and eisegesis. If Sir Kenneth Dover’s analysis of Greek homosexuality is correct, and applicable to the period of the New Testament, then we could read this active/passive distinction into the relationships which he outlines—it was the role of the adolescent who was being brought into adult society to be penetrated (“passive”) and of his sponsor to be the one who penetrated (“active”). Thus, a mature adult male who allowed himself to be penetrated incurred shame for behaving in an age-inappropriate way. But how far does interpreting the Pauline texts today in this way presuppose that the model for sexual activity between males is read off from a particular view of “normative” sexual relations between a male and a female? Does a gay couple have to have one who is exclusively “active” and one who is exclusively “passive”? Does lovemaking (lesbian, gay, or straight) inevitably involve penetration? And, given that in 1 Corinthians elsewhere a woman may be expected to initiate sexual activity on occasions, is the implied mapping of “active” and “passive” onto “male/masculine” and “female/feminine” respectively misleading?

Having raised this question of translation under its two headings we can perhaps approach the texts cautiously. References to same-sex activity in the biblical material appear with one exception to apply only to males. There are a number of texts which seem to refer to sacred male prostitutes (sometimes given the

derogatory nickname “dogs”). Thus, in Deuteronomy 23:17–18 female and male sacred prostitution is forbidden to the Israelites, and money earned in this way may not be offered to the Temple. But even if these male prostitutes served male customers (a point which is uncertain) these rules have little to do with the contemporary discussion—YHWH is not to be worshipped with these rites, but this is not problematic to Orthodox (or to most) Christians.

The story of Sodom in Genesis 19 has often been cited as the definitive condemnation of homosexual activity, but a closer reading of it shows that what is here in question is buggery as rape—a phenomenon that is not unknown in various societies as a way of putting the alien and outsider in his place. Oddly the similar story told about the men of Gibeah in Judges 19 has not been given the same significance. Is that because the men of Gibeah carried out their threat of rape heterosexually (on the Levite’s concubine) while the men of Sodom did not have the chance to illustrate their willingness or otherwise in this regard?

In both Gibeah and Sodom the primary sin for the original storyteller seems to have been inhospitality, and that is how Ezekiel in the later OT tradition views it too. (“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” (16:49)). And although Jude speaks of the sin of Sodom as pursuing “strange [or other] flesh” (v.7) this may be related rather to the inadvisability and impropriety of sexual activity with non-human persons (as in the myth of Genesis 6).

The clearest texts relating to same-sex activity in the OT are those in Leviticus 18:22 (“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”) and 20:13 (“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.”), while in the NT 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

already referred to are joined by Romans 1:26–27 (“women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 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 themselves the due penalty for their error.”) —the one place where same sex relations between women may be mentioned.

“Abomination” however, may be misleading—*toevah* primarily carries overtones of cultic separation, and one may therefore need to understand *bdelygma* (its Greek equivalent in the LXX) in a broader sense, too. We should also be aware that St Paul’s appeal to nature is not as straightforward as we might like—in 1 Cor 11:14 “nature itself teach[es] you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him.” A brief look at the iconography of e.g. St Paisy Velichkovsky, or at modern monastic practice, will show that the Orthodox Church disagrees with St Paul on this point.

On the other hand we should notice that the condemnatory texts of both OT and NT set this same-sex activity in the context of other behaviours that we might still wish to view as wrong: sexual activity between related persons or with animals, child sacrifice, and the use of magic in Leviticus; idolatry and various immoral behaviours in the NT. As Orthodox Christians we also need to take into account the belief that Scripture is part of the Tradition of the Church and is understood and interpreted within that context. St Maximos the Confessor (2nd Century on Love §86) states, “Some commandments of the Mosaic Law must be kept both physically and spiritually, others only spiritually.” On the whole the voice of Tradition has been against same-sex sexual activity, and this should certainly be taken into account when interpreting the half-dozen or so texts known as “clobber texts”. But Tradition, like Scripture, is not monolithic. In recent years gay and gay-friendly Christians have pointed to areas in which both straightforward readings of the text and traditional

interpretations have been challenged and even overturned (the example of the acceptance in both OT and NT of slavery is a favourite trope in this discourse, as is the modern accommodation to lending money at interest). Orthodox Christians are certainly comfortable with some behaviours characterised as *toevah/bdelygma* (e.g. the eating of shellfish or pork [cf. Deut. 14:3ff]), while remaining resolutely opposed to others (e.g. idolatry and worship of gods other than YHWH [cf. Ezekiel 8 *passim*]).

Is it possible to interrogate Tradition? Are there new questions which have not been asked in the past, but need to be addressed in the present? If so, can the old answers change in the light of new questions? And even if not, can one recognise that the old answers may need to be reached by new routes? In ten minutes it is impossible to do more than touch on these issues. But we can at least recognise that the approach which says, “All the answers will be found if you simply read the Bible,” needs considerably more unpacking.

— C —

The term “sexuality” was coined in the nineteenth century. The term denoted a completely new concept of psycho-biological sexual identities based on people’s sexual desires which radically changed our sexual culture. The discovery of sexuality in the nineteenth century meant a sexual turn in philosophical and theological anthropology comparable to the Copernican turn in philosophical and theological cosmology. We must be aware of the radical difference in our understanding of sex in relation to the concept of sexuality in contrast to the understanding of sex in the pre-sexuality era (i.e., before the nineteenth century) otherwise our interpretations of the sources of tradition will merely be anachronistic nonsense—at least if we claim to explain them in relation to their sociocultural context (“the world behind the

text”). When interpreting texts from the pre-sexuality era we must instead use concepts such as “sexual desires” and “sexual acts” rather than “sexuality” in order to avoid anachronisms. Sodomy was not a sexual orientation but a sexual taboo and anyone was in principle a potential sodomite in pre-nineteenth-century thinking about sex.

The concept of sexuality is not the only modern preconception of which we must be aware of in order to avoid the trap of anachronisms when approaching the sources of tradition. Other modern preconceptions relevant to our topic are ideas and ideals such as romantic love, egalitarian sex (i.e., that sex should be consensual and mutually pleasurable), that men and women should be judged by the same standard, that the phenomenon of sex is not restricted to a penis penetrating another body, that female and male homosexuality are species of the same concept, that marriage is a union of love between two adults which creates a nuclear family, etc. If we uncritically apply these ideas and ideals to the sources of tradition, the result will be anachronistic humbug. Much popular theological writing about (heterosexual) marriage in contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy falls into this trap, since the only things that are common to marriage today and marriage in Byzantium are that the phenomena involve two persons of the opposite sex and the marriage is conducted according to the ritual of the *Euchologion* [priest’s prayer book]. Apart from these two similarities, we are dealing with radically different phenomena.

In the ancient world, sexual acts and desires were not viewed as expressions of any sexual identity but as elements in the performance of the masculinity of male citizens. A free, adult, male citizen should penetrate in order to express his masculinity. As long as he did not penetrate the lawful wife of another citizen, or any other honourable woman, it was of little relevance if he penetrated a woman or man—even less so if the one being penetrated was merely a slave or a foreigner (non-citizen). It should

also be noted that it was assumed that sex should primarily be pleasurable for the penetrating party. The sexual pleasure of the party being penetrated was irrelevant in the case of women and shameful in the case of men.

Since it was viewed as emasculating for an adult man to be penetrated, homosexual acts between male citizen should be restricted to older mentors and male youths. The beardless youth was a socially acceptable sex object for men in ancient Greece. However, the beardless youth who allowed an older mentor to penetrate him should not enjoy being penetrated but merely allow the older mentor to penetrate him out of respect for the mentor. A bearded adult man, unlike the beardless youth, was not considered a socially acceptable object for homosexual desires in Ancient Greece. We recognize the topos of the “beardless youths” from various Byzantine monastic *typika* [regulatory charters] trying to restrict the temptation to commit homosexual acts in male monasteries.

The Romans were less permissive when it came to homosexual acts. They forbade homosexual acts between citizens, while slaves and foreigners were socially acceptable sex objects for such desires. Roman women had a somewhat greater sexual freedom than Greek women in antiquity.

In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), we find both condemnations of male homosexual acts and the celebration of male “homosexual” love (e.g., David and Jonathan). The Hebrew Bible is silent on the topic of female homosexual relationships. In the New Testament, we find condemnations of various practices of Hellenistic pagan culture, including homosexual acts. St Paul is one of the few ancient (male) authors who show any awareness of female homosexual acts, which he obliquely condemns.

While it was a capital offence to sexually penetrate a male Roman citizen in pre-Christian Roman law, the Christianization of the Empire prompted new legislation which also made other male homosexual acts capital offences without any regard to the

citizenship of the men involved. Together with the abolition of the legal penalties for celibacy, this was one of the few consequences the conversion of Constantine had for early Christian Roman law. Female homosexual acts, on the other hand, were not illegal in Byzantine law, which was probably the result of the ancient idea that sex in the strict sense involved a penis penetrating another body; since women do not have penises, homosexual acts between women were not strictly speaking real sex. It should also be noted that according to Roman law, it is the body rather than the psyche that determines the gender of a person which becomes apparent in legislation on hermaphrodites, who are juridically ascribed to the gender that they bodily resemble the most (cf. *Digesta Iustiniani* 1.5.10).

Since penetration was central to the ancient and Byzantine understanding of sex, Byzantine law distinguished between the active (penetrating) man and passive (penetrated) man in the criminalization of male homosexual acts. The penetrating party was generally more severely judged than the penetrated party and if the penetrated party was underage (as he usually would be if it was a traditional Hellenistic male homosexual act) he would be excused by the courts. Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora persecuted men guilty of homosexual acts. Byzantine historians tell us that the active partner was condemned to have his penis amputated, which was done in a fatal manner, while some judges condemned the passive partner to be impaled through the anus. However, for most of the Byzantine period homosexual acts were not publicly prosecuted (although they were formally criminal) but left to the discretion of bishops and spiritual fathers to be dealt with in the context of sacramental repentance and ecclesiastical discipline. In practice it was the *forum internum* rather than the secular court that was the competent authority to deal with homosexual acts.

Sexual offences (including homosexual acts) were also a popular topos in polemical exchanges which can be seen in the

acts of the ancient councils when bishops routinely accused each other of sexual immorality, abuse of power, and embezzlement within the context of doctrinal controversies.

In the classic Byzantine *corpus canonum*, both the canons of St Basil the Great and the canons of St Gregory of Nyssa deal with male homosexual acts. In canon 62, St Basil prescribes the same penance as for male homosexual acts as for adultery (i.e., 15 years of excommunication). In canon 7, he lists male homosexual acts together with bestiality, murder, mixing poisons, adultery, and idolatry. In canon 4, St Gregory of Nyssa equates male homosexual acts with adultery. He describes male homosexual acts as an offence both against the body of another and against nature since the vagina is the proper “vessel” for a man to penetrate.

St Gregory’s reasoning also points to later Byzantine usage when *arsenokoitia* can be catachrestically used to denote the same phenomenon as the Western Christian concept of “sodomy,” namely non-vaginal penetration (i.e., also oral and anal sex between a man and a woman). The active partner in a male homosexual act is generally prescribed a more severe penance than the passive partner in Byzantine penitential literature.

If the passive partner is underage, he is generally excused, but if he has been penetrated in the anus, he is disqualified from becoming a priest due to the ritual impurity he has incurred by having his “vessel defiled.” However, if the active partner ejaculated between the thighs of an underage passive partner, without penetrating the anus, the passive partner does not incur any ritual impurity and is not disqualified from becoming a priest.

The early canons do not regulate female homosexual acts. Female homosexual acts make their appearance in late-Byzantine penitential literature when the spiritual direction of nuns had made the male clergy aware of female homosexual acts. However, the attitude to female homosexual acts in the late-Byzantine

penitential literature is inconsistent with penances ranging from forty days of fasting to twelve years of excommunication.

In pre-modern Eastern Slavic penitential literature, the only legitimate sex is when a husband penetrates with his penis the vagina of his wife in the missionary position on non-fasting days when they have not received the Eucharist and the woman is not menstruating. The prohibitions against having sex on days of fasting, during the woman's period, and on days one has received the Eucharist have their origins in Byzantium. However, the pre-modern Eastern Slavic penitential literature seems to show a greater interest in sexual positions than Byzantine penitential literature. Medieval clerical speculation about sex had reached the conclusion that the legitimate sexual position should reflect the gender hierarchy of society, so it was sinful for a woman to be on top of the man ("like on a horse") during sex. Evidence from erotic folklore indicates that the sexual ideals propagated by this penitential literature were contrafactual.

After these historical observations, one must ask what relevance history has for sexual ethics today. The meaning of both marriage and sex has changed throughout history and the sources of tradition reflect different (sometimes contradictory) sociocultural realities and preconceptions about sex and marriage. To elevate the lowest common denominator of history to the essence of sex (i.e., a penis penetrating another body) and of marriage (i.e., some kind of union involving persons of the opposite sex) is a problematic approach which fails both to do justice to history and to contemporary realities.

Throughout much of history the primary purpose of marriage has been to regulate property and inheritance rights as well as to create bonds of loyalties between different clans. Love and affections have been of secondary importance. The attempt by some to argue that the phenomenon of "brother adoption" (*adelphopoiesis*) constituted some sort of "gay marriage" is anachronistic if compared to marriages during the era when brother

adoption was practice. Brother adoptions were probably much more the expression of mutual love and affection than marriages were during the same period. As such, brother adoptions (as long as we remember that they are formally an expression of homosexual love and affection *without the possibility of legitimate sexual intercourse*) have much more in common with modern heterosexual marriages than the latter have with (heterosexual) marriages during the Byzantine period.

If we apply a meta-ethical perspective to the historical evidence of tradition, we will see that we are dealing with various, sometimes contradictory, models of sexual ethics. We have models of virtue ethics that emphasize sexual moderation as a means of self-mastery in the cultivation of virtues. We have models of popular morality based on irrational taboos. We have models of deontology based on divine commandments or the order of creation (natural law) or both. It is sometime hard and problematic to attempt to harmonize these various ethical models.

The problem is also related to the fundamental problem of Christian ethics, namely whether Christian ethics constitute a morality that is exclusive to Christians or if it reflects a universal morality that is intuitively, or rationally, accessible to all people and not only Christians. Already the Deutero-Pauline letters in the New Testament and Apostolic Fathers invoke morality as an apologetic device—the Christian faith motivate Christians to be moral persons according to commonly recognized standards of morality in the Greco-Roman world.

The problem of Christian ethics is also related to the dogmatic question of the relationship between ethics and soteriology. All classic Christian traditions agree that ethics and morality are important, but they disagree in their theological attempt to answer why ethics matters.

If we look to trends in contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology, the virtue ethics model is attractive since it can be related to the doctrine of theosis. St John of Damascus writes,

He creates with his own hands man of a visible nature and an invisible, after his own image and likeness: on the one hand man's body he formed of earth, and on the other his reasoning and thinking soul he bestowed upon him by his own inbreathing, and this is what we mean by "after his image." For the phrase "after his image" clearly refers to the side of his nature which consists of mind and free will, whereas "after his likeness" means likeness in virtue so far as that is possible.¹

In the theological anthropology of St John of Damascus, the cultivation of the virtues is linked to theosis as the restoration of the likeness of God. Sexual moderation was generally promoted in the Hellenistic philosophical tradition as a means for achieve self-mastery. It seems that much of Greek patristic writings on sex is linked to this philosophical tradition which views sexual moderation as a means of self-mastery in the cultivation of the virtues. This must be contrasted with the Latin Christian tradition which is affected by St Augustine's view that sexual desire is linked to original sin and his personal conviction that celibacy is easier for a normal person than moderation in sexual matters.

St John Chrysostom also emphasizes sexual moderation as an important purpose of marriage:

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote to me: it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife; and let each woman have her own husband And in saying, "Because of fornications, let every man have his own wife" by the very cause alleged for the concession he guides men to continence.²

The Byzantine prohibition against having sex on days of fasting should probably be interpreted as an expression of this

¹St John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 2.12; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33042.htm>.

²St John Chrysostom, *Homily 19 on First Corinthians (1 Cor 7.1–2)*; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220119.htm>.

Hellenistic tradition that seeks to promote sexual moderation as a means of self-mastery in the cultivation of the virtues.

Besides the virtue model that promotes sexual moderation as a means for the cultivation of the virtues there is also the taboo model of popular morality. It is imperative that we begin to rethink the reliance on taboos in Christian morality since it is hard to theologically justify taboos, and they are also problematic when compared to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ who emphasized the commandment of love as the foundation of Christian morality and generally had a very flexible attitude towards traditional taboos. When it comes to invoking the order of creation in the realm of sexual morality, this has already been undermined by the tradition of Christian monasticism which is one of the reasons for the rejection of monasticism by classic Protestantism.

Robert Taft's poignant observation of the usefulness of liturgical history is equally applicable to the history of Christian morality: "Those ignorant of history are prisoners of the latest cliché, for they have nothing against which to test it. [. . .] The past is always instructive, but not necessarily normative."³

— D —

Gender essentialism is the view that human beings fall into two groups that are ontologically and fixedly different from each other. This idea is commonly coupled with a dimorphic sexual binary and a presumption of heteronormativity, meaning that assigned biological sex (male/female), gender identity (man/woman), gender roles (masculine/feminine), and a heterosexual orientation are assumed to sort human beings into two complementary groups whose members pair off as husbands and wives and form families.

³Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, ME: Liturgical Press, 1993), xiv–xv.

Orthodox mostly hold these views along with members or the larger society in which these ideas feed into nation building, marketing, and economies. But within the Orthodox sphere, these ideas are often seen as a part of the Holy Tradition. And we back them up with selective proof texts from the bible, from the patristic corpus, and from more recent arguments made by Orthodox theologians and bishops. These decorations give gender essentialism an air of ancient faith. We hear people say that it has been this way since the beginning. And as proof, we point to texts from the Genesis accounts of creation:

So, God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:27)

Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

When we read these passages through our contemporary lenses of gender essentialism and its particular version of complementarity, we end up with the basis for an argument for marriage and family between opposite-sex couples. From this kernel, we then build the nuclear family as “the little church” in the words of John Chrysostom. Then we further build godly societies based on these so-called “family values.”

Throughout the twentieth century, Orthodox theologians have made further arguments for gender essentialism and complementarity. The relationship between husband and wife is an image reflecting Christ and his Bride, the Church. Many theologians have gone as far as to read an analogy between the Son and the Spirit in the Holy Trinity, the two hands of the Father in the world, and man and woman, who come together to form the visible image of the invisible Father. While they are mostly careful to repeat the ancient patristic teachings that God transcends male and female, they continue to describe the work of

the Son and the Holy Spirit in terms of masculine and feminine activities.

Gender essentialism, now dressed in the words of the Scriptures and the Fathers, is the basis for most all of our relationships. And any person who steps outside of the expected cultural norms becomes not only socially deviant, but a sinner. And unrepentant sinners are then further labelled as heretics and apostates. There are, of course, a few exceptions. Orthodox still make exceptions for monastic vocations and make allowances for those who are not yet married among the laity. However, the pressure is strong for those who have not taken a vow of celibacy to pair off, form a family, and continue in the norm.

In the early Christian context, informed by the standards of philosophical and medical ideas of the day, human beings were not viewed in the fixed gender binary that is so common to us today. Rather, Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, as well as Aristotelian thought, conceived of human beings on a scale of greater to lesser perfection. Men were considered more perfect specimens of humanity—stronger, harder, warmer, less moist. Women were less perfect humans who had failed to live up to the high standards of manhood. They were weaker, softer. They had less heat and more moisture. In addition to these physical differences, men were believed to be more virtuous and morally superior to women. Men lived in the world of the intellect. Women lived at the level of the material and the sensate. Men could resist temptations and passions that women could not. However, the early Christian tradition held out hope for these weaker females. Through ascetic practice, they too could become manly.

Far from stable, masculinity and maleness were constantly performed in the ancient world and could be lost. Appearances could be deceiving. A man might be bearded and muscular, yet ancient physiognomists could discern in his speech, carriage, and demeanour the truth of his internal world. This was important because one enters into business dealings with true men,

those who are trustworthy and disciplined. Our own worldview reverses the ancient view. For the ancients, bodies were the epiphenomena of deeper, inner realities. But for us, biological substrates form the basis of our concept of sex, then gender then flows from the body.

Gender essentialism in contemporary Orthodoxy has its roots in a variety of sources that were incorporated into nineteenth-century German Romanticism. These include the androgyne of Plato's *Symposium*, ideas of pre-incarnate male and female paired souls in Lurianic Kabbalah, and the writings of the German mystic Jakob Böhme. This potent mixture fuelled Romantic notions of love between male and female principles that inspired Russian Orthodox thinkers such as Soloviev and Bulgakov. It also influenced the German psychoanalytic tradition of Freud and Jung that were further read into the theological anthropologies of Nikolai Berdiaev and Pavel Evdokimov. While writers such as Soloviev and Bulgakov name and discuss at length the extra-Orthodox sources that inspired their thoughts on gender, more recent Orthodox thinkers who espouse these ideas (e.g., Thomas Hopko, Bradley Nassif) appear to be oblivious to their origins.

I am not suggesting that we reject gender essentialism solely on the basis of its origins in extra-Orthodox thought. Orthodoxy does not exist within a vacuum. From the very beginning, the Fathers were often well versed in the cultural and philosophical writings of their context. Sometimes the language and ideas imported from the broader culture closely resemble their uses in the larger society from which they are drawn. Sometimes the Fathers modified and redeployed vocabulary and concepts in new ways to express Christian sensibilities. This can also be said of Orthodoxy's encounters with German Romanticism, as well as its interactions with other contemporary philosophical movements.

While I am not suggesting that we reject the gender essentialist paradigm that correlates men with the Son and women with

the Holy Spirit because of its inspiration in German Romanticism, I still propose that we reject it. In all of its formulations, from Bulgakov to Hopko, Orthodox versions of gender essentialism relates all women to the one hypostasis of the Spirit, while relating all men back to the one hypostasis of the Son. In the process, the uniqueness and non-interchangeability of each human person is obscured. Instead of seeing unrepeatable persons, we see only men and women. And with this comes expected roles and assumed gifts for each based not on who she or he is created to be, but rather based on whether we happen to read each as a man or a woman. A one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that denies the diversity and wonder of God's creation.

We often are unaware of the gender essentialist lens through which we view scripture, the patristic corpus, and the world more broadly. We assume it is part of the ancient tradition of the Church when it is anything but. As we continue our discussion of sexuality, it is essential that we cultivate our awareness of the historical contingency and recent development of our paradigm. Gender essentialism shapes not only our questions around on the aetiology of homosexuality, but also our characterizations of same-sex desire, the idea that reparative therapy can produce a heterosexual orientation, our sacramental understandings of marriage, our definitions of family, our values in rearing children (including adoption practices), and our treatment of transgender and gender nonbinary persons within the Church. With so much at stake, the burden of proof rests on advocates of essentialism to evaluate carefully the fruits of the system, taking into account the well-being of LGBTQ+ persons whose lives are often disproportionately affected by the system's demands.

