

# THE ISSUE OF *Homosexuality* AND THE *Armenian Church*

The following article is reprinted from the October issue of *Nakhgoch*, the newsletter of St. Andrews Armenian Church in San Jose, California. Deacon Tchilingirian is a graduate of the St. Nerses Armenian Seminary and is currently assigned to the St. Peter Armenian Church in Van Nuys, Calif.

Finding an objective definition of homosexuality is a difficult one, considering the widespread controversy of the issue in the scientific, religious, ethical, and public sphere of society. However, in an attempt to provide an *objective* definition of the term, the Encyclopedia of Bioethics seems to have a balanced and neutral presentation of the phenomenon.

"The most emotionally neutral and non-judgmental definition of homosexuality is a predominant, persistent, and exclusive psychosexual attraction towards members of the same sex. A homosexual person is one who feels sexual desire for and a sexual responsiveness to persons of the same sex and who seeks or would like to seek actual sexual fulfillment of this desire by sexual acts with a person of the same sex. A distinction is drawn by a majority of authors on the subject between the homosexual *condition* and the homosexual *act*. Homosexual condition refers to the person who is sexually attracted exclusively to persons of his or her own sex or who wished to express sexually deep feelings exclusively with persons of his or her own sex. Homosexual *act*, on the other hand, refers to sexual contacts between persons of the same sex. Such *acts* may be per-

The key words in this definition are *condition* and *act*. Pastorally speaking, as members of the Armenian Orthodox Church, we understand the homosexual *condition* (the person who is sexually attracted exclusively to persons of his or her own sex), as a "passion," just as other passions, like greed, pride, lust, gluttony, etc. However, *we do not and cannot condone them since they stand at odds with the fundamental teachings of the Armenian Orthodox Church*. Homosexual *condition* (passions) is viewed as "wrongful orientation of our desire;" particularly, based on the Church's teaching on human sexuality.

Secondly, the church condemns homosexual *acts* (sexual contact between persons of the same sex), just as she condemns any sexual act outside the context of marriage. Hence, a homosexual or a heterosexual act is considered sin and as such condemned. A heterosexual who fornicates is not less guilty of his or her act than a homosexual.

In the ongoing debate over homosexuality, there are numerous views and opinions about how the issue should be treated and understood. "The current ethical position on homosexuality can be grouped under the three categories used to describe the ethical analysis of the meaning of human sexuality: the *integrity* understanding of human sexuality, which sees homosexual acts as unnatural; the *recreational* understanding,

Any ethical position and contemplation takes place in a specific context. And the ethical context of the Armenian Orthodox Church is her BELIEF. A person's ethics involve his values, his upbringing, his experience in life, his religious faith and practice, and many other factors. A baptized member of the Armenian Orthodox Church, who identifies himself with the Body of Christ, does not have the "luxury" of personal preference. A person is not the Church in and of himself. But the Church is where two or three are gathered in Christ's name. There is no pluralism in the church as well. We either accept the truth of Jesus Christ or dissociate ourselves from it. The Armenian Orthodox Church is not a "shopping center" where we visit and acquire certain items and reject others, because we do not like them or they do not "suit" us. Obviously, the Church is a living body of believers, and as such, is a growing and nourishing body. Hence, there are certain things that *change* to accommodate the needs of the believers. However, there are certain things that are *unchangeable*, such as her doctrines and basic tenets of her Faith. For example, a human body grows and changes year after year, but the basic, fundamental "components" of the body do not change, as far as their function is concerned in maintaining a healthy body. The "unchangeability" of the Church's Faith is necessary and essential for the spiritual health of her children.

As far as homosexuality is concerned, the biblical, traditional, and sacramental teaching of the Armenian

broader perspective, the issue of homosexuality should be examined within the framework of the Family—the Christian family which is a microcosm of the Church. The family is the most important nucleus of a society and if the integrity of the family is not protected, the whole social order of humanity is doomed.

