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THE STAND OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

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THE FORMULATION OF THE CHURCH'S STAND

Throughout its history, the Orthodox Church has dealt with controversial issues by a process which addresses the "mind of the Church." When an issue arises for which there is no clear-cut, widely and readily acknowledged tradition, and about which there is honest divergence of opinion as to what view genuinely expresses the teaching of the Church, a process begins which may eventually lead to the formulation of an official Church teaching. A classical example from the early period of the Church is the formulation of the Church doctrines about the person of Jesus Christ, which began with the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325) and concluded with the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787).

Over this four hundred and sixty-three year period, the Church clarified its understanding and teaching of the revelation regarding Jesus Christ. At the center of this process stood the Ecumenical Councils, which constituted the final and most authoritative agent for the formulation of doctrine, pending the acceptance of their decrees by the entire Church. For the Orthodox Church, this meant that such issues could not, and should not, be solved by appeal to a single bishop or leader, no matter how honored and respected he might be. It meant, rather, that the Church set its mind to resolving the issue through a corporate approach which drew on the whole tradition of the records of God's revelation.

In practice this meant reference to the Bible and to the living Tradition of the Church by persons seeking to comprehend how the tradition spoke to the new questions being raised. Questions were never raised just for intellectual curiosity nor for the sake of systematic organization. They nearly always were raised because in one way or another their outcome would bear on our salvation and the truths of the Faith. A response would be made whenever a new teaching seemed to be at variance with tradition in one way or another, and consequently not in harmony with the received tradition of revelation, even though the response might have to deal with yet undefined topics. Thus, the great Fathers of the Church, such as Athanasios, Basil, the Gregorys and Chrysostom, not only criticized the false teachings of heresiarchs such as Arius, but proposed formulations of the truth as well. These became the subject of study, debate, and finally, the decisions of Councils on every level - local, regional, provincial and ecumenical, all guided by the Holy Spirit.

THE PRESENT STAND OF THE CHURCH

Many controversial issues presented to us during these days of rapid change have reached the earliest stages in the process of dealing with controversial issues. People are beginning the search for answers - either with respect to attacks on the faith and practices of the Orthodox Church, or to new and previously unimagined problems - that can be formulated so as to preserve our salvation in Christ and to reflect the truths of the Faith. Often, since new issues

arising from the rapid development of technology affect not only individual church members, but society as a whole, the attempt to answer the question for and within the Church also provides a basis for addressing these same questions on the public scene.

In some cases the controversial issues can be addressed from long-standing doctrinal, ethical and canonical traditions. Where this is the case, there is little or no debate in the Church. One example is the Church's position on the legalization of abortion on demand. Since the Church went through the same debate in the early fourth century, it is not difficult to determine "the mind of the Church" on this issue, and to apply it to the current discussion.

COMPLICATIONS FROM TECHNOLOGY

The process, however, is not so easy in reference to the many issues which deal with the concerns arising from the amazing development of medical technology. How, for example, would the tradition of revelation address the issue of artificial insemination? The first question it would ask is if there are any implications in it from the perspective of salvation and the truths of Faith. In this case, since it clearly impinges on marriage, family, the relation between spouses, and the lives of human beings, there is an obvious connection. In order to understand that connection, it is necessary to examine the whole tradition of revelation in the sources of the Church's teaching in order to clarify the impact of the new technologies. Then, solutions seeking to embody that tradition are offered to the "mind of the Church."

If the membership of the Church finds them in harmony with the tradition, and if they are not widely challenged, the formulation may remain at that level, and become part of the teaching ministry of the Church. If it is challenged and debated, it may become the subject of conciliar decision. Only very few topics would ever reach the level of consideration by a regional or pan-Orthodox council.

THE CONTENT AND THE STAND OF THIS ARTICLE

What follows in this section represents this process in dealing with controversial issues. It seeks to express "the mind of the Church" on these issues, either by defending against attacks on the Orthodox Church's teachings and practice, or by providing ethical guidance concerning issues that arise from our highly technological age. Very few claims to uncontroverted teaching can be made. Most positions of the discussion should be understood as the current consensus, sincerely and widely held, and representing the mind of the Orthodox Church on issues discussed. At this early stage, this is the most that can be presented. In practice, it serves today as the teaching of the Orthodox Church on these controversial issues:

Worship

The most characteristic aspect of Orthodox Christianity is its worship. Though rich in tradition of doctrine, morality, canon law, social concern, personal faith, and monasticism, to name only a few of its objects, the core of Orthodox Christian life is to be found in its worship. Consequently, Orthodox Christianity

has been perceived by some to emphasize worship so much that the other aspects of church life appear to be submerged and even lost. Orthodox leaders would strongly deny the characterization that the Orthodox Church is only a Church of worship, while continuing to accept and justify the centrality of worship in the life of the Church.

Worship is central to the life of the Church because it is the place where the most important relationship for human life occurs: the relationship with God. Worship includes the chief means by which God has revealed Himself to humanity: Scripture and the living Tradition of the Faith. No worship service in the Orthodox Church is without the use of the Bible. Furthermore, worship brings all of life into the life of the Kingdom of God. The Orthodox Church orders its worship so that time is sanctified, as are all aspects of human life. For example, when Orthodox Christians open a new business, it is customary for the priest to bless it with sanctified water; when a newborn baby reaches its fortieth day, he or she is brought to the Church by the parents for the "churaching."

Worship also makes alive and present for the believer all of the mighty acts of salvation history. Most feasts are presented in worship services as occurring now, "today." The chief example of this is Holy Week, which serves to help the faithful relive the events of Christ's death and resurrection.

More important, however, is the sacramental aspect of worship, through which the saving work of Jesus Christ is mediated by the Church to each person. Baptism introduces the believer into the life of the Kingdom. Holy anointing or Chrismation grants the gift of the Holy Spirit for growth in the image and likeness of God. The Eucharist realizes the Kingdom of God everywhere it is celebrated, and unites the communicant with the very body and blood of the Lord. The sacrament of Penance serves to grant and assure the penitent Christian of God's forgiveness. Marriage unites a man and a woman, incorporating the natural union into the life of the Kingdom, "in the Lord." Ordination sets aside a small number of the believers for special service to the altar. Unction mediates healing and forgiving grace to believers. It is around these worship experiences that the Orthodox Christian lives his or her Christian life. Hence worship cannot be other than central to the life of the Church.

Marriage, Divorce, and Mixed Marriages

Marriage is one of the sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Christians who marry must marry in the Church in order to be in sacramental communion with the Church. According to the Church canons, an Orthodox who marries outside the Church may not receive Holy Communion and may not serve as a sponsor, i.e. a Godparent at a Baptism, or as a sponsor at a Wedding. Certain marriages are prohibited by canon law, such as a marriage between first and second cousins, or between a Godparent and a Godchild. The first marriage of a man and a woman is honored by the Church with a richly symbolic service that eloquently speaks to everyone regarding the married state. The form of the service calls upon God to unite the couple through the prayer of the priest or bishop officiating.

The church will permit up to, but not more than, three marriages for any Orthodox Christian. If both partners are entering a second or third marriage, another form of the marriage ceremony is conducted, much more subdued and penitential in character. Marriages end either through the death of one of the

partners or through ecclesiastical recognition of divorce. The Church grants "ecclesiastical divorces" on the basis of the exception given by Christ to his general prohibition of the practice. The Church has frequently deplored the rise of divorce and generally sees divorce as a tragic failure. Yet, the Orthodox Church also recognizes that sometimes the spiritual well-being of Christians caught in a broken and essentially nonexistent marriage justifies a divorce, with the right of one or both of the partners to remarry. Each parish priest is required to do all he can to help couples resolve their differences. If they cannot, and they obtain a civil divorce, they may apply for an ecclesiastical divorce in some jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church. In others, the judgment is left to the parish priest when and if a civilly divorced person seeks to remarry.

Those Orthodox jurisdictions which issue ecclesiastical divorces require a thorough evaluation of the situation, and the appearance of the civilly divorced couple before a local ecclesiastical court, where another investigation is made. Only after an ecclesiastical divorce is issued by the presiding bishop can they apply for an ecclesiastical license to remarry.

Though the Church would prefer that all Orthodox Christians would marry Orthodox Christians, it does not insist on it in practice. Out of its concern for the spiritual welfare of members who wish to marry a non-Orthodox Christian, the Church will conduct a "mixed marriage." For this purpose, a "non-Orthodox Christian" is a member of the Roman Catholic Church, or one of the many Protestant Churches which believe in and baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity. This means that such mixed marriages may be performed in the Orthodox Church. However, the Orthodox Church does not perform marriages between Orthodox Christians and persons belonging to other religions, such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or any sectarian and cult group, such as Christian Science, Mormonism, or the followers of Rev. Moon.

Questions on Sexual Issues

The teaching of the Orthodox Church on sexual questions is strongly determined by the Church's attitude toward marriage and the family. A representative Orthodox statement which shows the centrality and importance of the family in Orthodox thinking is found in an encyclical letter by former Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, issued on the occasion of National Family Week in 1972. He stated:

"Home and family life is the bedrock of our Greek Orthodox life-style. The spirit that binds us together as a people finds its deepest roots in the home where the tenderest values of human existence, love, compassion, forbearance and mutual helpfulness thrive in abundance."(?)

Over the centuries and throughout most cultures and civilizations the family has been proven to be the unifying unit of society. Today we find the family under attack both from within and from without. Outside forces would have us believe that the family as we have come to know and cherish it is no longer necessary. From within, the erosion of spiritual values and emphasis upon materialism has created for many families confusion and uncertainty where commitment and dedication once reigned. Marriage is holy. The home is sacred. Birth is a miracle. In these we find the very meaning of life itself.

One aspect of the "commitment and dedication" of the holy state of marriage and family is cast in terms of sexual behavior. Most moral questions relating to sex are generally best understood in the light of this high regard for marriage and the family. Some of the questions on sexual issues addressed by the Orthodox Church are the following:

1. The Orthodox Church remains faithful to the biblical and traditional norms regarding premarital sexual relations between men and women. The only appropriate and morally fitting place for the exercise of sexual relations, according to the teachings of the Church, is marriage. The moral teaching of the Church on this matter has been unchanging since its foundation. In sum, the sanctity of marriage is the cornerstone of sexual morality. The whole range of sexual activity outside marriage - fornication, adultery and homosexuality - are thus seen as not fitting and appropriate to the Christian way of life. Like the teaching on fornication, the teachings of the Church on these and similar issues have remained constant. Expressed in Scripture, the continuing Tradition of the Church, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and the canons, these views have been restated by theologians, hierarchs and local Orthodox churches in our own day. For example, the Decalogue prohibits adultery. In the tradition of the Church, the second-century Epistle of Barnabas commands "Thou shalt not be an adulterer, nor a corrupter, nor be like to them that are such." The fourth-century Church Father St. Basil wrote against the practice (Canons 35 and 77); and the Quinisext Council (A.D. 691) repeated the same condemnation in its eighty-seventh canon. All major Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States have had occasion to repeat the condemnation of adultery.
2. Generally stated, fornication, adultery, abortion, homosexuality and any form of abusive sexual behavior are considered immoral and inappropriate forms of behavior in and of themselves, and also because they attack the institution of marriage and the family. Two representative statements, one on abortion and another on homosexuality, from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America follow. They are from the Twenty-Third Clergy-Laity Congress held in Philadelphia in 1976. The Orthodox Church has a definite, formal and intended attitude toward abortion. It condemns all procedures purporting to abort the embryo or fetus, whether by surgical or chemical means. The Orthodox Church brands abortion as murder; that is, as a premeditated termination of the life of a human being. The only time the Orthodox Church will reluctantly acquiesce to abortion is when the preponderance of medical opinion determines that unless the embryo or fetus is aborted, the mother will die. Decisions of the Supreme Court and State legislatures by which abortion, with or without restrictions, is allowed should be viewed by practicing Christians as an affront to their beliefs in the sanctity of life. The position of the Orthodox Church toward homosexuality has been expressed by synodicals, canons and patristic pronouncements beginning with the very first centuries of Orthodox ecclesiastical life. Thus, the Orthodox Church condemns unreservedly all expressions of personal sexual experience which prove contrary to the definite and unalterable function ascribed to sex by God's ordinance and expressed in man's

- experience as a law of nature. The Orthodox Church believes that homosexuality should be treated by religion as a sinful failure. In both cases, correction is called for. Homosexuals should be accorded the confidential medical and psychiatric facilities by which they can be helped to restore themselves to a self-respecting sexual identity that belongs to them by God's ordinance. In full confidentiality the Orthodox Church cares and provides pastorally for homosexuals in the belief that no sinner who has failed himself and God should be allowed to deteriorate morally and spiritually. Psychiatric reconciliation is bound to prove short-lived.
3. The possible exception to the above affirmation of continuity of teaching is the view of the Orthodox Church on the issue of contraception. Because of the lack of a full understanding of the implications of the biology of reproduction, earlier writers tended to identify abortion with contraception. However, of late a new view has taken hold among Orthodox writers and thinkers on this topic, which permits the use of certain contraceptive practices within marriage for the purpose of spacing children, enhancing the expression of marital love, and protecting health.

Euthanasia

The Church accompanies its faithful from even before birth, through all the steps of life to death and beyond, with its prayers, rites, sacraments, preaching, teaching, and its love, faith and hope. All of life, and even death itself, are drawn into the realm of the life of the Church. Death is seen as evil in itself, and symbolic of all those forces which oppose God-given life and its fulfillment. Salvation and redemption are normally understood in Eastern Christianity in terms of sharing in Jesus Christ's victory over death, sin and evil through His crucifixion and His resurrection. The Orthodox Church has a very strong pro-life stand which in part expresses itself in opposition to doctrinaire advocacy of euthanasia.

Euthanasia is understood to be the view or practice which holds that a person has the right, and even the moral obligation, to end his or her life when it is considered to be - for whatever subjectively accepted reason "not worth living." Euthanasia advocates nearly always include in this assertion the right and duty of others, including medical personnel, to assist the person in fulfilling this purpose. Needless to say, the Orthodox Church rejects such a view, seeing such behavior as a form of suicide on the part of the individual, and a form of murder on a part of others who assist in this practice, both of which are seen as sins. Thus the Orthodox Church, in the words of 1976 Christmas encyclical of former Archbishop Iakovos, considers "euthanasia and abortion, along with homosexuality ... a ... moral alienation." Modern medical practice, however, has affected another part of the Church's perspective. The Church does not expect that excessive and heroic means must be used at all costs to prolong dying, as has now become possible through technical medical advances. As current Orthodox theology expresses it:

"The Church distinguishes between euthanasia and the withholding of extraordinary means to prolong life. It affirms the sanctity of human life and man's God-given responsibility to preserve life. But it rejects an attitude which disregards the inevitability of physical death."

This means that the Church may even pray that terminally ill persons die, without insisting that they be subjected to unnecessary and extraordinary medical efforts. At the same time, the Church rejects as morally wrong any willed action on the part of an individual to cause his or her own death or the death of another, when it otherwise would not occur.

The Church and Politics

Though there are many names by which the Orthodox Church is known, perhaps the most hallowed name is that which is used to designate the Church in the Nicene Creed - "... One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." The Orthodox hold that this phrase precisely describes the Orthodox Church. What each of these words means in its fullness is the subject of many deep and thoughtful theological articles and books.

The word "catholic" in this name of the Church has provoked many such efforts at understanding. It can and does mean the universal perspective and outreach of the Church, which transcends national, racial and cultural boundaries. It can and does imply, as well, the outlook of the Church toward the created world and toward human affairs, which refuses to accept a compartmentalized self-understanding that restricts the interests and concerns of the Church to a narrowly defined "religious sphere."

The Orthodox Church, throughout its history, has both used and encouraged the arts, culture and education, and has addressed the whole range of social and public phenomena. Among these have been its relationship with government in general, and the exercise of civil power in concrete circumstances, i.e., politics. As a general principle, the Orthodox Church has held a position on the ideal of Church and State relations which may be called "the principle of synergy." It is to be distinguished from a sharp division of Church and State on the one hand, and a total fusion of Church and State, on the other hand. It recognizes and espouses a clear demarcation between Church and State, while calling for a cooperative relationship between the two.

It is readily admitted that even when conditions for the implementation of such an ideal were most favorable, the ideal was not always fulfilled and realized. However, the historical example for the principle of synergy in Church and State relationships is the model of the Byzantine Empire, which lasted over a thousand years (324 -1453). Recent scholarship has rejected the older viewpoint that in Byzantium the Church was subservient to the State, and now recognizes that the view of the Byzantine Church on this question was misunderstood by earlier researchers. In the practical area of political life, it is nearly always impossible fully to realize the principle of synergy, but the Church has supported a range of attitudes which allow it to become involved in the political process on the one hand, while retaining its clear distinction from, and transcendence to it, on the other.

Briefly stated, these are some of the guidelines which direct the Orthodox attitude toward involvement in politics by the Church:

1. Upholding its own vision of the Kingdom of God. Uppermost in the mind of the Church is its prayer that human relations of all kinds might be incorporated into the Kingdom of God. Such a sacramentally oriented perspective, based on the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come

on earth, as it is in heaven," when applied to the distinct God-established realm of governmental and political life does not mean the submission of the State to the Church, but rather the acceptance by the State of the God-like principles of justice, equity, genuine service and care, and mutuality. Though the State is not "under the Church" as is the case with everything else - ideally it should in fact and practice be "under God."

2. Adaptation to the Political Realities of Time and Place. The Orthodox Church readily recognizes that in this day and age no single nation comes close to a realization of its ideal model. The Church finds itself, however, living under many different political systems and environments. Its chief patriarchate, that of Constantinople, is under persecution in a Moslem-dominated country, Turkey. Another of its patriarchates, Jerusalem, functions in a theocratic Jewish State. Its largest patriarchate, Moscow, has lived a precarious life of bare legality, shifting from periods of relative tolerance to periods of overt persecution. One of its most active and vigorous patriarchal churches, in Romania, has worked out a unique *modus vivendi* with a government somewhat sympathetic, yet officially atheistic and Communist. Another of its larger national churches, that of Greece, is struggling to maintain the equilibrium between Church and State. On the other hand, the numerous Churches created by emigration from traditionally Orthodox countries enjoy freedom of religious practice, together with an obscurity enforced by their minority status in numerous western-style democracies, such as England, Germany, France, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The Orthodox also seek to relate in some way with other systems of government not so easy to categorize, such as in the various nations of South America, and in such disparate places as Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt and South Korea.

As can be understood, the adaptations of the ideal of synergy to reality must be varied in practice, and far from homogeneous. Nevertheless, certain modes of political relationship continue to be fostered by the Church. These include good citizenship, pursuit of Church rights, official nonpartisanship, preference for lay leadership, support of justice, limited advocacy for the right of revolution, and the unique case of ethnarchy. Space allows only a few general comments on each of these.

Practical guidelines from biblical times and throughout its history, the Church has always fostered values which encourage good citizenship, regardless of the particular system of government. The Church fosters obedience to just laws, and even to unjust ones for the sake of the greater good. To this category belongs the fostering of appropriate ethnic and cultural identification, the support of military service, and the defense of the nation. The Church has also encouraged public service on the part of citizens, and philanthropies for the general good.

Traditionally, the Church understands that one of its chief rights before the State is freedom to worship and function as a Church. Therefore, one of its major concerns is to assure its freedom, and to restrict or eliminate what it views as the improper interference of the State in the life of the Church. Byzantine history has many examples of the Church opposing the policies of emperors who were considered to be improperly interfering in Church affairs. It must also be noted,

however, that the Church often welcomed the involvement of the emperors when the Church judged that this involvement served its interests.

By and large, the Church is content to let the various political processes function in a way which separates the Church from partisan politics by maintaining a stance of general non-partisanship. Regardless of the political system of the nation and government, the Church is prepared to pray for the leader, in accordance with New Testament teaching. In democracies, this means that the Church seeks, insofar as its other purposes allow, to avoid partisan politics, neither formally opposing nor endorsing political candidates. Historically, only officials who imposed heretical teachings on the Church, or persecuted the Church, might be personally condemned; but even in these cases there was a certain hesitancy. By and large, hierarchs and other clergy do not seek to exercise political power, with the exception of the exercise of "ethnarchy," a unique institution discussed below.

The official Church strongly prefers that its laity be involved in government and politics, and embody Christian values to the extent possible given the governmental and political systems in force. This approach avoids the evils of a theocratic system, while encouraging a more general lay involvement in the embodiment of the ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven in Church-State relationships.

The basic role of government is to provide protection and to ensure justice. The Church sees God as the source of justice; therefore, it shares His concern about justice within the State. In the political process, which seeks to embody justice, there are numerous means by which the Church has sought to further its concern for justice. In the ancient imperial system, churchmen had not only sought to form the character and conscience of the Emperor in general, but frequently "whispered in the ear of the emperor" with reference to specific issues. The Church was a force for the improvement of laws, "toward greater philanthropy." In present-day democratic societies Orthodox hierarchs, ecclesiastical bodies, and even individual Orthodox Christians, must often publicly protest injustice, participate in the legislative process, and use other political means to further political issues with moral implications.

By and large, the Church approves stability of government and does not encourage revolution. Just as it recognizes the great evil in war, yet at times understands and accepts the need to wage war in defense of the homeland, so also, but even more reluctantly, does it accept the right to revolution in cases of severe and unbearable injustice. In most cases, the Church's support of revolutionary causes has been related to efforts of national independence.

However, there is nothing in the tradition which would reject out of hand revolutions which are motivated by a sense of unbearably oppressive injustice in other spheres. Such concerns, as embodied in modern day "Liberation Theology" movements, have their antecedents in the writings of Church Fathers such as St. John Chrysostom, who railed against the exploitation of the poor by the rich. What the Orthodox Church finds unnecessary and unacceptable in "Liberation Theology" is the Marxist theoretical underpinnings of this theological movement. However, its concern for the downtrodden and the exploited is recognized to be essential Christianity.

The Concept of "Ethnarchy"

Eastern Orthodoxy has a unique institution in its history, known as "ethnarchy," which appears to contradict nearly everything which has been noted above about the Church's attitude regarding practical involvement. "Ethnarchy" occurs when the highest ecclesiastical leader of the church in a given area assumes political leadership. An excellent embodiment of the principles of "ethnarchy" was the assumption of authority as chief-of-state of Greece by Archbishop Damaskinos following the German withdrawal at the end of World War II. The most recent case was the assumption of the presidency of Cyprus by Archbishop Makarios. This rarely practiced institution occurs only in periods of crisis, when lay civil leaders cannot, because of extraordinary reasons, exercise normal political powers. When only a Church leader seems to be able to embody the identity of the people of the nation, the hierarch may assume political and government leadership by general consensus. It is all-important that such an exercise of political power should be only temporary and exceptional, until the regrouping of political forces in the nation allows the resumption of power by the lay leaders of the nation.

Human Rights

In the portion of Orthodox theological doctrine which deals with humanity, there is much emphasis on the creation of human beings in the "image and likeness of God." Many Fathers of the Church make a distinction between the two terms. The "likeness" is the high spiritual calling of every human being, to become "God like," which is only made possible by the saving work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, which is first and foremost realized in the life of the Church. The "image," however, is the commonly held nature of all human beings. Though sin has had its impact upon human nature, so that all of our faculties are in some measure darkened and distorted, the Orthodox see human beings as still possessing a strong residue of the God-given likeness which is the essence of our humanity. Our intelligence, our power of self-determination, our aesthetic sense, our creativity, our moral perception, our integration of the individual and the social into our personhood, and numerous other characteristics provide manifestations of such likeness.

Since all people share in the divine image, all persons enjoy a basic and fundamental human dignity before God, simply because they are human. As a result, God treats people with a fundamental dignity and respect, and expects that people will treat each other in the same way. The Bible teaches that "God is not a respecter of persons," in the sense that He treats us all with equal dignity and respect as regards our basic humanity. This does not mean, of course, that there are also not legitimate roles and functions enjoyed by everybody in their social, economic, political and even ecclesiastical relations. Nevertheless, all persons are entitled to a fundamental respect and treatment by others, simply because they are human beings, created in the image of God.

They need not accomplish anything, hold any rank, or possess anything, to "earn" this fundamental dignity. In our own days, this dignity has come to be stated in terms of "rights." Historically, it had been stated in terms of "duties." These are two sides of the same coin, the first being a claim of the individual seeking an acknowledgment and treatment based on his or her human dignity, while the second is the responsibility of the other person to accord the respect which is due each person as a human being. Regardless of how the question is

approached, the Church teaches that people have fundamental rights based on their dignity as human beings created in the image of God. In this spirit, the 25th Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese held at Atlanta in 1980 decried governmental actions which deny basic human dignity and rights:

"We disapprove of governmental policies and actions which violate the unalienable rights of all men to freedom and human dignity. We are disillusioned and dismayed at the selective and hypocritical manner in which armed aggression and the violation of human rights by some nations are condemned, while similar acts by others are either ignored, or even worse, shamelessly justified. We express our indignation at the gross insensitivity of the so-called great or superpowers of the world toward small and defenseless nations and racial minorities of the world, and the cynical manner in which they are used or abused by these powers to further what they believe to be their interests or the interests of their allies. The blacks in South Africa, the Thais and the Tibetans, the Georgians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians in the Soviet Union, the Afghans and the Kurds in both Iran and Turkey; the Greek Cypriots in Cyprus, the Greeks in Northern Epirus, the Armenian and Greek minorities in Turkey - all these and many others are not included among the concerns of these powers unless they can serve as useful and valuable pawns in their political chess game."

A general concern for human rights - regardless of power, numbers, and strength - is evident in this statement, and can be particularized to certain specific cases, as well. Thus, each of the Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States, with their specific ethnic backgrounds, has a special concern for the peoples of their own heritage and the violation of the rights they are entitled to enjoy. Thus, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese evinces special concern for the Greek minority in Turkey, the Cypriot question, and the Greek minority in Albania. The Orthodox Church in America, which is Russian in background, concerns itself with the free exercise of religion in the Soviet Union and the rights of dissidents, especially those who are religiously motivated. The Antiochian Archdiocese has a special concern for the rights of minority Orthodox Christians in Israel and with the Palestinian and Lebanese situations.

Domestic concerns are also important, and the Greek Orthodox Clergy-Laity Congresses have often dealt with the issue of human rights. As an example, a portion of their statement concerning racial injustice from the 1970 Clergy-Laity Congress in New York City is presented below. It is interesting because it shows both the leadership of the hierarchy and also the response of both the parish clergy and the laity of the Church on this vital issue; their shared sensitivity to the current situation regarding civil rights in the United States, as well as the religious presuppositions for the attitude expressed, is apparent in this statement:

"The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's brought to the attention of the nation, in dramatic fashion, the many forms of overt and hidden racial discrimination that exist in American society. While all of us have been impoverished spiritually by this stigma upon our nation, minority groups

of color such as the Blacks, the American Indians, and the Mexican-Americans have borne the brunt of this malady."

Acutely aware of the racial problem of our nation, former Archbishop Iakovos noted in his opening speech to the 20th Clergy-Laity Congress that:

"... our contribution to the abolition of racial segregation and on behalf of social justice, are of a most imperative nature ... Our Church ... has never restricted its love and philanthropy from those 'outside its fold.'"

We fully concur with this observation. A divided nation, with entrenched racial hostilities, contradicts the Christian gospel that preaches a oneness and unity among people in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We call upon the Greek Orthodox Christians to use their fullest resources in the struggle for human justice for all people, regardless of race, creed, or color.

Women's Rights

Another important area of human rights concerns is the women's liberation issue. The Church has attempted to avoid the reactionary male chauvinist stance, no less than a shrill feminism. The balance between recognition and practical support of the basic human rights of women on the one hand, and the great concern for the role of women in family life on the other, has produced a not-so-easy to categorize stance on the part of the Church. It is probably most sharply illustrated by the actions of the 1980 Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. The original report of the Social and Moral Issues Committee recommended the endorsement of the ERA. When taken to the floor for debate and action, it was clear that the Congress members did not want to endorse the constitutional amendment. For all of that, the Congress finally passed a statement which used the very words of the amendment, saying:

"... we believe and support the proposition that equality of rights shall not be denied or abridged under the terms of any law solely because of sex."

The Orthodox are adamantly opposed to the ordination of women as liturgical clergy. There have been articles and books by both men and women theologians supporting this stand. At present, there is no movement within Orthodoxy for this innovation.

The place, role, and significance of women in the life of the Church have become important concerns. In 1976, a conference on the topic was held in Romania, with participation of Orthodox women from all over the world. The results were published in a book entitled *Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church*. A similar conference was held on the topic of "Theological Anthropology: Towards a Theology of Human Wholeness (Female/Male)" in Niederaltaich in 1980. Other conferences on this question have been held in Sheffield, England, and at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, N.Y., all held with the endorsement of the Church's hierarchy.

Women are now being trained in theology in Orthodox seminaries, both in Europe and the United States, where women have been degree candidates and graduates at both of the accredited seminaries, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, and at St. Vladimir's. One of the topics of discussion is the reconstitution of the ancient order of deaconesses. Theological studies have been undertaken on the topic in Greece, and a school for deaconesses has been established, but the formalization of the institution is yet to be realized.

Bioethics

A few Orthodox writers have indicated concern for the bioethical questions which have arisen as a result of the development of highly technical methods of health care. They have been categorized into questions dealing with the "protection of life" and the "transmission of life." Under the first rubric, some of the issues are the allocation of scarce medical resources, patient rights, human experimentation, abortion, child abuse, organ transplantation, the giving of bodies to science, the treatment of an increasingly aged population, questions of euthanasia and allowing terminal patients to die. Some of the most interesting questions belong to concepts centered on the very transmission of life: artificial insemination, artificial in ovulation, in vitro fertilization, sterilization, genetic counseling and genetic screening as well as genetic engineering.

While no official positions have been formulated on these topics by the Church, theological opinions by Church theologians are beginning to be formed. In an encyclopedia article on these topics, there is a good general statement on bioethics. The common denominator of all the issues discussed is the high regard and concern of the Church for human life as a gift of God. Orthodoxy tends to take a conservative approach to these issues, seeing in them a dimension of the holy, and relating them to transcendent values and concerns. An intense respect for human life is needed to hold the reins upon those who would attack it. The human person, from the very moment of conception, is dependent upon others for life and sustenance. It is in the community of the living, especially as it relates to the source of life, God in the Trinity, that life is conceived, nurtured, developed and fulfilled. The trust we have in others for the continued well-being of our own lives forms the basis for generalization. Eastern Orthodox ethics, consequently, functions with a pro-life bias that honors and respects the life of each person as a divine gift which requires development and enhancement.

To put it briefly, the views expressed by some theologians (without official sanction) on these controversial topics follow, though in an abbreviated form because of the lack of space:

- Scarce medical resources should be allocated on the basis of justice and need, and not only on the ability to pay.
- Patients have rights which should be honored by the medical profession.
- In principle human experimentation cannot be prohibited, for the sake of the patients themselves and the well-being of others, but great care in respecting the dignity and integrity of the patients must be maintained, while the use of experimentation should be governed by strict rules of scientific necessity and informed consent.

- Organ transplantation cannot be prohibited, but the chance of success should be high, taking the real need into account, evaluating carefully the impact on both donors and recipients.
- While no one is obligated to give an organ, such a donation should be encouraged as an expression of Christian love; on the other hand, organ transplants from the dead involve different problems - in particular, the hastening of the death of the potential giver for the sake of the potential recipient, which is considered wrong.
- Artificial insemination by a husband (AIH) is not rejected, but artificial insemination by donor (AID) is considered an improper intrusion of a third party in the sanctity of the marital relation.
- In vitro fertilization is looked upon with great doubt because present methods cause the destruction of numerous human fertilized ova and even developing fetuses; this is still a form of abortion.
- Genetic counseling and screening cannot be objected to in principle and in fact should be encouraged.

AIDS

The recent spread of the AIDS virus has provoked much concern throughout the world and for Orthodox Christians, as well. The Orthodox address this question on several levels. First, the Church always looks upon those who are ill with compassion, and prays for healing. We encourage the medical profession to continue seeking for the appropriate medications to heal this disease. But at the same time, we note that the major causes for the spread of this disease are behaviors which the Church has always taught are immoral and ought not to be practiced: homosexual behavior, promiscuity, and narcotic drugs (the use of contaminated needles). Love and caring for all persons provokes the Church to re-affirm its teaching. The best prevention against the AIDS virus is virtue.

Some have raised the question of possible contamination through the Communion Spoon and the possible change of the method for administering Holy Communion. There have been other methods for the administration of the Sacrament in the Church, in the past. In principle, therefore, the method could change again. Nevertheless, several strong reasons would argue against it. Theologically, the Orthodox Church cannot accept that the Sacrament would be a source of illness, since it teaches that it is a "medicine of immortality." Further, not one single case of the transmission of any illness has been shown empirically as coming from participation in the sacrament. In addition, scientific evidence points to another reason for this as well: it appears that saliva inhibits the transmission of all kinds of microbes, including the AIDS virus (Journal of the American Dental Association, May, 1988). Should the Church change its method of administering the sacrament, it should do so for its own reasons and not those provoked by unreasonable fear.

Converts and Proselytism

Missionary activity is an essential part of the life of the Church. The great commission to the Church, "Go ye into the world, and preach the gospel to all nations," provides the Church with its mission to bring people into its life. The goal and purpose of mission is to bring new people into the life of salvation as

realized in the character (*ethos*) and sacramental experience of the Church. Consequently, the Orthodox Church conducts missionary activities in many parts of the world.

This aspect of Orthodox Church life, strong enough during its first fourteen centuries, was severely hampered when much of the Orthodox Church fell under the political domination of Moslem powers; the great exception was the Church of Russia, which continued its own missionary work in the Eastern parts of Russia and the Far East. During the period of subjugation to the Ottoman Empire, missionaries from Roman Catholic and Protestant countries came into Orthodox lands and sought to convert the Orthodox to their own professions of Christianity. Both had a measure of success as a result of their proselytizing efforts. These two facts, the requirement of missionary activity, on the one hand, and the reaction to proselytizing, on the other, have formed the present-day policies of the Orthodox Church regarding missionary work among non-Christians, converts, and proselytism in both directions. The last few decades have seen a resurgence of missionary efforts by the Orthodox in places like Uganda, Kenya, South Korea, and Alaska.

Dealing with other Christians

The experience of being subject to massive proselytizing efforts has caused the formulation of a multifaceted policy.

First, it has meant that Orthodoxy has sought to influence other churches, primarily through the ecumenical movement, to renounce systematic proselytizing programs. The opposition to such organized "sheep-stealing" programs has been generally accepted in the ecumenical movement and they are not now widely practiced.

Second, the Orthodox do not themselves practice "proselytism" in the sense that they do not actively seek to cause the disaffection of others from their non-Orthodox Christian faiths. This does not mean, however, that anyone seeking to learn about the Orthodox Faith will be turned away. Converts are not readily accepted unless they learn as much as possible about the Orthodox Faith before they make a decision to join it. Following instruction, close examination, and the expression of strong willingness to convert, they may be received into the Orthodox Church, some merely by declaration and repetition of the Creed, and others (the majority), by means of the sacrament of Holy Anointing (Chrismation).

Third, if an Orthodox Christian is formally received into membership by another (non-Orthodox) Church and receives Holy Communion in that Church, he or she becomes an apostate (apostates). Such a person is not considered to be an Orthodox Christian any longer, and may not receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church, nor serve at a baptism or wedding as a sponsor. Should such persons seek to return to the Orthodox Church, they are received back into the Church through a profession of faith, and the sacrament of Chrismation.

Suicide

Suicide is the taking of one's own life. The Orthodox Church has, over the centuries, taught that we do not have the right to take our own lives, since life is a gift from God which we are called upon to preserve and enhance. Hence, the

Church considers direct suicide, when a person destroys his or her life with his or her own hand, to be the most serious kind of murder, because there is no opportunity for repentance. The canons and practice of the Church thus prohibit a Church burial to a person who has committed suicide. However, if it can be shown that the person who has committed suicide was not mentally sound, then, upon proper medical and ecclesiastical certification, the burial can be conducted by the Church. In cases, however, where the deceased held a philosophical view affirming the right to suicide, or allowed despair to overcome good judgment, no such allowance can be made.

Morally speaking, there is also the case of indirect suicide, in which people harm their health through abusive practices such as excessive smoking, excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages, and unnecessary risk-taking. The Orthodox Church teaches that we are obligated to care for our health, so these kinds of practices in fact are looked upon as immoral. However, they do not carry the same negative implications which the direct taking of one's own life has.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Stanley S. Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues Facing the Orthodox Christian* Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life Publishing Co., 1982.

-----, *Let Mercy Abound: Social Concern in the Greek Orthodox Church*. Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1983.