— E —

In this project about sexual morality, we shall need to consider whether adultery, remarriage after divorce (outside the limits

recognised by the Orthodox church) premarital intercourse, homosexual sexual acts, and contraception are always sinful, as has traditionally been believed; or whether Christian tradition is in error on one or more of these matters. We shall also need to consider whether gender “transition”, a new kind of act similar to those listed, is sinful. We need to have a clear view about this *before* we develop a view about whether and to what extent the state should discourage such acts (for example, by not endorsing gay marriage), and what attitude the church should take to towards those who commit sexual sins.

1. Moral principles are principles about which states of affairs are intrinsically good, and which actions are morally good or bad, and which among the latter are moral obligatory or obligatory not to do (= “wrong”). A moral obligation is an obligation to someone else; and we wrong that someone if we fail to perform the obligation. To wrong God is to sin. The fundamental moral principles are necessary truths, independent of the existence, nature or will of God. I shall call states of affairs which are good in all possible circumstances intrinsically good, and actions which are obligatory in all possible circumstances intrinsically obligatory. It is intrinsically obligatory to keep our just promises (that is, promises which we had the right to make), and so that adultery and divorce without the consent of the other spouse is wrong. (And to wrong another human is also to wrong God and so to sin, since to wrong a creature is to wrong their creator—just as to hurt a child is to hurt their parents.) It is also a fundamental moral principle that if we are given a gift by some benefactor on condition that we use it for a certain purpose or do not use it at all (that is, he forbids us to use it for any other purpose), it would be wrong to use it for some other purpose. God is our creator; and everything we are and have is a gift from God, except those few gifts given to us by others, principally our parents, whose ability to give their gifts is itself a gift from God. Hence to use one of God’s gifts for a different purpose other than the one for

which God gave it to us is to wrong God. Our sexual organs are a gift from God. Hence it would be sinful to use them in a way forbidden by him. For 1900 years the Christian Church taught with virtual unanimity, as a central moral doctrine, that remarriage after divorce (with possible exceptions), sexual intercourse outside marriage, and homosexual acts, are sinful. Given that the Church founded by Jesus has authority to tell us which acts God has forbidden, it would seem to follow that all these actions are sinful.

2. But in order to rebut the objection that God, being perfectly good, would never have forbidden such actions and so that the Church cannot have any such authority, it is necessary to show what good reasons God might have for forbidding them. It is highly plausible that a loving marriage between a man and a woman, facilitated by them having sexual desires for each other, involving lifelong commitment to each other, producing children who share the genes of both parents as a result of a loving act between them of a kind which they have had and will have with no one else, nurturing and educating those children to have happy and God-directed lives is a very good thing; and so that the reason why God gave us sexual organs is to make such a marriage possible. So, it is highly probable that God would forbid any actions which in any way make it difficult for humans to have such a marriage.

3. It seems evident to me that the prevalence of remarriage after divorce (outside certain limits) and non-marital intercourse in society in general, and especially any such practice among Christians, makes it difficult for couples to have the sort of marriage described. Not merely does the prevalence of such practices make it much easier for those in existing marriages to maintain lifelong fidelity to each other, but it makes those considering marriage think of it as a possibly temporary union and so already to be not properly serious about the commitment that it involves. While the prevalence of divorce and non-marital

intercourse can have the bad effects mentioned above, whether or not there is a God or he forbids such acts, it can hardly be an intrinsic obligation to other people not to divorce and not to have non-marital intercourse. But for the command of God, it would be at best supererogatory so to do.

4. Fairly evidently, homosexual acts of an already married person would be damaging to marriage. But it needs to be shown that the prevalence of homosexual practices among those not in a (normal) marriage is also damaging to marriage. It would not be damaging if every human was totally, permanently, and unchangeably either heterosexual or homosexual in their sexual orientation. But this is not the case. Some humans have orientations of both kinds, some humans are homosexually orientated for a time and then become heterosexually orientated (and vice versa), and there is—to my mind—credible anecdotal evidence that some sexual orientations are changeable by outside intervention. There is a lot of conflicting evidence on these matters, provided by surveys and collections of experiences sponsored by organisations with conflicting “agendas”; and it is difficult to avoid the impression that no serious well-funded long-term impartial scientific investigation has been conducted into the causes and possible “cures” for homosexuality—even to raise the issue of whether, homosexuality can be “cured” could be damaging for a scientist’s reputation. But the serious work being done on the causes and possible cure of paedophilia which is a similar (but of course far worse) propensity, suggests that some of the causes and possible cures of it can to a considerable extent be discovered; and we should press for similar work to be done on homosexuality. Meanwhile we should listen to what our psychological colleagues in this project have to say about this. Probably most psychologists would agree that there are many different influences, both within the womb and within the subsequent environment, which influence sexual orientation. Sexual orientation cannot be caused by merely genetic factors—since most

identical twins of homosexuals are not themselves homosexual; but it may be that other causal influences in the womb also make a difference. There is serious evidence that for every older brother a boy's chance of eventually becoming gay increases from 2% with no older brothers to an eventual 33%. But of course, even that may be due to social factors, and even if due to factors in the womb is compatible with subsequent social factors being the primary determinant of sexual orientation. But in my view the limited and contestable evidence suggests that it is probable that many humans can develop homosexual orientations partly as a result of the direct influence or example of others and so make it impossible for them to enter into a normal marriage in which children are produced as a result of a loving act between spouses. However, it is also possible that many other humans have a total permanent unchangeable homosexual orientation. But unless it becomes evident which humans are like that, any example of homosexual behaviour by them could encourage such behaviour in others who are not like that, and so prevent those others from entering into a normal marriage. So, unless and until science has identified who have a permanent unchangeable homosexual orientation, it is plausible to suppose that God has forbidden all homosexual acts.

5. While the prevalence of divorce, non-marital intercourse, and homosexual acts can have the bad effects mentioned above, whether or not there is a God or he forbids such acts, it can hardly be an intrinsic obligation to all other people not to divorce, not to have non-marital intercourse and not to perform homosexual acts. People have the right to live lives as they choose, so long as they do not use physical force to influence others. But for the command of God, it would be at best supererogatory not to do these things (though perhaps it might be obligatory not to do these things, if doing them would have a bad non-physical influence on our children.) But God has the right to command us to live in difficult ways for the sake of others. For the importance

of not living in such ways, *even if* those ways are morally permissible for you, as to have a bad influence on others, recall I Corinthians 8. St Paul points out that there is nothing intrinsically wrong in eating food purportedly sacrificed to idols—since those idols do not exist, and so by eating such food his readers would not be honouring idols. Nevertheless, Paul warns his readers, if thereby they influence someone else to eat such food who does believe that idols exist, they influence him to join in the worship of idols whom he believes really to exist, and so to commit a grave sin. If God has prohibited remarriage after divorce (outside certain limits), non-marital intercourse, and all homosexual acts, he has imposed a considerable burden on some for the benefit of others. But it is a privilege to be used by God as a means of benefiting others. It does not follow immediately from such acts being sinful, that the state should prohibit them, or that the church should discipline those who commit them in any particular way.

6. There is one type of sexual action, strongly condemned by the church in the past, which—I think—should not be regarded as sinful today. That is the use of artificial contraception within a normal marriage to limit the number and frequency of new births. One of Augustine's rules for interpreting Scripture is "to recognise that some commands are given to all in common, others to particular classes of persons". The grounds for supposing a command to have application only to particular classes must surely include the ground that the only reason that we can see for God to issue some command arises from the particular circumstances of that class. In the case where the class concerned is people living in earlier days, it needs to be shown that the circumstances in which God would have reason to issue the command no longer hold. For 1000 years Christians believed that God had forbidden usury, that is lending money on interest. This command obviously served a good purpose at a time when most lending was by rich people to poor people to enable them

to feed their families; it would have been cruel to demand not merely repayment of the loan but additional interest as well. But since the developments of sophisticated financial arrangements in the 14th century much lending has been by people of limited means to richer people to enable them to develop enterprises which would make them even richer. In such circumstances those of limited means are surely entitled to payment for making their money available to the rich. Hence Christian tradition naturally came to see much lending on interest as no longer sinful, and thereby—in my view—correctly interpreted the limited character of the prohibition on usury.

Now the point of God forbidding contraception (if he did forbid this) was presumably because—as Genesis 1 reports God saying to Adam to Eve—he wanted humans to “be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). It is plausible to suppose that if contraception had been practiced widely in early centuries (when so many children died before reaching adolescence), the human race would have died out. But plausibly humans are now much nearer to “filling the earth”. If contraception were not practiced now, the earth would soon become very crowded, and indeed too crowded to grow enough food to feed all humans. And that, I suggest, is a reason why, as with usury, the circumstances which made the command a good one for God to issue no longer hold; and so it is plausible to suppose that contraception within marriage is no longer wrong.

7. The Catholic “natural law” tradition has sought to show that sexual actions condemned by the Church are “disordered” or “unnatural” actions, and for that reason wrong. The best contemporary statement of this tradition known to me is Alexander Pruss’s book *One Body*. Pruss argues that bodily organs have “functions” and they “strive” or “try” to “fulfil” their functions. For example, Pruss argues, the penis has the function in intercourse of omitting semen into a vagina which it strives to do; and to prevent it from doing this is unnatural and so

wrong.⁴ It seems to me that to “strive” or “try” is an intentional action which only intentional agents can do; and that even if I am mistaken about this, it still doesn’t follow that it would be morally wrong to do what is unnatural. The account which I have given locates the immorality of most of the kinds of sexual action traditionally condemned, not in their being “unnatural”, but in the command of God (issued for a good reason) not to do them.

8. Finally, we need to consider the morality of the one kind of sexual action on which Christian tradition has nothing to say, because it has only been performed within the last 15 or so years—gender transition, by which I mean taking drugs or undergoing surgery so as to induce permanent changes in the sexual organs. (I do not include dressing or otherwise behaving as one of the different sex.) It seems to me fairly well agreed that can be a bad thing for many young people to allow themselves to undergo gender transition, because the desire to have a different sex is often characteristic only of a stage of their lives and there is no way to discern which are the people in whom that desire will never fade. Hence the example of some people transitioning, influencing others to do so, will lead to considerable harm to those others. They will not be able to enjoy the benefits of a normal marriage. It therefore follows that if God forbids homosexual acts because of its influence on others leading them not to be able to enjoy the benefits of a normal marriage, one would expect God to forbid gender transition (even of older people—to the extent to which it can be effective in them) for just the same reason; and so we can plausibly suppose that he does forbid it.

⁴Thus “it appears to be a necessary condition of something’s being a body part that it have service to the body as a purpose . . . It must actually be striving . . . to promote this purpose” (Alexander Pruss, *One Body: An Essay in Christian Sexual Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 99.

— F —

The Christian Churches have suffered two great diminutions of authority in the modern age. The first occurred during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during which period politics and economic life was emancipated from religious oversight. However, the Church retained its jurisdiction over family and personal life, which it asserted—by way of compensation, perhaps—more jealously than ever.

The second diminution took place much more suddenly than the first, in the 1960s and 70s. During these decades, the laws governing marriage, abortion, contraception, pornography, suicide and homosexuality, which in most Western countries had reflected Christian teaching, were redrawn on secular foundations. The churches were thus faced with an uncomfortable dilemma. Either they could adapt to the new civic consensus, reinterpreting their scriptures and traditions in its light, or they could uphold their traditional teaching, thereby alienating themselves from mainstream secular opinion. Roughly speaking, the Protestant state churches in Europe have taken the first path, while Protestant fundamentalists, the Vatican, and the Orthodox Church hierarchy have taken the second.

Homosexuality has been a particular flashpoint. For complex reasons, affirmative treatment of gays and other minority sexual and gender identities has become a fundamental dogma of the new liberalism—a new public orthodoxy, if you like. Defenders of the traditional Christian teaching are liable to find themselves ostracised, “no-platformed” and—in some countries—prosecuted. Tim Fannon, the former leader of Liberal-Democrat Party in the UK and an evangelical Christian, resigned in 2017, primarily because of the pressure put on him to disown his church’s stance on homosexuality. In his resignation statement he claimed that “To be a political leader—especially of a progressive, liberal party in 2017—and to live as a committed Christian,

to hold faithfully to the Bible's teaching, has felt impossible for me." Last month, Oxford students petitioned for the dismissal of the Catholic legal philosopher John Finnis on the grounds that his stance on homosexuality constituted "harassment" and "discrimination," though Finnis' statements on the subject do little more than repeat official Catholic teaching. The tendency that today calls itself "liberal" is anything but liberal; it is a new form of secular zealotry.

What should be the position of the Orthodox Church on these matters? I cannot see how a church claiming to base itself on scripture, as interpreted by the fathers, can honestly regard acts of same-sex intercourse as anything other than sinful. All the authorities—I could quote the well-known passages in Leviticus, Romans, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, and many others—are unanimous in condemning the "sin of Sodom". There is variation concerning the grounds of this condemnation: most Biblical and Patristic writers regard homosexual sex as "against nature", but some, notably St. Paul, also associate it with idolatry, perhaps because they envisage our relationship with the true God as analogous to that of bride and bridegroom. But as to the condemnation itself, there is complete unanimity.

Those who argue for the revocation of the Church's prohibition of sodomy commonly make one or more of four claims:

1. The relevant passages in the Bible and in the Church Fathers do not mean what they appear to mean. I won't dwell on this argument. It seems to me patently dishonest.

2. Although the relevant passages mean what they appear to mean, we are entitled to ignore them because they contradict experience or reason. This, for example, is the position of the Roman Catholic scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, who has written:

I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says through appeals to linguistic or

cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says [However], we must state our grounds for standing in tension with the clear commands of Scripture and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us.⁵

This is at least honest, but its method of reasoning is not one that the Orthodox Church can endorse. Johnson's appeal is to "experience", considered as something independent of scripture and tradition. The standard Orthodox view is that personal experience, though potentially a source of truth, needs to be interpreted and corrected in the light of scripture and tradition, which is simply a record of the experience of Christians of previous ages. "The object of faith—its dogmatic content—always exceeds the actual religious experience", wrote Sergei Bulgakov. "It is an enormous mistake to think (together with the Doukhobors, Quakers, and similar representatives of related anti-dogmatic and anarchic currents in religion) that only the real content of *actual* religious experience or *personal* revelation constitute the object of faith, whereas every *tradition* written or oral, liturgical or ritual, as such contradicts living faith."⁶

A similar response can be made to those who claim that reason requires us to abandon the Church's traditional teaching on gay sex. ("Reason" here might take a Kantian or a utilitarian

⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, "Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture and Experience", *Commonweal*, June 11, 2007, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-0>.

⁶Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, trans. and ed. Thomas Allan Smith (Cambridge/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 28.

form, but the conclusion is the same either way: gay sex does not violate human dignity or diminish public utility, and so is morally permissible.) Those who argue in this way assume a conception of reason that is alien to us. The Orthodox Church is by no means hostile to reason, but it regards it as operating within tradition, not independently of it. The idea of a free-floating, “presuppositionless” use of reason is a creature of the Western European Enlightenment. (It is also a myth, but that is another matter.)

3. A third argument is that the prohibition on gay sex belongs to what is time-bound in the Church’s teaching, as opposed to what is eternal. I see no sense in this distinction. Christian revelation is to be affirmed in toto. Once we start trying to separate out what is “of its time and place” in it, we will soon find ourselves left with nothing in our hands at all, beyond a banal injunction to be nice to people. Christian revelation is not to be judged by the standard of contemporary norms. Contemporary norms are to be judged by the standard of Christian revelation.

The Orthodox Church, it appears to me, has preserved better than others a sense for that “world without end” spoken of in the liturgy. The Protestant churches long ago went down the relativising path, reinterpreting scripture in line with the demands of the emerging commercial society. “The requiring some to part with their possessions, was only a candid forewarning of the first disciples, what their profession of Christianity would probably cost them in those days of persecution”—thus dealt the Scottish Presbyterian minister and Enlightenment philosopher Francis Hutcheson with Christ’s command to “sell all you have.”⁷ It is only logical that those churches which made their peace with the new economic order should now seek an accommodation with the new sexual order. But one would hope for a prouder stance from the Orthodox Church.

⁷Francis Hutcheson, *Reflections Upon Laughter, and Remarks Upon the Fable of the Bees* (Glasgow: R. Urie for Daniel Baxter, 1750), 58–59.

4. The fourth argument is essentially a variant on the third. It points out that the Church's teaching on sodomy was formulated in an age when the concept of "homosexuality" was unknown. "Sodomitical" referred in the first instance to acts of a certain sort, not to personalities of a certain type. Of course, it was recognised that some people went in for sodomy, but that was regarded as no more than a bad habit, akin to an inclination to drink or gamble. But now—so the argument runs—science has discovered that some individuals are born gay. In Christian terms, that means God made them gay, and God, being just, would not endow people with inclinations which they are forbidden to act upon.

I find this all quite unconvincing. Science has not discovered, and is not likely to discover, a "gene for gayness". No doubt there are innate predispositions one way or the other, but everything we know about the power of imitation and habit suggests that the final orientation takes shape gradually, throughout youth, rather than being given once and for all at birth. The avowal of many gay people that they were gay from an early age is not evidence to the contrary—early experiences are easy to interpret retrospectively, especially when there are strong incentives to do so. Homosexuality is a social, not a natural category. And it is, I would add, an unhelpful category, in that it imposes an artificial duality upon the variety and fluidity of sexual desire. Speaking for myself, I am sure that, had I lived in a different time and place, I could have become a pederast in the ancient sense. But I am a "straight" man, so this is taboo for me. Fear of "crossing the line" has led to the disappearance of all sorts of affectionate, quasi-erotic behaviour between men and men and women and women which would otherwise come quite naturally.

All in all, I see no reason for the Church to alter its teaching on sodomy. How priests and confessors choose to enforce that teaching is another matter entirely. Here I see much room for latitude. In many regions of Christendom, gay sex has been de

facto tolerated, as it was (until recently) over most of the Muslim world. It would probably be sensible for the Orthodox hierarchy to adopt a similar policy today. It should certainly not give its blessing to the political campaign against homosexuality which is gathering pace over much of the Orthodox world, along with other symptoms of fascism. We should keep in mind that almost all of us today, gay and straight—including, I suspect, many of us who call ourselves Orthodox—have violated the Church's teachings on sexual matters. One part of this corrupt world has no business wagging its finger at the other. The parable of the mote and the beam should be on our minds.

— G —

I suggest two topics for discussion relating to philosophy and LGBT+ issues. For each I briefly sketch my own view as a starting point for further discussion.

The first topic is the ontology of sexual identity. Several of the most prominent Greek Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus the Confessor, hold that God created human beings as male and female only because of his foreknowledge of the Fall. Specifically, he knew that after the Fall sexuality would be necessary for reproduction. They further hold that among the blessed in heaven such sexual differences are ultimately eliminated. Although they do not draw this conclusion directly, it would seem that on such a view our identity as male or female is an epiphenomenon that does not reflect either God's true intent or our ultimate destiny.

I argue that this view is best seen as a relic of undigested Platonism. For Plato the soul has no intrinsic sexual identity, as shown by the fact that it can be reincarnated in successive lives as male or female. Although the Church Fathers rejected reincarnation, they seem to have retained the assumption that the

soul is intrinsically sexless and that sexual identity is due solely to our present embodiment.

I believe that an alternative view is available that is both more biblical and fits better with the Church Fathers' holistic understanding of the relationship of body and soul. This alternative view takes seriously the beliefs (commonly held among the Fathers) that the soul (a) is created simultaneously with the body, and (b) develops its active capacities only in and through their bodily expression. Given these premises, it follows that the sexual identity of the embryo, as determined by its chromosomal structure, plays a part in determining the development of the active capacities of the associated soul. Barring unusual circumstances, a male embryo will develop a male soul, and a female embryo a female soul. Here sexual identity attaches to the soul, not in virtue of its original creation (although this too may be possible), but in virtue of the way its body has enabled it to develop certain innate capacities, while others have been left in a purely potential state.

This view has much to recommend it independently of any bearing upon LGBT+ issues. However, if it is correct it does provide a helpful basis for thinking about issues of sexual identity, particularly as they relate to transgenderism.

The other topic I propose is that of the spiritual value of observing the biblical commandments. Many people think of such commandments simply as what God requires of us in order to achieve salvation. Such a view lends itself to a kind of legalism, in that one's spiritual life becomes primarily a matter of observing rules merely out of the hope of reward and fear of punishment. Legalism in turn naturally begets its antithesis, a kind of theological minimalism in which divine commandments have no real role to play, other than perhaps that of sparking our critical reflection. (Such minimalism may or may not find other grounds for morality; Kant and Nietzsche are both minimalists in this sense.)

Such a legalistic view of the divine commandments is foreign to the Bible's own outlook. Both the Old and New Testaments instead present the divine commandments under at least two complementary aspects, those of how one comes to know God and how one comes to be known by God. For example, in Psalm 1 it is the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord" who is firmly established before God, whereas "the way of the ungodly shall perish." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to those who did mighty works in his name, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." In both cases, it is obedience to the divine commandments that brings a person into a living relationship with God—one in which that person's own identity comes to be firmly and deeply rooted, rather than "like the chaff that the wind drives away."

To know God and to be known by him is, in a word, to be holy. This is why the Orthodox have traditionally looked to the saints for the authoritative interpretation of the divine commandments. The underlying thought is not that the saints are infallible, but that they are those who have successfully obeyed the commandments in a way that brought them close to God. Hence it is natural to look to them for guidance regarding what the commandments mean and how they are to be obeyed.

There are, of course, other, more modern ways of understanding the divine commandments. I believe that a frank discussion of this issue would help to achieve greater understanding among those on different sides of the LGBT+ debate.

— H —

Questioning the "stability" of the traditional sex/gender identities and roles initially started as an emancipation movement. This was primarily the emancipation from the binary opposition male-female and the corresponding social roles within the patriarchal society. In the work of Judith Butler we find one of

the most influential theories of gender. Since it is likely that her work will be cited more than once during this project, I wanted to briefly reflect upon Butler's gender theory.

Butler begins with the questioning of the "essentialist" pre-suppositions about one's sex/gender identity. (By pointing to the social construction of one's "male" or "female" identities—which is very relevant—Butler is quick to move to a denial of the biological dimension of our sex and gender identities). Gender becomes a fluid (de-essentialized and, by implication, de-biologized) category, which is formed through the interplay of individual's subjective preferences and the broader social context. It seems that Butler contextualizes the gender issue as 1) political by definition and 2) as an issue of emancipation. In this sense, gender politics can be defined as a specific approach to the issue of gender identities which affirms the immanent instability of one's gender identity and its fluidity.

What I want to question in this presentation are the political implications of gender policies in today's society and the present ideological context. I want to explore whether or not gender politics defined this way still have a subversive and emancipatory potential within the present day social and political (power) structures.

My main thesis is that gender politics have lost their subversive and emancipatory potential in most of the Western countries. Gender identity appears an immanently political issue (given the social and cultural context which is understood as constitutive of it) and yet the affirmation of its fluidity is remarkably non-subversive vis-à-vis the contemporary capitalist system. In fact, one could claim that the very logic of gender politics is very compatible with the contemporary capitalist system.

Gender politics are compatible with understanding human personal identity (an important part of which is gender identity) as a commodity. Just as the neo-liberal, technologically-centered capitalist era exploits the idea that our identity is a

“free” and “open” structure, which can be changed, advanced and manipulated (as long as the individual remains within the corporate-dominated universe), through the strategies such as “reinventing” ourselves, creating our virtual “selves” via social networks, etc., gender politics fit the bill—one can be gay in the morning, end the day as transgender, wake up as bisexual . . . However, no matter how many pluses we add to the LGBTQ one still wakes up, every morning, in the same oppressive capitalist system.

The “freedom” to “reinvent” ourselves, to “freely” manipulate our personal identities is there to mask the real impotence and passivity vis-à-vis the (real) power structures in a similar way in which the presence of dozens and hundreds of “different” (but actually the same) products on the shelves of our supermarkets are there to mask the fact that there is no real choice—all the “free” choices are possible only within the corporate dominated market. Forms of oppression are thus presented as forms of liberation.

Looking from a broader perspective—contemporary gender politics come out of a distinctly individualistic tradition, and as such they appear as a natural ally of capitalism. To quote Sheldon Wolin “Marx has been only half-right: capitalism not only deformed the worker qua worker but also qua citizen. In its structure, ideology, and human relationships capitalism was producing human beings unfitted for democratic citizenship: self-interest, exploitive, competitive, striving for inequalities, fearful of downward mobility. One’s neighbor was either a rival or a useful object.”⁸

Gender politics are particularly useful in this sense because they are promoted as the real agent of freedom and emancipation, while in actual reality we see their impotence to challenge

⁸Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1960]), 597.

the power structures and their reluctance to address most of the pressing issues we are facing in our societies (including poverty, the collapse of the healthcare system and the system of education, corruption of the judicial system, exploitation of the poor, ethnic and racial minorities, etc.).

This can be illustrated by a concrete example: Serbia has a lesbian prime minister. Looking abstractly that should be a positive sign, a sign that Serbian society became very progressive, liberal, tolerant etc. If one asks: Has anything changed as a result of this? Have the living conditions improved for sexual minorities? The answer is—no. Her being lesbian functions as another commodity, another product of the political advertisement industry, which functions cynically: everything that can be employed (everything that, in a given moment, looks good from a marketing point of view), will be used in order to solidify the political power of the top echelons of the political pyramid (in the case of Serbia in the hands of one man—yes, one man, not one woman!).

Paradoxically enough, gender politics often do not even help sexual/gender minorities. For instance, to say to someone who is gay, who faces real problems in their lives (many of them economic in nature), that they should embrace the instability and fluidity of their gender identity, that they should be open to the possibility of waking up in the morning as a transgender or (why not—following the same logic) as heterosexual, would be cynical to say at least, if not cruel.

Gender politics tend to reduce the identity of the human person to one's gender identity. In doing this, what gets completely obscured is the fact that one can be gay or transsexual and still find oneself at "class war" with rich and powerful gay or transsexual individuals. This is another example how gender politics can function as a sedative, or a modern-day version of the "opium of the people."

To conclude: advocating sexual minority rights in certain social context (such as Russia for instance) is an act of protest, subversion, and emancipation. Gender politics with the LGBTQ+ ideology in the West, willingly or not, serve as a useful commodity which gives the people impression about how “liberal,” “progressive” and “free” we are, while most of the people still remain obedient servants to the political and financial oligarchies.

— J —

The presentation deals with the question of sex binary in public and scientific discourse and as a starting point it takes the public dispute which took place recently in the US on the issue of sex binary. The dispute was sparked by a leaked memo of the Human Service Department which contained a proposal to define what is meant by sex in the Title IX and considered it as binary and biologically determined.⁹

Alongside the public outrage, the proposal was confronted with a statement issued by the US based Society for the Study of the Evolution (SSE) which stated that instead of being viewed as binary “sex should be more accurately viewed as a continuum”.¹⁰

Recent trends in both public and scientific discourses see sex binary (still recognized by the World Health Organization)¹¹ as not inclusive enough of the various sexual and gender identities and, therefore, discriminative. The point is being made that we

⁹Erica L. Green, Katie Benner and Robert Pear, “‘Transgender’ Could be Defined out of Existence Under Trump Administration,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/21/us/politics/transgender-trump-administration-sex-definition.html>.

¹⁰“Policy: Letter RE: Scientific Understanding of Sex and Gender,” <http://www.evolutionsociety.org/news/display/2018/10/30/letter-re-scientific-understanding-of-sex-and-gender/>.

¹¹“Sexual and Reproductive Health: Defining Sexual Health”, *World Health Organization*, https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/.

ought to drop sex binary if we are to show respect and grant civil rights to people who do not fit in it. The arguments I put forth are the following:

- a. The scientific arguments for the negation of the sex binary seem to be insufficient and, therefore, biological sex should (still) scientifically be seen as binary.
- b. The case against sex binary in public and scientific discourse is based on the assumption that we should somehow derive our ethical standards from the biological facts, which I deem to be false.

Sex binary

I believe that the distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a sociological one is useful and should be maintained.¹² Unlike gender, which in many cultures is not regarded as binary, sex is binary, and I believe that scientific data prove so.

To challenge sex binary the cases of intersex persons are put forth in which not all biological traits which are commonly used to determine sex (chromosomes, reproductive system, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics) align to form a single category of either male or female. A case was made by Anne Fausto-Sterling in the early 1990s that sex should be regarded as a continuum. She based this proposal on an estimate that 1.7% of people can be classified as intersex. Around the same time and along the same lines, Judith Butler famously claimed that besides gender sex should also be regarded as a social construct.

It has been shown, however, that Fausto-Sterling's estimate is based on a rather loose definition of the intersex. Alternative and more adequate definition was proposed by Leonard Sax which reduced the percentage to only 0.018% (2: 10.000

¹²“Genomic Resource Centre: Gender and Genetics”, *World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/>.

births). Moreover, Sax rightfully pointed out that Fausto-Sterling failed to differentiate the terms normal and natural. Despite being perfectly natural, intersex should not necessarily be regarded as normal and therefore urges us to reconsider our binary classification.

Biology and ethics

I believe that the attempts to discard the sex binary and introduce instead a notion of continuum are based on the assumption that we need the sex to be a continuum in order for its various social expressions in individuals to be respected and have their legal rights protected. This assumption seems to be shared by both biological determinists and social constructivists.

I believe that we should disregard the assumption that we need to derive our ethics out of biological facts, i.e. that biology should be used prescriptively in ethics. This line of thought is based, I believe, on three fallacies: appeal to nature (which some identify with naturalistic fallacy), moralistic fallacy and (what I call) constructivist fallacy. The presupposition that whatever happens in nature is good entails the following:

- a. The existence of intersex in nature and in human population should make us realize that the diversity of sexes is normative and desired. To a great extent, the same applies to sexual practices; (Appeal to nature) or
- b. The respect for the individuals who are biologically intersex, as well as for those who are transgender should make us recognize that their existence is proscribed by nature (Moralistic fallacy).
- c. The variety of human genders and sexual practices, as well as the ambiguous biological data on the nature of the sexes and their expressions should make us realize that there is no

such thing as a biological sex, but that it is also socially constructed (Constructivist fallacy).

To avoid making these fallacies does not imply assuming that we should neglect biological facts or exclude them from any debates—theological ones included—on sexual identity. Rather, it means that biology (and medicine) should do its own thing—research as objectively and rigorously as possible into the issues of sexual identity and practices. Biology and medicine should inform and, to a certain extent, guide and correct our reasoning about sex and gender—in the fields of social practices, politics, as well as theology.

— K —

1. Nature versus Nurture: The Etiology and Occurrence of LGBTQ+ Phenomena

A. The conversation of choice as defined by behavior or attraction: For most people in the general population, the defining factor regarding whether a person is considered straight or gay is behavior. If a person engages in same-sex sexual activity, then they are generally defined by cisgender, straight people as gay. However, LGBTQ+ people themselves most frequently define their own orientations by their attractions, which can be further nuanced by making other differentiations within attraction, such as a difference between sexual attraction and romantic attraction. Therefore, we often see that discussions between cisgender, straight individuals and LGBTQ+ individuals regarding whether LGBTQ+ phenomena are naturally occurring or environmental result in the two parties talking past each other, as this fundamental definition is overlooked.

B. Observations which overwhelmingly indicate that variances in sexual orientation and gender identity are naturally occurring phenomena: Vast amounts of research has been done in the

area of the etiology of LGBTQ+ phenomena. Please see Simon LeVay's book, *Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why*, as one introductory source. It is a literature review of thousands of studies on this subject. As Dr. LeVay states, what the literature is now showing us can be summarized in the following eight areas.

1. Commonality of homosexual behaviour among nonhuman animals: Same-sex sexual behaviour and gender non-conformity are not exclusive to human beings. These phenomena occur across nature, where psychological environmental factors are non-existent.

2. Mental traits ("gender"): Throughout the lifespan, LGBTQ+ individuals differ from their cisgender, straight same-sex counterparts in a variety of ways which can be generally termed as "gender specific." These differences frequently (but not always) manifest during childhood as differences in gender-specific play (such as boys who eventually identify as gay feeling more comfortable playing with girls). It is important to note here that the level of distress around these issues in the child are distinctive from children who eventually age out of these aspects of development. For instance, transgender children frequently show the first signs of distress when forced into gender-specific types of dress or play and especially bathroom usage in early childhood. A transgender child will frequently be so distressed that they are virtually incapacitated. They exhibit symptoms such as bedwetting, extreme inconsolable tantrums, acting out in many ways, and even suicidal ideation and attempts (like jumping from a high place or running in front of a car) as young as age 4–5.

3. Hormones in gestation: Evidence suggests that the levels of hormones related to sex and gender in circulation during gestation influence these gender-specific traits.

4. Structural and functional differences in brains of gay and straight people: We are now understanding that our brains are sexed just like the rest of our bodies. Just as men and women typically display differences in body size and shape, amounts

of hair growth, muscle size, etc., in the same way, our brains are also sexed. There are both structural and functional differences in the brains of gay and straight people, such as (but not limited to): the size of cell group INAH3 in gay men, in the region of the hypothalamus which deals with male-typical sexual behavior; gender-shifts in the size of the left and right cerebral hemispheres; both gay men and lesbians are gender-shifted in their brain responses to compounds thought to be sex-specific chemosignals, as well as functional connectivity of the amygdala; lesbians and gay men are gender-shifted in their hormonal responses to stress.

5. Structural and functional differences in bodies of gay and straight people: Studies are showing that differences exist in the structure and function of the bodies of gay and straight people. Some examples include ratio of limb to trunk length, finger length ratio, facial structure, gait, and voice quality.

6. Birth order influences: studies such as those of the “older brother” phenomenon show correlations between birth order and same sex attraction in gay men. This type of research is showing that there are biological mechanisms (as opposed to social mechanisms) with relation to birth order which influence sexual orientation in men.

7. Genetics: Evidence shows that, while we have not isolated a “gay gene,” genes and specific chromosomal anomalies do influence gender and sexual orientation. For instance, while the statistical norms are XX and XY (what we consider male and female), there are anomalies such as XXY, XYY, and XXYY, which correlate with gender non-conformity.

8. Intersex individuals: We must also be attentive to the studies of intersex individuals, which speak directly to the feeling of being trapped in the wrong body. Studies show high rates of intersex individuals who were assigned the sex which is inconsistent with their chromosomal sex who ended up having gender harmonization surgery in order to align with how their bodies

and minds felt prior to knowing of their chromosomal anomalies. There are also studies of intersex individuals who desired a medical transition to the sex opposite of their assigned sex prior to knowing that they were intersex at all.

As a result of the fact that there is no one etiological source, something else we also now know from research is that sexual orientation and gender are not well conceptualized in static categories or boxes which are ever unchanging. While Kinsey defined sexual orientation as dependent on behavior, which we've established is likely not the most accurate method of definition, his concept of sexuality on a spectrum, articulated on a scale of 0–6, is a more useful way to conceptualize and one I frequently use with clients, as it helps them conceptualize themselves when they can't find a "category" which suits them. It is also worth noting in this discussion, that many (usually indigenous) cultures recognize more than two genders. Most popularly, though certainly not the only ones, Samoans recognize a third gender of *fa'afafine*, and some Native American cultures recognize as many as 26 genders.

Regarding occurrence, numbers differ in this area, but most commonly bisexuality is reported in about 0.5% of men and 2.8% of women; and homosexuality is reported in about 1.9% of men and 1.4% of women. It is argued that external factors tend to affect the accuracy of these self-report numbers. It is thus argued by some that the prevalence may be more accurately in the 4–5% range. Some have even argued for numbers as high as 22–23%, especially with respect to bisexuality. Either way, it can be conservatively stated that over 2% of men and over 4% of women report that they are NOT exclusively heterosexual but experience some sort of variance in sexual orientation.

C. Weaponizing nature versus nurture

1. Defending science: The extent of current research is such that, in addition to identifying influences on sexual orientation and gender biologically, we can also acknowledge and rule out

longstanding myths. In addition, we must also give voice to the extent of the research, as doing so will by default defend the research against the attacks of individuals who would use incomplete or misinformation to attempt to discredit the research because it threatens their belief system.

i. Influence of early sexual experiences: Most young people develop an awareness of their sexual orientation while they are still virgins or prior to sexual experiences with partners of their preferred sex. Thus, their orientation could not have been determined by the sex of their first partners.

ii. Childhood abuse: Gay men and lesbians are at higher risk for abuse during childhood. Heightened risk results at least in part from reaction of parents and others to children's gender nonconformity, but still accounts for only about one-third of the increased risk. While one study concluded that some of the additional risk comes from the abuse, that study depended on unusual statistical techniques and was later rebutted and disproven. The weight of the evidence does not support this notion.

iii. Gender learning: This is the search for how people might "learn" their orientations. Studies of intersex individuals who were assigned a gender at birth which was contrary to their genetic gender show that the rates of reversion to their genetic gender are high, despite having "learned" their gender and orientation to be the assigned, opposite gender. This heavily suggests that gender is inborn and not learned. Additionally, if gender and sexual orientation are learned, then LGBTQ+ individuals would be expected to have LGBTQ+ parents, who would have modelled gender behavior that influenced the individual's gender learning, and LGBTQ+ parents would be expected to have LGBTQ+ children for the same reason. But this is not the case. Most LGBTQ+ individuals have straight parents, and most LGBTQ+ parents have straight children.

iv. Choice: If people choose to be gay, then they could presumably choose NOT to be gay. But this is not consistent with

the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals or empirical evidence. It further defies logic, as many LGBTQ+ individuals will tell you that they have gone through periods in their lives of wishing and praying that they could be straight, and even trying through various means (such as so-called conversion therapy, a highly unethical, harmful, and empirically debunked form of therapy which attempted to change the sexual orientation of gay people) to be straight because their suffering is so great.

v. In defense of science: We've entered a period of time when people are no longer trusting of scientific fact and data. Because of the vast, overwhelming, and now instantly accessible nature of information, one can quickly and easily access "studies," articles, blog posts, or any other manner of dis-information written by purported experts to defend against legitimate scientific research. Even research which is legitimate can be efficiently cherry-picked and misrepresented to convince others to ignore or reject overwhelming legitimate evidence from reputable institutions because it contradicts certain previously held beliefs, the rejection of which is threatening to the very identity of the individual who feels their beliefs to be challenged. It is now commonplace to see individuals and even institutions doing "research" in order to support or prove the conclusion they desire. This, of course, is not good science.

As a result, it is essential to note the extent of legitimate research on LGBTQ+ phenomena. It is likely the most studied aspect of psychology. Homonegative individuals will frequently decry research which supports the biological theories of etiology, saying it's a "few studies" in "liberal institutions." However, this is not the case. There have been thousands of studies since at least the 1920's, across thousands of institutions worldwide, conservative and liberal alike. For example, LeVay's book alone cites around 1,000 studies about LGBTQ+ phenomena. Those studies cover everything from the ridiculous to the essential in this conversation.

It is shocking to realize how much time, effort, and money has been spent on trying to answer the question of the etiology of LGBTQ+ phenomena. Even more shocking is what we have done to LGBTQ+ individuals in this process. We have poked and prodded them, examined them, done invasive procedures on them, observed them like lab rats, invaded their lives, violated their privacy, and objectified them to the extreme. As we undertake this conversation of etiology, we must acknowledge this fact, as well as acknowledging that the very undertaking of this conversation itself is further objectifying them and in many cases, compounding the violation and invasion into their lives that they have already experienced and re-traumatizing them.

2. The blame game: the intent of the conversation: The nature versus nurture conversation, in my experience of serving the LGBTQ+ community and professional circles in that context, as well as in theological communities, occurs far more frequently in the theological communities. It has been documented that the nature versus nurture discussion tends to be inextricably linked to beliefs regarding how LGBTQ+ people should be regarded, included, and treated. From a theological perspective, the question of where LGBTQ+ phenomena originate should matter far less than how we treat and include LGBTQ+ individuals, which should be guided by our robust theology of unconditional positive regard and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sadly, the opposite often seems to be true. The answer to the question of etiology, rather, seems to frequently dictate how LGBTQ+ individuals are treated, with uninformed, misinformed, and biased judgments regarding the worthiness of LGBTQ+ individuals based on their perceived adherence to a behavioral code (as opposed to correct belief in Christ) instead being the determining factor. As we undertake this discussion, we must ensure that etiology does not become a judgment-based red herring and attempt to focus our attention on what really matters, which

is the life experiences and well-being of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. Clinical Implications in LGBTQ+ Orthodox Christians of anti-gay sentiments in their religious upbringings and communities

A. The infliction of trauma: Homonegative beliefs, especially ones imposed in messages by a person or institution carrying the immense weight of the authority of God, are frequently ingrained long before a person's identity is fully formed. Many LGBTQ+ Orthodox Christians will state that they learned that being gay or gender non-conforming was sinful long before they knew that they themselves were gay or gender non-conforming. These homonegative beliefs then form the context in which the individual's sexual development and identity development occurs. The repetition of the trauma which results from the realization that one is somewhere along the LGBTQ+ spectrums (in conflict with the now deeply ingrained homonegative beliefs) causes a discordance within the individual.

B. The presence of discordance: Discordance is an incongruent or split state that occurs mentally and emotionally when a person's gender identity, sexual identity, sexual behavior, or sexual orientation is in conflict with other parts of the individual's identity, such as spiritual or moral identity. This split state causes the subcortical brain, which holds strong emotions used to activate the "fight or flight" responses in the limbic system, to be in a state of war with the neocortical brain, which imposes the cognitive homonegative messages against the subcortical brain. The result is, broadly speaking, an ever-growing downward spiral of self-loathing, as the individual feels extreme shame due to the fact that they cannot escape the (very normal) feelings and desires they have, no matter how much they attempt to cognitively think their way out of them.

C. Clinical presentation of discordance: Discordance presents clinically in many ways, including but not limited to: shame, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, attempts, and completions, PTSD-like symptoms (such as nightmares, hyper vigilance, dissociation, and flashbacks), isolation, confusion, major shifts in identity, purpose, and sense of order, an incapability to integrate various parts of the identity into one complete sense of self, extreme existential aloneness and loneliness. Rates of attempted suicide are around 45–50% among transgender individuals alone, as opposed to the general population's rate of around 4.6–5%. Thus, lest the gravity of discussion escape us, this is truly a matter of life or death.

3. Considerations of Power: The Relationship Between the LGBTQ+ Orthodox Christian and the Orthodox Church

It is of paramount importance to consider power dynamics in these discussions, given the history of exclusion, oppression, and suffering they have endured at the hands of the Church, and given the enormity of the power differential between the Church and the LGBTQ+ Orthodox Christian. Where one falls in the power structure of the institution of the Church directly impacts the interpretation of the Canons and other beliefs, the articulation of theology, the decision-making process, the methods of implementation, and the day to day reality of the effects of all of the above. For the most part, our theology is articulated and implemented by cisgender, straight men, not by gay men, transgender individuals, or women, much less lesbian women. When it comes to the development and implementation of a theology of sexuality and gender, we must acknowledge that the group which holds the power to articulate and implement is not the group which must live on a day to day basis with that which is articulated and implemented. The LGBTQ+ Orthodox Christian is in the position of seeking help from the Church, relying on Her knowledge and guidance, trusting Her and Her clergy

with their life and wellbeing. They are thus particularly vulnerable and on the disempowered end of the differential, the size of which is most extreme, considering that on the other end of the differential is God Himself. This power can be seen in three areas, which will be further explored and the implications of which will be articulated in my coming work.

A. Political/Institutional power of the Church: This is the power of the institution to shape public policy and to reach into the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals.

B. Religious authoritative power of the Church: This is the power of the Church to speak with the authority of God Himself, which results in the Church's pronouncements being largely unquestioned and unchallenged by the people.

C. Power of the Clergy: This is what I believe to be the most important manifestation of power, as the person of the clergyman has the authority to implement or relax the Canons. He is also a living icon of Christ and the one who distributes the sacraments (especially confession) and is thus the interpersonal representative of God before his flock. He is the person who directly impacts the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ individuals on behalf of the Church the most. He is also, therefore, able to do the most direct harm.

5

Summary & Commentary

As noted in the Introduction (§1.2), the ten perspectives given above are the individual contributions of scholars to the project's first digital workshop. The contributors were chosen to represent a range of disciplines, approaches, and points of view related to issues of sexual diversity. The discord and lack of cohesion evident between the reports reflects the current state of discourse on sexual diversity within the Orthodox Church though they all assume, in differing ways, the broad theological vision we outlined earlier in the report (§3). A number of key issues arise, of which we wish to highlight four:

5.1 Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics

Each of the contributions demonstrates respect for the authority of Scripture and Tradition, consistent with the outline of Orthodoxy's theological vision given above (§3). But there is wide and deep disagreement about how the authoritative sources of the tradition are to be received, interpreted, and appropriated, so as to reveal the face of Christ in questions concerning sexual diversity.

Several contributors appeal to what might be called a "plain" or "common sense" meaning of Scripture and other authoritative theological texts, building their arguments on what is perceived to be the obvious meaning of key texts from time immemorial, and, in some cases, refusing on principle to engage those opinions which they consider to be manipulations of this obvious

meaning. Such approaches tend to rest on the assumption both that the received teaching and discipline of the Church today is the uniform teaching and discipline of the Church across time and that the formulations of the Church's teaching and discipline have consistent meaning in all contexts. These foundational assumptions or principles mean that the teaching and practice of the Church as derived from Scripture and tradition does not need to be contextualized historically, since it is in any case consistent.

Other contributors devote their entire presentation to the contextualization of Scripture and traditional frameworks and disciplines, demonstrating their commitment to hermeneutic sensitivity and historical methodologies. Such approaches are sceptical that the "plain" meaning of Scripture and authoritative theological texts amounts to more than an expression of contemporary ideas through the language of historical sources. These approaches highlight the histories of ideas and reception of authoritative texts and tend to view the Orthodox tradition as a rich symphonic poem rather than a singular witness to univocal truths. Advocates of such hermeneutically sensitive readings tend to be unwilling to make sweeping statements about the tradition and the scope of their argumentation may therefore appear narrower than those who presume the ready accessibility of the meaning of Scripture and tradition.

5.2 Gender Essentialism & Ontology of Sexuality

Gender essentialism (as is explained above) is the view that human beings fall into two groups (male and female) that are essentially and permanently distinct. Many Orthodox accept this and derivative ideas as part of the Church's traditional teaching and believe them to be essential components of authentic Orthodox anthropology. It is argued (but more often simply asserted) that the Church has always conceived of gender difference in

precisely this way. Scriptural and Patristic texts (especially Gen. 1.27 and commentaries upon it) are deployed as evidence for the consistent teaching of gender essentialism in Christian history. Deviation from this model of sexual difference by Orthodox Christians is regarded as a capitulation to the liberal Western *Zeitgeist* and a surrender of one the core teachings of the Church. Others, however, propose an intellectual history of gender essentialism which regards it as a product of modernity standing in contrast to ancient and medieval notions of gender. They argue that, in the early Christian context, which was informed by contemporary philosophical and medical learning, human beings were viewed not in terms of a fixed gender binary but rather on a scale from lesser to greater perfection.

Gender essentialism regards biological sex, gender, and gender roles, as stable, trans-historical realities—and they are often described in terms of “nature.” Thus, any definition, identity, or action which does not conform with one’s designated gender is an unnatural aberration. In the context of Christian theological anthropology, this rejection of the stable, natural order is regarded as a rejection of God’s plan in creation and therefore a rejection of God per se, i.e. sin. In contrast, it is argued by others, the ancient culture in which Christian theological anthropology took shape did not regard sex and gender as stable categories. Maleness and masculinity needed to be performed constantly and could be lost. Furthermore, whereas today many arguments around gender essentialism regard biological substrates as the basis for the conception of sex and argue that gender identity must conform to the body, the ancients, it is alleged, instead regarded the body as an epiphenomenon which revealed deep, inner realities.

Over the last decades, gender essentialist arguments have become core to Orthodox opposition to the social and legal acceptance of phenomena such as same-sex intercourse and marriage. This is so in part because, finding that its moral teachings and

disciplines are no longer held in common by many of the ambient cultures in which Orthodox Christians find themselves living, the Church has needed to make a defence of its position. While some Orthodox consider this to be an appeal to traditional teaching, others propose that gender essentialism is of recent genesis. Argumentation tends to be circular and there is little engagement between those who advocate the respective positions.

5.3 Contemporary Science

The issue of the reliability and significance of contemporary science arises in several of the perspectives given above and was a topic for heated debate during the workshop. Some contributors confidently assert that there is no evidence for a “gay gene” and homosexuality cannot be accounted for in nature. Others highlight the fact that there is a lack of large-scale research into the causes of homosexuality and some propose that such research might result in the discovery of cures. Some contributors make the case that the scientific evidence for the normative nature of gender fluidity from the womb and same-sex attraction as being grounded in genetics is so overwhelming that to question otherwise is to reject science and rationality. Yet other contributors (especially in discussion) pointed to cutting-edge research which is beginning to suggest that there may in fact be a cluster of genes which determines sexuality and that it is too early to come to any stable scientific conclusions. Ultimately, more research and more specific expertise is required to understand this topic, if it is determined to be of ultimate significance in settling questions about sexual diversity in the Orthodox Church. Moreover, what was apparent in discussion and in the pieces included herein is that the meaning of the scientific data is itself not perspicuous and subject to debate by the scientists themselves.

Related to the role of natural science in determining moral issues is the question of the significance of psychology and

pastoral counselling. Perspective K highlights many of the arguments and sources of evidence used by practicing licensed clinical therapists in the Western world today which lead them to current perspectives and practices with regard to sexual diversity. Here there was an account of the scientific consensus of the normativity of LGBTQ+ persons characterized by certitude and brooking no tentativeness which came across as almost the mirror opposite of the assured conservative Orthodox rejection of the normativity of sexual diversity. The reliability of the science underlying current psychology was widely questioned (albeit often without substantive evidence) in the workshop and it was evident that there is a strong contradiction between the Church's traditions of pastoral guidance and exhortation to endurance and patient suffering and the approaches taken by (secular) therapists today. Many Orthodox are distrustful of (secular) psychology and approaches to sexual diversity which appear to have swiftly adopted the positions advocated by political pressure groups of different kinds.

5.4 Models of Ethics

Another fault line that emerged between the contributors divides approaches to ethics which are broadly deontological and those which are broadly contextual-therapeutic. The deontological approach takes the view that normative ethics is determined on the basis of whether an action is intrinsically right or wrong based on a series of rational criteria. This model is generally comfortable with the idea of transhistorical moral truths which are always valid. It is consistent with a "Divine Command" approach to moral injunctions in Scripture which regards the simple word of the bible on moral matters (often without historical contextualisation, though sometimes taking account of the history of interpretation) as absolute. In Orthodox contexts, such a hermeneutic lens is also employed to read the disciplinary

canons, which are regarded as a law book, developing and clarifying the injunctions of Scripture.

A contextual-therapeutic approach to ethics in an Orthodox context tends to frame moral questions with notions such as virtue, the healing of the passions, and *theosis* or divinization. It regards all human experience as part of a seamless whole in which the subject experiences divine pedagogy with the aim of delivering them into the Kingdom. It emphasizes discernment, judgment, learning, and spiritual development over a rules-based moral order and is often willing to cover moral complexity and personal struggle under the veil of spiritual direction and confession in conversation with an experienced Spiritual Father. With respect to issues of sexual diversity, contextual-therapeutic approaches often highlight the human *telos* (goal/perfection/end point) of sanctification in love and conformation to the image of Christ over the observation of commandments.

Both deontological and contextual-therapeutic approaches are able to point to strands of the Orthodox tradition which justify them. The appropriation of these different models is therefore the manifestation of a tension internal to Orthodoxy which often appears to lack a satisfactory resolution. It is sometime discussed in terms of *akrivia* (strictness) vs *oikonomia* (understood as leniency)—that is to say, a pastor (priest or bishop) may follow the letter of the Orthodox law exactly or with generosity. Such an understanding regards the letter of the law (as expressed in Scripture or the theological tradition or the disciplinary canons) as normative—even divinely commanded—and any relaxation as an accommodation to human weakness. However, it should be noted that all pastoralia in the Orthodox tradition should be in accordance with *oikonomia*—that is to say, for the good management of the household of the Church, whether through strictness or leniency. Such an understand instead regards an authority other than the letter of the law as the measure and goal of its application—that is to say, Christ himself.

6

Conclusions & Future Goals

6.1 Preliminary Conclusions: Orthodox Contradictions

The ten perspectives expressed above (§4) and summarized thereafter (§5) clearly display a number of real tensions and contradictions within Orthodoxy, and we here offer no attempt to resolve them, except by reference back to the statement of Orthodox theological vision (§3). At present, it appears that the interlocutors are often talking past one another. The disagreements over approaches to sexual diversity and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the Orthodox Church derive from fundamental differences over how to receive and apply the theological tradition of the Church. In large part, this is a matter of divergent views over the hermeneutics of Scripture and tradition, the contrasting authorities of personal experience and the community, and the relationship of Orthodoxy to (post) modernity and secularism. These views may turn out to be irreconcilable with one another or with aspects of the tradition. Also at play are questions arising from contemporary science and psychology, which are not easily integrated into Orthodox theological reasoning.

6.2 Future Goals

The first phase of this research project, which is represented by this report, has successfully brought to light the contours of the debate which has begun and needs to continue in the Orthodox world. This information will shape the formation of our

residential workshop in August 2019 and the edited volume of scholarly articles which will follow. Our primary aim as a research consortium is to facilitate the ongoing conversation; part of this facilitation will involve highlighting the points of deep disagreement and contradiction at the hermeneutic level, so that meta-conceptual issues can be worked on before the practical issues of sexual diversity are tackled. The final phase of the project will put the results of this enterprise into conversation with policy goals and translate the lines of theological reasoning into the language of government.

Appendix

Bibliographies & Further Reading

The following bibliographies and recommendations for further reading were supplied by the authors of the ten perspectives (§4).

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Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41.

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1. Selections from Antiphon the Sophist coupled with Aristotle, *Politics* I.2. These readings give the gist of the *nomos-physis* debate in antiquity. I make this suggestion because it seems to me that people often move from “X is socially constructed” to “X has no normative authority,” without much thought about the issues involved. Aristotle’s argument that our *nomoi* are themselves “natural” is an important alternative to such views.
2. Abigail Favale, “The Eclipse of Sex by the Rise of Gender,” <http://churchlife.nd.edu/2019/03/01/the-eclipse-of-sex-by-the-rise-of-gender/?fbclid=IwAR2UirqrwAHGk5MYDtFAkbyqK-yNibJI-6I6wJYmTCV2jjAVIs1m5UFQkdro>. This article articulates well the unease that I think many people (myself included) feel about the way that terms such as “gender fluidity,” “social construct,” etc. get thrown around, often without careful definition.
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Appendix A

Pew Data on Orthodox Attitudes towards Contemporary Social Issues

Source: Pew Research Centre, “Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century” <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/>

Most Orthodox Christians say homosexuality should be discouraged, except in Greece, U.S.

% of Orthodox Christians who say homosexuality should/should not be accepted by society

	Should	Should not	DK/ref.
Former USSR			
Armenia	1%	98%	1%
Georgia	5	93	2
Moldova	5	93	3
Russia	7	87	6
Ukraine	6	86	8
Kazakhstan	8	85	7
Belarus	9	84	7
Estonia	9	83	8
Latvia	9	83	8
MEDIAN	7	86	7
Other European countries			
Bosnia	10%	86%	5%
Romania	10	86	4
Serbia	19	76	4
Bulgaria	34	59	7
Greece	50	45	5
MEDIAN	19	76	5
U.S.	62%	31%	8%*

*U.S. DK/ref. category also includes a small proportion of respondents who volunteered an ambiguous response, such as “depends on the situation.”

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Data for former USSR and other European countries from survey conducted June 2015–July 2016 in 19 countries. Data for U.S. from 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4–Sept. 30, 2014. Data for Ethiopia not available.

“Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Relatively few Orthodox Christians support same-sex marriage

% of Orthodox Christians who _____ allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally

	Strongly favor/favor	Oppose/strongly oppose	DK/ref.
Former USSR			
Armenia	3%	96%	1%
Georgia	3	95	2
Moldova	5	93	2
Kazakhstan	6	91	3
Russia	5	91	5
Estonia	8	89	3
Latvia	9	86	5
Ukraine	9	84	7
Belarus	16	81	3
MEDIAN	6	91	3
Other European countries			
Bosnia	8%	88%	4%
Serbia	11	85	4
Bulgaria	19	78	3
Romania	27	72	1
Greece	25	72	4
MEDIAN	19	78	4
U.S.	54%	41%	5%

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Data for former USSR and other European countries from survey conducted June 2015–July 2016 in 19 countries. Data for U.S. from 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4–Sept. 30, 2014. Data for Ethiopia not available.

“Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Most Ethiopian Orthodox Christians say homosexual behavior, prostitution, abortion and divorce are morally wrong

% of Orthodox Christians who say ____ is morally wrong

	Using drugs	Homosexual behavior	Prostitution	Having an abortion	Drinking alcohol	Sex before marriage	Divorce	Using contraceptives
Former USSR								
Armenia	97%	98%	96%	69%	56%	78%	56%	42%
Moldova	93	91	91	65	63	46	41	35
Ukraine	91	82	83	46	44	38	25	12
Georgia	89	91	92	66	34	75	30	35
Russia	89	86	85	45	43	36	15	12
Estonia	89	79	84	26	40	13	13	3
Belarus	88	85	81	37	32	26	16	14
Kazakhstan	87	85	80	34	55	32	19	14
Latvia	78	77	78	35	28	16	16	8
MEDIAN	89	85	84	45	43	36	19	14
Other European countries								
Romania	82%	82%	86%	59%	36%	39%	28%	24%
Bosnia	81	81	78	51	48	33	17	20
Serbia	75	71	81	39	44	25	18	14
Bulgaria	75	55	73	16	26	15	15	13
Greece	74	52	79	54	24	10	13	16
MEDIAN	75	71	79	51	36	25	17	16
Ethiopia	n/a	95%	93%	83%	55%	n/a	70%	n/a

Source: Data for former USSR and other European countries from survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. Data for Ethiopia from survey conducted December 2008-April 2009. Data for U.S. not available.
 "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Appendix B

Glossary

Adelphopoiesis Greek, “brother-making”. A church ritual for the joining of two persons of the same gender in a life-long union recorded in some Byzantine, Slav, and post-Byzantine prayer books but no longer practiced by the church.

Arsenokoitia Greek, *hapax legomenon* (possibly derived from Lev. 18.22) in the Pauline corpus from *arsin* (men) and *koitê* (bed, lie); found in the vice lists at 1 Cor. 6.9 and 1 Tim 1.10; frequently translated (questionably) as “homosexual.”

Autocephalous Church From Greek, literally “self-headed”; self-governing and self-determining Orthodox church, functionally independent, but interdependent and ultimately subject to the supreme authority of a global council of bishops, when convened.

Cariative From Latin; “loving, charitable.”

Catholicity From Greek, “universality”; being “catholic” or “universal” is one of the four characteristics of the church defined in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (*see below*).

Chalcedon, Council of The fourth Ecumenical Council (*see below*); met at Chalcedon (on the western shore of the Bosphorous) in 451; agreed a doctrinal statement on the nature of Christ which divided the Christians of the East and remains divisive to this day.

Chalcedonian Orthodox Orthodox church or person which accepts the authority of the Council of Chalcedon (*see above*), especially its doctrinal statement on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

Christocentric Oriented to, focused on, and directed towards Jesus Christ.

Christoform Christ-shaped; conformed to the shape or pattern of the life of Jesus Christ.

Christology The field of theology specifically concerned with the doctrine of Jesus Christ in his humanity and divinity.

Consensus partum Latin, “consensus of the Fathers”; the idea that the Fathers of the Church reached or held a “common opinion” on a given topic. Often used in distinction to “theologoumena,” privately held opinions of individual theologians which, while not in error, have not received the authoritative approval of a church synod, constitute a “minority report,” or deal with topics of secondary importance.

Doxology From Greek, literally “discourse of glory/praise”. Doxology is the mode of prayer and worship in which God is praised and thanked, rather than petitioned. A “Service of Doxology” or simply “Doxology” is a short church service of thanksgiving in the Orthodox tradition.

Ecumenical Council A council of bishops (and some other ecclesiastical leaders) convened from or to represent the whole Christian world (Greek, *oikoumenê*). The Eastern Orthodox Church regards seven such meetings as true Ecumenical Councils (and a further six meetings as having very high status, approximate to that of an Ecumenical Council), the conclusions of which are binding on all Orthodox Christians. The Catholic Church recognizes twenty-one Ecumenical Councils; many Protestants

and Oriental Orthodox (*see above*) recognize only four or five, if any.

Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople The Archbishop of Constantinople is head of the Autocephalous (*see above*) Patriarchate of Constantinople and has borne the honourific “Ecumenical Patriarch” since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 in recognition of his senior role among Christian bishops. Since the schism of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church (headed by the Pope), the Ecumenical Patriarch has been *de facto primus inter pares* among Orthodox bishops and is the last point of appeal.

Eikon Greek, “image.” In the Christian bible, the human being is said to be made in the image/icon of God (Gen. 1.26) and Christ is said to be the “image/icon of the invisible God” (Col. 1.15). The Orthodox Church developed a rich theology of the eikon/image in response to several waves of iconoclasm in Byzantium.

Ephesus, Council of The third Ecumenical Council (*see above*); met at Ephesus in Asia Minor in 431; especially significant in promoting the doctrine of the Virgin Mary as “Theotokos” (bearer-of-God).

Eschatological Relating to the “eschaton,” the “end” or “consummation” of all things. Orthodox Christianity is often said to have a strongly eschatological orientation, meaning that it focuses on the end that is in sight *in Christ* and is not limited by the horizons of the world. This is felt to be particularly revealed or shared in the liturgy.

Eucharist(ic) From Greek, literally “thanksgiving”. The central act of worship in many Christian traditions. The rite usually includes readings from scripture, a sermon or homily, hymns, prayers, and the offering of bread and wine, which is believed to become the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharistic service in the Orthodox tradition is called the Divine Liturgy.

Exegesis The practice of reading and interpreting a text, often in reference to authoritative texts such as the Bible or the writings of the Church Fathers.

Fathers, Church Fathers, Holy Fathers Authoritative teachers of the Christian tradition; usually men, but not exclusively so, in view of which some speak of “Church Mothers” in addition. Catholics and those Protestants who take an interest in such things usually consider the age of the Church Fathers (“patristic era”) to have concluded with the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787 AD), the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843); Saint John of Damascus (d. 749 is often regarded as the last Father and the herald of Medieval theology). The Orthodox Church refers to many later teachers as Fathers (certainly including those down to Saint Gregory Palamas, d. c. 1359) and some speak of modern-day Church Fathers, especially those who have taken a role in the revival of monasticism and traditional spirituality.

Hermeneutics The art of interpretation, or the framework (lens) within which interpretation is made.

Hypostasis Greek, “substance, concrete reality.” A term found in Greek philosophy which was taken up by early Christian theologians in their efforts to define various aspects of metaphysics in relation to God (as Trinity, *see below*) and Christ. According to Orthodox theology, God exists and is known in three *hypostases* (i.e. three concrete realities), Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ exists and is known in one hypostasis, which has two natures (human and divine).

Kerygma, Kerygmatic Greek, “proclamation.” The kerygma is the preaching or content of the Christian gospel (good news). If something is kerygmatic, it has the quality of proclaiming this gospel.

LGBTQ+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +; inclusive acronym for non-cis/heterosexual sexualities and gender identities.

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A creed (from Latin, *credo*, “I believe”) is a statement of faith. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is a succinct statement of core Christian dogmatic belief which was first formulated on the basis of traditional baptismal affirmations (i.e. statements which adult candidates for baptism made or affirmed at their baptism) at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and reformulated at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD). It remains normative for Christians of many traditions and is used by Orthodox Christians on many occasions, including at every celebration of the Divine Liturgy (*see Eucharist above*).

Oriental Orthodox A modern, general term encompassing ancient Eastern Christian Churches which did not accept the Council of Chalcedon and are therefore not in communion with the Eastern Orthodox Church. The designation usually includes the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Tewahedo, and Malankara Churches. These churches are more loosely affiliated than the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The term should be used with caution.

Patriarch An honourific title given to the heads of the senior bishops of the most senior and prestigious Eastern Orthodox Churches. Nine of the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches are headed by a patriarch and their churches are therefore referred to as patriarchates. The other autocephalous Churches are headed by an Archbishop or Metropolitan.

Patriarch of Moscow Senior bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of the fourteen autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Metropolitan Archbishop of Moscow was elevated to the rank of Patriarch in 1589, but the title was suppressed by the Russian Emperor from 1721 to 1917. Although

ranked fifth in the Diptychs (table of names of Orthodox bishops) of the Orthodox Church, the Patriarch of Moscow is arguably the most powerful bishop in the Orthodox Church today.

Phronêma Greek, “mindset, worldview.” Eastern Orthodox often speak, following Georges Florovsky (a highly influential twentieth century Russian theologian, who emigrated to France and then the USA), of the “phronêma of the Fathers,” and make a distinction between merely the vain repetition of their ideas and words and the acquisition of their phronêma.

Primus inter pares Latin, “first among equals.” The phrase is often used to describe the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch (*see above*) in relation to the heads of the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches although he does possess some actual powers including the right of last appeal and (controversially) the right to call ecumenical councils.

Prosôpon Greek, “face, mask, person.” A term found in Greek philosophy which was taken up by early Christian theologians in their reflection on God and Christ. *Prosôpon* is related to *hypostasis* (*see above*). According to the Council of Chalcedon (*see above*), Jesus Christ has a single *prosôpon*, that is, his existence is singular and he presents a singular face to the world, despite his existence as both God and human.

Salvation, Salvific The means or process by which one is saved from sin and its consequences. In Christianity, salvation comes through and in Jesus Christ, specifically his Cross and Resurrection. Eastern Orthodoxy generally place sin and salvation within a framework of a comprehensive restoration of the human being and creation, sometimes called *theosis* (“divinisation”). If something is salvific, it has the quality of effecting or leading to salvation.

Sobornost’ A key term in modern Russian philosophy and theology which refers to the quality of unity or togetherness found in

the church, as opposed to the individualism which dominates elsewhere.

Soteriology The field of theology concerned with the study of salvation (*see above*); model of the operation of salvation.

Staurocentric Oriented to, focused on, and directed towards the Cross (Greek, *stauros*) of Jesus Christ.

Synaxis Greek, “gathering, assembly.” Generally referring, in an Orthodox context, to one of three phenomena: a liturgical assembly (i.e. the community gathered for worship, especially the Eucharist [*see above*]); a monastic assembly (i.e. the brotherhood of monks or sisterhood of nuns gathered around their abbot, abbess, or spiritual elder, often for a spiritual talk or community meeting); a hierarchical assembly (i.e. gathering of bishops; often a small gathering of senior bishops or bishops working on a specific topic).

Synod From Greek, “meeting, assembly, council”. Formal gathering, usually of bishops but sometimes of other clergy and laity. The “Holy Synod” of an autocephalous Church is the assembly of all bishops of that Church.

Theosis Greek, “divinisation.” One of the primary ways in which Orthodox theology talks about the effect of salvation (*see above*). Theosis is the process by which one attains to likeness or union with God. The Orthodox tradition regards theosis as an experiential reality which begins in this life through repentance and the acquisition of virtue. It is regarded by many as a distinctly Orthodox teaching and has become a central preoccupation of much twentieth and the twenty-first century Orthodox theology.

Traditional Values A loosely defined term which refers to moral and social values which are perceived or asserted to be long-held and of lasting value in Western society (or universally), e.g. the

understanding of marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life (hence, adherents of “traditional values” oppose same-sex marriage).

Trinity, Trinitarian A central concept in Christian theology pertaining to the doctrine of God, who is one in divine nature but exists in three *hypostases* (*see above*), Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.