In the light of the present debate concerning "Gay Rights," the Armenian Orthodox Church will agree and support guarantees to the basic rights due to all persons, and dignity, liberty, basic needs and equal access to them. However, *for the protection and care of others, the Armenian Orthodox Church cannot join in advocacy efforts which will legalize homosexual acts, or encourage public display of homosexually related behavior.*<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, the issue of homosexuality and the position of the Armenian Orthodox Church should be viewed in the context of the Church's teaching on marriage, family, and human sexuality. If one chooses not to follow the Truth of Jesus Christ through the Armenian Church, then there is no point in arguing about it. We are either in it or out of it. The Armenian Orthodox Church has a pastoral understanding of human problems with compassion, love, and sensitivity. The Church is here to support all those who struggle to overcome their passions and tendencies. The Church is here to help those who desire to grow in Jesus Christ. It is up to us to choose our path. □

## Asbarez

Armenian Daily Newspaper

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formed by persons in a homosexual condition or by persons in a heterosexual condition. Thus, many heterosexuals engage in homosexual acts without being in a homosexual condition.<sup>1</sup>

which regards homosexual behavior as natural and therefore justifiable; the rational understanding, which evaluates homosexual acts according to their ability to contribute to the growth and development of the person."<sup>2</sup>

## LETTERS TO EDITOR

### Armenian Schools & Demonstrations

The Armenian National Committee organized a demonstration on Sept. 22 in solidarity of the popular movement in Karabagh. In Armenia, students and workers have gone on strike; the entire population have given their entire lives towards the struggle that they believe in more than their own lives.

Unfortunately, the Sept. 22 demonstration was not attended by the entire Armenian community of Los Angeles.

One reason is that our schools were

open on that day.

I think it is very disappointing that even our schools did not participate in this demonstration in the numbers that they should have. Our people have failed to feel the importance of their active participation in our national struggle for our rights.

If our schools will not take the first important step towards this realization, who will?

Sharistan Melkonian  
Los Angeles

### Reader Disagrees with Bedian's Commentary

Greg Bedian asserts that politicians in Washington have a new, more positive attitude towards the political agenda of the Armenian community ("The Choice Is Ours," *Asbarez*, Sept. 30). He believes that this new position is due both to increased media attention on the Karabagh Movement and the earthquake, and to advances made by our political activists. We now have gained, it is claimed, broader and deeper support in Congress than ever before.

Without discounting our increasing political influence or the dedication and hard work of our activists in our ANC offices and at the grassroots level, I question Mr. Bedian's claim. I think that our increased support and recent political successes are more a result of the convergence of our interests with those of the politicians than anything else. I wonder if this new-found concern in the current Armenian agenda is simply due to the fact that the present

legislation is not being met by vigorous opposition as in the past. Is this a true transformation in official Washington? I wouldn't be so sure.

I strongly agree with Mr. Bedian that the Armenian community must actively support, both financially and at election time politicians who advance our interests. In order to expand our influence, however, it is imperative that, in addition to supporting our political activists, we as individuals strive relentlessly for more real power, both financial and intellectual. As I'm sure we haven't forgotten, money can often speak louder than right or truth. The Armenian community can become a genuine "player" in the game of politics only if it plays the game at the same level and with the same resources as the other "players."

Michael Kouchakdjian  
New York, NY

as morally wrong. "In the face of homosexuality, as well as all other expressions of wrongful sexual expression (fornication, adultery, prostitution, incest, bestiality, masturbation) the Church teaches that the only proper place for the exercise of the sexual function is in marriage. In the Old Testament, we read 'If there is a man who lies with a male as those be with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act, (Leviticus 20:12, 18:22). Grave punishment was visited on the city of Sodom by God for this sin (Genesis 19:1-29).' The New Testament uses this account to illustrate the 'depraved passions' of fallen humanity: 'their woman exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way the men abandoned the natural function of women and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men, committing indecent acts...' (Romans 1:24-28). In the First epistle to the Corinthians we read, 'Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals; nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.'<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Canons of the church reaffirm the biblical teaching, namely canon 12 of the Apostolic Canons (the *Didache*) and canon 20 of the Apostolic Thaddeus, found in the Canon Book of the Armenian Church.

To put it more simply, *any sexual or conjugal relationship that is not consecrated and blessed by God vis a vis the Church is sinful and not accepted*. This is the teaching of the Church and in the Armenian Orthodox Church we cannot understand one part of an issue unless we look at the whole. Otherwise, the very foundation of the church's doctrinal tradition would collapse. In a

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* Vol. 2, p. 671.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 674.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley S. Harakas. *Contemporary Moral Issues*. Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Company, 1982. p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95.

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ASBAREZ (ISSN 0004-4229) ARMENIAN NEWSPAPER is published daily except Sunday, Monday and holidays; Saturdays with the weekend/English edition, by the Asbarez Publishing Company, Inc.: 419 W. Colorado Street, Glendale, CA 91204. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE paid at Glendale, CA and additional offices. POSTMASTER—please send address changes to Asbarez, 419 W. Colorado St., Glendale, CA 91204. ADVERTISING RATES will be provided upon request. UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS & PHOTOS cannot be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes.