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St. Justin of Ćelije's Critique of Humanism: The Case of Homosexuality

Priest Roman Tarabrin

Sretensky Theological Academy, Moscow, Russia

Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Moscow, Russia

Introduction

Same-sex relationships have existed in different epochs and cultures. For example, in ancient Egypt, several findings in literature and arts show that homosexual acts took place there (Walsh 2012, 178 – 87).¹ In ancient Greece, homosexual relationship was a common practice, especially with social subordinates. It was auspicious “if a freeborn man who is the head of household dreams of having (penetrative) sex with social subordinates, that is, with his wife or with his servants (male or female)” (Schultz 2019, 185). And conversely, it was condemned if the same man became a passive partner of his male servant (*ibid.*, 185). So, sexual roles reflected relationships of power and possession. It was therefore “normal” for ancient Greeks to sexually abuse their students (Foucault, M. 1990, 204 – 206). Similar examples can be found in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, ancient China, and ancient India (Bullough 2019, 2). Moreover, Bullough points out that among American tribes even institutionalized homosexuality was accepted (*loc.cit.*).

The ubiquity of these sexual perversions was in deep contrast with the Judeo-Christian attitude. In the book of *Leviticus*, such intercourse is unequivocally condemned: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22 cf. also 20:12). Christians as well are kept in line by a God Who revealed Himself as one Who created mankind as man and woman and Who hates homosexual acts. For Christians, such acts separate them from their divine calling: Those who practice homosexuality “will not inherit the kingdom of God” says the apostle (1 Cor. 6:9).

The Christianization of the West rendered same-sex intercourse an outrageous sin, to be punished by death (Bullough 2019, 31 – 33). Today, however, homosexuality is viewed as a

¹ For example, in history of Seth and Horn, the god Seth is condemned after his nephew Horus's semen was found inside of him. In contrast, the story of Neferkare and the General Saset contains a description of non-aggressive homosexual intercourse. A picture of a tomb depicts two men touching noses and torsos which are associated with romantic gay relationships (Walsh 2012).



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lifestyle preference, and same-sex intercourse is considered normal between consenting parties (Engelhardt 2000, 233 – 234). This essay asks the question: how could Christians in the West, after centuries of moral opposition to such acts, have become so weakened in their opposition today? This essay looks for an answer in St. Justin of Ćelije's teaching about the Godman, and his critique of humanism which that teaching implies. This essay seeks to render explicit what St. Justin's writings only allow one to conclude: Western Christianity, in allowing itself to be seduced into endorsing the humanism that manifested itself in papal claims to power and in a scholastic theology that relied on human reason, thus transforming life in Christ into a moral agenda, also de-spiritualized that Christian life. As a result, with the advent of post-modernity and the breakdown of metaphysical foundations for what was affirmed as „Christian morality,“ the Divine injunction against homosexual acts became implausible and is in the process of getting disregarded.²

This paper starts out with the understanding of human being and his sexual norms as presented in the patristic teaching of St. Justin of Ćelije (Popovich, 1894-1979) and St. Maximos Confessor (+ 662). The argument proceeds in five steps: 1. The substitution of spiritual life with reasoning about God paved the way toward scholasticism. That weakening of spiritual life facilitated the emergence of modern Humanism which accorded man a central position in life, culture, and the sciences. The eradication of God from human life, as explicitly manifested in post-modernism, led to the denial of the very concept of truth. In consequence, sexual life became de-moralized: all sexual desires and practices were declared morally neutral issues of individual preference. 2. St. Justin clearly identifies the setting aside of God and His commandments in Christian life as the root of such distortion of human (including sexual) life. His critique of all kinds of humanism as the substitution of God with man exposes the inevitable result: the transformation of man as endowed with the freedom and status as a subject (a person), able to reveal his creation after the image of God, into an object of the natural and social sciences. Outside of their spiritual connection with God, humans lose the ontological basis for moral and spiritual accountability, and thus for a spiritually grounded moral life. Only by restoring that spiritual connection can humans hope to overcome their alienation from God, and thus also the post-modern deformation of ethical norms (including sexual norms). Such restoration has to start with a new appreciation of what it means to be a human person. 3. St. Justin argues that such ontological basis is present in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. As true God and at the same time true man, He revealed in Himself what it means to be a person. Only by returning to the God-Man, so St. Justin argues, can humans be restored to their personhood in the image of God. 4. Such returning requires following God's commandments, including sex-related ones. Here, St. Maximos Confessor's teaching about *logoi*, i.e. God's preordained rules of spiritual life, come into play. Only by following these *logoi* can lead a rightly oriented

² As an example, one might trace the implausibility of applying to Divine injunctions in Calvin Robinson's arguing with Anglican bishops to prove that the Bible is against homosexuality.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymbTb2HS5Rc>



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spiritual life, and thus also likeness to the God-Man and true personhood, be restored. 5. The fifth and final section will apply this teaching about *logoi* to the Christian teaching on sexual behavior.

1. Forgetting spiritual life in God

Spiritual life is the foundation of theology in the strict sense. Only those who pray rightly can theologize (Evagrius Ponticus 1981, 65). Only those who have purified their heart can *see* God and thereby speak truly about God (Matth 5:8, cf. Gregory of Nazianzus 2011, 3)³ However, to share their – as the Tradition calls it - noetic experience of communion with God, apostles, fathers, and other saints had to use their intellectual abilities to profit other people.⁴ Thus, during the first millennium, philosophical discursive reasoning was employed to articulate dogmas more clearly or to defend Christian teaching against heretics (Engelhardt 2007). As a result of such merely auxiliary engagement of human philosophy, there was no gap between the practice of the Christian faith and support through rules, Councils' statements, dogmas, and liturgy.

The situation changed when the articulation of theology as communion WITH God was gradually substituted with reasoning ABOUT God.

The Scholastic turn to speculative philosophy, as core element of a new understanding of theology, marked the beginning of a momentous cultural change in what was expected of the relationship between human reason, theology, and Christian culture. Discursive rationality and speculative reason were authorized to assess and recast theology and then, finally, even to transform moral theology into a moral philosophy indistinguishable from secular moral reflection. (ibid.).

In forgetting about the center of spiritual life in God (by following His commandments and thereby remaining within His love and grace), this new theology in effect expelled God from human life and consequently from culture. This is especially evident in the example of man's place in that culture. In the first millennium, man was perceived as a microcosm, as the center of the universe, through the deification of whom the whole surrounding world was to be offered to God. (Gregory of Nyssa 1893, 403 – 405) The main emphasis here was placed on the necessity of man's communion with God.

The new synthesis of theology and philosophy exchanged such noetic experience OF God with a purely human knowledge ABOUT God. Discursive reasoning and verbal articulation of the Divine mysteries, in no longer being grounded in the grace of being allowed to “see” God (i.e. communing with His un-created energies), removed safeguards against intellectual error. As a result, the place of man in the World was changed so as to introduce

³ Oration 27, 3. PG 36, 15A.

⁴ “In church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” – 1 Cor 14:19.



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Humanism. Here, man, all by himself and no longer connected to his Divine calling, had become the first and primary goal of the world. The difference between the understanding of man as a king of the universe for first-millennium Christianity and the subsequent humanistic approach to man as primary goal thus rests on different views of the relationship of man with God. In traditional Christianity, man's central position is contingent on his moving towards communion with God. In Humanism, man is a primary and independent center of the Universe.

How we define and understand 'man' affects our definition of right and wrong human behavior. Ever since the experience of the Holy Spirit was lost in Western Christianity, human ideals, the goal of human life, and criteria for human conduct were explained differently from what had been taught in the first centuries. Discursive reasoning, all by itself, cannot provide universally binding moral norms. Around competition concerning such norms, the European nations divided into rival camps that at times resulted in religious wars (e.g. of 1618 - 1648).

Unfortunately, even after realizing that religious divisions had resulted from a cacophony of reasoning ABOUT God, the West did not return to noetic communion WITH God but instead set God aside, along with ever greater numbers of His commandments. A new search for worldly peace was promised by the Enlightenment 'Project of Modernity' (Engelhardt 1996, 5 – 7). On the basis of human reason alone, philosophers tried to discover a common morality that would bind everyone together, avoid (religiously deluded) moral conflicts, and thus provide the basis for eternal peace. (Kant 1897).⁵ The hope was to be able to secure a morality while avoiding any reference to God. (Engelhardt 1996, 5). This is why Octavio Paz calls the modern era "a falling away from Christian society". (Paz 1974, 27)

The modernity of the 19th and early 20th centuries were full of hope and faith in scientific and social progress. (Engelhardt 1996, Ch. 1, ref 6)⁶ This hope for progress may have roots in the notion, existing since Christian times, of a successive development of the world towards one goal. In the Christian context, such a transcendent goal is the Kingdom of God. But the scientific discoveries and achievements of the 19th and 20th centuries diverted human attention from this previously canonical account. Thus, for example, Einstein's relativity theory makes it impossible to believe that there exists anything ultimately constant in the world. Ever since the development of his theory, everything, including time and space, has 'reality' only relatively, i.e., in relation to something else. Time and space became dependent on the speed with which an object is moving. At the same time, Darwin's theory of natural selection cast doubts on man's privileged position in the Universe. Man became just one among many in the chain of living organisms. To name just one other example: The emergence of photography blurred the uniqueness of objects of art. Thus, the scientific and technological discoveries of the late 19th and 20th centuries gave rise to a worldview crisis that also questioned the ability

⁵ Kant here proposed, six years after the French Revolution, the establishment of a league of nations to formulate the conditions for the eternal peace.

⁶ Cf. Moore J. H. *The Universal Kinship*. London: George Bell, 1906.



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of philosophy to provide a reasonable, objective picture of the world. The era of post-modernity was approaching.

The term 'post-modern' has been widely used to designate significant changes that occurred in the arts, technology, and society after WWII. "The advent of post-modern period has been marked by the rapid rise of a new technology of knowledge which serves data collection and analysis, simulation, and systems analysis". (Etzioni 1968, 9). However, postmodern philosophy, as a more reflective stage of modernity, had started long before WWII. Its roots can be traced to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). They both aimed at overthrowing metaphysical truths, rendering them merely subjective preferences, contingently embraced by individuals, social groups, or a historical epoch. Postmodernity here appeared as '*incredulity toward metanarratives*' (Lyotard 1984, xiv), meaning that the grand narratives justifying knowledge had been lost.⁷

The principled rejection of religion characterizing modernity was completed by a post-modern rebellion against technology that was claimed to reflect nothing beyond a higher level of rationalization and a more advanced variant of a long-outdated metaphysics. (Snyder 1988, XV) Metaphysics had become a metanarrative that would impede a person's ability to reach a freedom that was now conceived as "total". Likewise, as a primarily metaphysical concept, 'Being' was criticized. From the time of Plato and Aristotle, 'Being' had signified a kind of objective truth that exists independently of man, and that can therefore be grasped by a reason that transcends human limitations. However, ever since Heidegger's philosophy, Being has ceased to be understood as something stable and objective. He pointed out that "To think Being explicitly requires us to relinquish Being as the ground of beings". (Heidegger 1962, 6) According to him, we should forget Being as foundation of everything that exists. Following Heidegger, Vattimo (1936-2023) advocated a complete break with metaphysics, offering instead his 'non-metaphysical' understanding of truth. Rather than presenting as something endowed with permanence and stability, Being as the central concept of metaphysics (and also of truth as connected with it) boils down to "events" or "what is constantly being reinterpreted, rewritten, and remade" (Snyder 1988, XX).

Nowadays, living under the rule of postmodernity, one can no longer establish claims to something truly objective. It is recognized that to advance such claims one would need foundations received from the past. Postmodern philosophy, after all, has rejected all previous human experience and knowledge, dismissing it as a misguided way of searching for the objective truth that had (quite unreasonably) been promised by Western metaphysics. Having rejected metaphysics with its rationalization, post-modern philosophy did not turn back to God. Instead, that philosophy considers the Divine revelation as just another metanarrative, designed

⁷ However, such 'incredulity' was a result of progress in science itself. The development of sciences even required the rejection of metanarratives, since these were thought to inhibit scientific progress. Yet this same requirement. On the other hand, metanarratives were those foundations that justified not only the destination of that science but also the content of this knowledge, the core notion of objectivity in science that is the truth itself.



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to impede humans' unhindered and subjectively valid interpretation of the world. Not surprisingly therefore, the most prominent proclaimer of post-modern thought, Nietzsche, declared the death of God (1974, 181).⁸ With no objective reality or experience in hands, post-modernity reduces all objectivity to a will to power of interpretation, in other words, ideological will.

As a result, in post-modernity, everything appears merely fictional. We must reject any kind of truth (annihilate the very concept) claimed to undergird any possible human experience as true and valuable. Breaking all restrictions, this philosophy is also known as nihilism: "An accomplished nihilism ... calls us to a fictionalized experience of reality, which is also our only possibility for freedom" (Vattimo 1988, 29). Nihilism attacks reason (and thus also truth, as metaphysically inseparable from reason) on all levels, whether in art, morality, or in science.

Morality provides a telling example: Here good and evil have been rendered contingent on personal (social, cultural, regional) preferences. Moral concerns appear transformed into lifestyle issues. (Engelhardt 2017). There is no objective basis upon which to justify the value of one's actions. There is no rational argument that can be employed to convince others of the need to accept one's own moral perspectives. Instead, individuals adhere to their respectively own values, resulting in a dynamic and evolving system of diversely affirmed values. We can assume that this is the reason why Vattimo insists on calling Being an "exchange-value" (Vattimo 1988, 29) in post-modernity.

The implications are significant. A good example in view of human behavior is sexual ethics. Michel Foucault, one of the heralds of post-modern philosophy, describes the different approaches to sexual activities endorsed in different epochs and cultures. There exists no objective truth with regard to right or wrong forms of sexual behavior. 'Truth' is created within specific discourses. Different visions of proper sexuality are all equally subjective, because conditioned by historical and cultural circumstances.⁹

Foucault even claims that the very notion of homosexuality appeared only in the 19th century when states realized the necessity of controlling their constituents through sexual and procreative norms. Only at that time would medical and psychological studies declare same-sex relationships pathological. To prove this argument, Foucault submits that in ancient Greece there was no separation between permitted and non-permitted sexual practices for men. Disapproval only extended to the overuse of sexual pleasures, the use of a passive instead of an active role for men, or the failure to respect the social hierarchy in sexual relations. According to Foucault, love affairs with boys were not only permitted by law and public opinion, but were constantly reinforced by existing institutions, such as the army, or schools. In addition, there

⁸ Book III, Section 125.

⁹ Cf. Schultz 2019.

See Halperin's summary: "Foucault... conceives morality not as a set of formal and explicit prescriptions whose content can be more or less accurately summarized but as a cultural discourse whose modes of signification reveal the conditions under which values are constituted as such" - Halperin, D. M. (1986). Sexual ethics and technologies of the self in classical Greece.



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was a special literature glorifying this kind of love and establishing its higher value. (Sokuler 2007) Marital fidelity was to be observed only by women because they belonged to their husbands and had no rights of their own. Regarding a married free man, restrictions on sexual activity were linked with the interest of the state: it was better to conceive children in marriage; only children born in marriage could become free citizens. Having sexual relations outside of marriage was allowed, but children born out of wedlock were not recognized as legitimate heirs. Foucault gives the example of Euripides' *Medea*: Her crying out at Jason's infidelity is motivated by his having forsaken her in favor of a royal bride whose offspring will reduce his children by Medea to a state of humiliation and servitude." (Foucault 1990, 164).

Foucault's justification of homosexuality would subsequently develop towards recognition not only of sexual relationships, but also of sexual identity as a lifestyle choice. Dissensus arose about whether sexual differences rest in objective biological givens, representing an objective feature of the world and thus a matter of discovery, or whether these distinctions represent merely a social construct. A matter of human decision, decree, or convention.' (Skrzypek 2023, 77 – 94). Discursive reasoning, merely as such, does not provide any clear response to such questions. To find an answer, it is necessary to reconsider post-modern arguments on reality and man. We will do so by appealing to St. Justin's teaching on the God-Man.

2. St. Justin's Critique of Humanism

In many of his writings, St. Justin mentioned the demoralization of Europe: "What is left of Europe when God is torn from its body? A corpse. ... The result is devastating. Enamored of things, European man himself finally becomes a "thing"." (Justin 2009b). Substituting God by 'European man' inevitably led to the disappearance of man as the center of a universe governed by God and his transformation from a personal subject into a series of psychological processes. As a result, all human morality – as Engelhardt has called it – is deflated and demoralized.

According to St. Justin, humanity (in the strong, center-of-the-universe sense of the term) cannot exist without metaphysical foundations. There must be a goal to which humans aspire, a purpose to which they dedicate their life, a vision of the meaning of their existence, and a set of principles to which they adhere in their practical activities. From the beginning of His Self-revelation to the prophets of the Old Testament, God provided such a foundational anchor. From the beginning of Christianity, Christians sought after God and organized their lives so as to come closer to God's Kingdom. The prospect of eternal life in God's Kingdom inspired Christians and gave them a sense of fulfillment. God's commandments were (and still are) the principles according to which Christians have shaped their practical activities. Thus, all facets of life served one purpose – God and eternal communion with Him.

With the development of humanism, God's Kingdom ceased to play the most important role. It was man himself, conceived as independent from God, who replaced God at the



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metaphysical center of human life. The history of the Fall was thus repeated: Man, who should have become god-like together with God, decided to sever the life-giving connection with his Creator, seeking to become a god on his own. Having rejected God, man decided to become the center of the universe all by himself. In a similar way, the humanism of Western scholasticism began to exalt man (and human reason) beyond his connection to God. It gradually pushed God to the periphery of human consciousness, adopting man as the highest reality.¹⁰ According to St. Justin, this happened as result of the loss of the true understanding of man –as if man had lost himself. “This is because, through the course of history, various heresies denied or deformed certain aspects of the God-man and Lord Jesus Christ; these European heresies remove Him altogether and put European man in His place.” (1994, 169). With the beginning of the historical period of Humanism, man was still conceived as occupying a central place in the world, - a residual trace of a truly Christian understanding of man as the image of God. With the gradual disappearance of God, these remnants of knowledge and understanding of man as ruler of the world evaporated. As a result, man as a self-determining subject and co-creator of nature was eventually reduced to a mere process of states of self-consciousness: Thus, for example, in secular bioethics, personhood is considered today as a psychological concept. It refers to an ability to reason, to self-awareness, and communication with others that is established by empirical data suggesting such abilities.¹¹ This is how man has lost his status as God’s image and has been reduced to a process of psychological states.

This same disappearance of a substantial concept of man is confirmed by post-modern philosophers who also criticize the humanism at the root of that disappearance. Thus, Vattimo explains the loss of humans’ status as a subject as result of a completed rationalization of humanism itself: ‘[T]he subject, conceived of by humanism as self-consciousness, is simply the correlative of metaphysical Being which is defined in terms of objectivity, that is, in terms of clarity, stability, and unshakable certainty <...> The subject is ‘overcome’ ’. (Vattimo 1988, 42 – 43). Yet, Vattimo, even though he criticizes the rationalist approach to man, does not turn back to God in order to recover the foundation which had been lost by Humanism. His way of denying the very project of rationality leaves him with nothing beyond nihilism. Vattimo’s critique of humanism can thus serve an example of the post-modern end-stage destruction of

¹⁰ For example, St. Justin says: “Humanism is in fact the fundamental evil, the original evil of man. In the name of original humanism man has driven God out into a superhuman transcendentalism and is left entirely with himself and within himself. Yet despite all this, man was unable to completely expel from himself the Godlike traits of his spirit; they remained to manifest themselves even in his humanism in the form of a yearning for infinite progress, for infinite knowledge, for infinite improvement, for infinite existence. Consciously and unconsciously, in all the struggles which man has conducted in his humanism, he longs to regain the Godlikeness he has lost. In this he partially succeeds, succeeds insofar as it is necessary for him to sense and realize that on his own, with his pure godless humanness, he can never correct his spirit, to reintegrate the Godlikeness of his being.” (2009a).

¹¹ ‘Personhood is a psychological concept not a biological one. It is a being mental and behavioral capacities that make it a person, not the shape of its body, the microstructure of its chromosomes, or any other strictly physiological characteristics’ (Warren 2000, 93-94).



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humanity, and thus as confirmation of St. Justin's claim that Humanism has destroyed humanity. It is only that for Justin humanism has done that already from its Medieval beginnings, by separating man from God, whereas for Vattimo, Humanism can achieve its goal of destroying man only through its post-modern final stage.

Thus, once one leaves a God-based understanding of a man behind, one will find oneself on the slippery slope towards the disappearance of man. As Cvetković infers from St. Justin's teaching "If God does not exist, Justin claims, then the logical consequence of the humanist project, after passing through the atheist and anarchist phases, is to end in nihilism". (Cvetković 2021, 204)

The disappearance of the right understanding of man also leads to the blurring of the boundaries between good and evil. St. Justin summarizes it as follows:

Outside of Him [Christ] a man turns into an apparition, into a scarecrow, into nonsense. Instead of a man you find the dregs of a man, the fragments of a man, the scraps of a man. Therefore, true manhood lies only in God-manhood; and no other manhood exists under heaven. (Popovich 2009a).

The multiplication of perspectives on moral norms, including sexual behavior, is a result of the evaporation of the Christian remnants that had remained in the European culture even after God had gradually faded into the background of Western social life at the dawn of the historical period of Humanism. If God is dead (as Nietzsche claimed¹²) then everything is permitted (as Dostoevsky added¹³).

According to St. Justin (2009b), the downgrading of all moral norms to the level of values (Engelhardt 2000, 233 – 239) inevitably results in dissensus concerning priorities among values, and, ultimately, in the disappearance of all claims to objective values and any proper hierarchy: "As there is nothing absolute in human worlds, then there is no hierarchy of being and no hierarchy of values; there is only anarchy"(Justin 2009b)

So, following St. Justin teaching, we can conclude that the roots of postmodern ethics, including sexual ethics, lie in a refusal of God and His commandments. The possible restoration of the place of God's commandments in people's lives must begin with the re-discovery of foundations for humans as persons (in the Christian sense of the term) rather than living objects. To become a person, understood even just in the morally serious sense Humanism had vainly aspired to, once again, humans must recover unshakeable foundations for rebuilding their life, culture, ethics, and bioethics. This task requires an appeal to God and obedience to God's commandments, and in this sense the restoration of a full spiritual life.

¹² "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?" – Nietzsche, F. 1974. Book III, Section 125, p. 181.

¹³ 'But what will become of men then?' I asked him, 'without God and immortal life? All things are lawful then, they can do what they like?' (Dostoevsky, 1950).



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3. Restoration of man in God-Man by St. Justin Popovich

St. Justin sees the solution to the crisis of humanism not in overcoming the drawbacks of Humanism and in settling for a “weak” theology without substantive truth-claims (as postmodernists will), but in the restoration of the truth about man. For him, the true man is God having come into flesh. He is true God and true man, i.e. the God-man. Through His own perfection, He revealed true humanity without sin, without corruption, without death, “totally filled with God, and thereby with all divine perfections”, and therefore, as God, knowing everything. The God-man disclosed the truth about man as being “personified eternal Truth”. Therefore, in the God-man, St. Justin sees the restoration of the correct understanding of man’s Divine vocation. In the person of Jesus Christ, God revealed what it means to be a good, sinless, and perfect man. (Justin 2006, 272).

The Word of God, as God-man, revealed not only perfect truth, but also justice, love, and the ideal of all the other virtues modernity had attempted to establish with the help of reason. In addition to serving as a role model, the God-man set the purpose of human life and defined the boundaries within which that purpose could be achieved. Furthermore, he provided the means to help achieve that purpose:

In the Incarnation of God the essence, the way, and the means of salvation of man and the world from sin, evil, and death are revealed. It contains the whole plan of salvation, all the means, and all the ways of man to God, the creature to the Creator, and the prodigal son to the Father. In the God-man is taught the most truly realized divine ideal of the human person; in the God-man organism, the Church, is presented the most truly accomplished divine ideal of a holy, gracious society (Justin 2006, 294).

In his *Dogmatics*, St. Justin elucidates the purpose of human life as follows:

The eternal meaning and purpose of human nature was revealed in the God-Man Christ, who saved it from the relativism of anarchism and the nihilism of humanism. In Him, humanity was able to reclaim its divine image, which had been distorted and dehumanized by sin. (Justin, St. 2006, 292, cf. also 272).

Consequently, the objective of human existence is to achieve union with Christ, which is accomplished through emulation of and fellowship with Him:

To be Orthodox means to have the God-man constantly in your soul, to live in Him, think in Him, feel in Him, act in Him. In other words, to be Orthodox means to be a Christ-bearer and a Spirit-bearer. (Popovich 2009a)

The boundaries by which we must regulate our lives to achieve the goal of human life are the commandments of God, revealed in their fullness during the earthly life of the Son of God, first by Himself, and later through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and their successors. These are the *logoi* of being – eternally established the ideal patterns by which every creature, all being, partakes of God. All of them were revealed by the God-man.



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Thus, the sources through which we can learn about the moral rules in force for Orthodox Christians are the Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition, including the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the decrees of the councils, canonical rules, and liturgical texts. (Tarabrin and Tarabrina 2025) It is worth noting the importance in Orthodoxy of both Scripture and Tradition for the clarification of the commandments of God, because both of these sources complement and mutually condition each other. It is by God's revelation that the holy fathers form their doctrine, and the Church accepts it. It is by God's revelation that councils of bishops unanimously express the will of the Holy Spirit through canons and rules. By the action of God, His Church recognizes certain provisions for inclusion in liturgical texts. The Liturgy is the peak of the Holy Tradition. Only what was recognized by the Church as an expression of Truth, as dogma, was integrated into the Divine services. St. Martyr Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130-200) makes this clear:

Our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit (Irenaeus 2001, 831).¹⁴

Finally, the God-man provided the means by which to fulfill the purpose of human life and to help us follow His commandments – the sacraments of the Church. Through the sacraments, we not only draw closer to God, we even become Divine-human. St. Justin writes:

[The Eucharist] is our complete union with Christ, our becoming God-man. Here the entire God-manifestation of salvation, from the Incarnation to the Ascension, is graciously perceived and experienced. (Justin 2006, 239).

But in addition, we are cleansed of sin in Confession and the Eucharist, we are cured of our spiritual infirmities through the touch of the transfigured and healed Flesh of Christ. "It is the God-manifesting power that sanctifies, purifies, transfigures, assimilates to Christ, enters a person to the Church, make him God-man, make him a partaker of the Trinity, saves." (Justin 2006, 241).

4. St. Maximos Confessor's teaching on the *logoi* of being and the *tropoi* of existence

In the context of St. Justin's teaching about the restoration of man, it is worth considering the doctrine of St. Maximos Confessor on *logos*, to whom St. Justin often refers in his *Dogmatics*. This doctrine provides a theological foundation for the necessity of following the Divine commandments as the Divine ordained ideals of the world - the *logoi*¹⁵ of being.

¹⁴ Chapter XVIII "Concerning sacrifices and oblations, and those who truly offer them #5."

¹⁵ In this paper, to designate of the Plural form of 'logos' and 'tropos', we use its Greek variants 'logoi' and 'tropoi'.



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St. Maximos, in his interpretation of the difficult passages of the theology of St. Gregory of Nazianzus says that

The principles [οἱ λόγοι] of all beings that exist essentially – whether they exist now or will exist in the future, whether they have come to be or will come to be, or have appeared or will appear – preexist and are immovably fixed in God, and it is according to these that all things are, and have come to be, and remain always drawing closer to their own predetermined principles [λόγοι] through natural motion. (Maximos Confessor 2014b, Ambigua to John # 42, 149)

Therefore, the *logoi* of being are the design, the meaning of creatures' existence. They exist eternally in God and are His eternal volitions about the world. Every creature, and in particular every intelligent creature, has the *logos* of its being existing in God. These 'minor' *logoi* represent the ideal patterns by which every creature partakes of God. Those minor *logoi* are depicted as radii of a circle, in the center of which they all are united in God the Word, the Unique Divine *Logos*. Explaining St. Gregory the Theologian's expression that man is a particle of the Deity, St. Maximos concludes that although all of creation communicates with God through their *logoi*, individual *logoi* are present only for humans and angels. (Maximos Confessor 2007, 394)¹⁶

The knowledge of any creature by God and the headship of creation in Christ is explained by St. Maximos by the pre-existence of the *logos* of that creation. St. Maximos speaks about this in more detail:

In God the logoi of all things are steadfastly fixed, and it is on the basis of these, that God is said to know all things before they come into being, for in absolute truth, in Him and with Him are all things even though all things – things present and things to come – were not called into existence simultaneously with their logoi or with their being known by God. Instead in the wisdom of the Creator, individual things were created at the appropriate moment in time, in a manner consistent with their logoi, and thus they received in themselves their actual existence as beings. For God is eternally active creator, but creatures exist first in potential, and only later in actuality [1080B] (Maximos, Confessor 2014a, 99 - 101).

The created world exists in accordance with the good, perfect divine meaning and design (*logos*), but the mode of its existence (*tropos* – another term of St. Maximos) may not correspond to that design (Sherwood 2007, 436 – 458). When man's mode of existence (*tropos*) fully and completely corresponds to his pre-ordained *logos* (which includes the purpose and direction of a person's spiritual movement), then man receives «well-being»¹⁷, because in such a movement of man, God knows him and therefore man abides in God. In God's knowledge of

¹⁶ Scholium #74 to the translation of *Ambigua* 7 of St. Maximos Confessor (PG #1080B – #1080)

¹⁷ "Well-being" is the term St. Maximos uses for salvation. In other words, since salvation is being with and in God, the source of everything good, "well-being" receives the eschatological sense as being in God. Its opposite is "ill-being" the condition out of being in God, that is, being in Hades.



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man lie eternal life, salvation, and the kingdom of God. Conversely, a person who lives not in accordance with his *logos* of being will not be recognized by God at the Last Judgment: “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Mt 7:23). St. Maximos describes this reception of well-being as follows:

They [all being] receive well-being through virtue and through their direct progress toward the principles [λόγοι] according to which they exist; or they receive ill-being through vice and their movement contrary to the principle by which they exist. To put it concisely, they move in accordance with their possession or privation of the potential they have naturally to participate in Him who is by nature absolutely imparticipable. (Maximos, Confessor 2014a, 101)

The theological foundation for human personhood and adequate behavior must therefore lie in the *logoi* of being human. In other words, even the norms in force for human sexuality must be gleaned from God’s revelation of those preexisting *logoi*, and only by conforming to those *logoi* can humans receive their eternal being in God.

5. Preexisting *Logoi* of being regarding sex and sexual behavior

Since the world exists through participation in the Divine *logoi*, there are not only individual *logoi* of persons (humans and angels) and of nature but also various *logoi* that condition the natural development of nature. Reflecting on the *logoi* of creatures, the 19th-century Russian scholar Epifanovich says:

These logoi can, however, be considered not only in relation to their Originator and Bearer, but also in relation to the world formed by them, so to speak, in themselves. ... their whole being is essentially ideal. It is nothing else but a set of logoi, ‘emanating’ from the Logos and variously intertwined with each other. All qualitative differences of being depend on different combinations of these logoi. (2003, 62 – 66)

Thus, God determined both the structure of this world and its content.

Moreover, the doctrine of *logoi* also corroborates the well-known fact that God has established specific rules, following which a person comes closer to Him and thus continues to live spiritually. So, if a person lives in accordance with his individual *logos* of being, which is in God, then he receives “well-being”. Conversely, if a person lives contrary to his *logos*, he does not reach his Divinely established goal, receiving “ill-being”¹⁸.

What is the *logos* of human sexual activity?

At the creation of man, God revealed that solitary existence is «not good» (Gen 2:18): The creation of a helper for Adam was caused by the necessity of perfection for man. The division

¹⁸ See the footnote 17.



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of human nature into two sexes (male and female), according to the teaching of St. Maximos the Confessor, manifests the first of the five divisions that the first Adam had to overcome on his way to perfection in God.¹⁹ Only by filling these division in creation: first the one between male and female, then the one between paradise (the earthly dwelling of the first man) and the rest of the earth, the division between earth and heaven, between the bodily world and the spiritual, angelic world, Adam was to preside over the whole world to present the whole world in his person to God so «that God may be all in all» (1 Cor. 15:28).

It is worth noting that in creating a helper for the perfection of man, God creates not another man, but a woman, Eve. According to some exegetes (such as St. John Chrysostom (+ 407) 1995, *Homily LXII*, 382 -383, or Blessed Theophylact (1055- after 1107) 2006, 161 – 162), in the creation of Adam and Eve God set the example of the first family. According to them, the first marriage was even consummated in Paradise. They define the main goal of marriage as yearning for the Lord God and helping each other towards this goal (Tarabrin 2020). Thus St. Gregory the Theologian writes “Composing one flesh, spouses have one soul. Marriage does not draw [the couple] away from God but brings [them] closer to Him” (Gregory of Nazianzus 2001, 88 - 118).. Turning to the doctrine of the *logos* of being, we can conclude from *Genesis* that God provides *logoi* for only two sexes, male and female. The *tropos* of a person’s being, of course, may not correspond to his predestined *logos*, since the will of man may go against the Divine will. But in this case, we cannot speak of normal state of affairs, it is a perversion of God’s design, it is a way opposing God and leading to “ill-being”. Thus, the biblical narrative of the creation of Adam and Eve offers the main theological argument for the binarity and exclusivity of the two sexes.

In addition to the need for perfection, in dividing man into two sexes, God foresees the subsequent fall of Adam and the need for reproduction to produce offspring and prepare for the incarnation of God. Thus, we can say that the fall of man has had a radical impact not only on the nature of man and the rest of creation present and future, but also on the past. After the fall, the incarnation of the Son of God became necessary for the healing of human nature.²⁰

On the other hand, today biomedical data, indicating the complexity of the sexual formation process; feed the current controversy about the differences between sex and gender.²¹

¹⁹ “These five divisions <...> are: between man and woman, between heaven and the universe , i.e. the inhabited world, between heaven and earth, between what is accessible to the mind and what is accessible to the senses, and finally between created and uncreated nature” (Cvetković 2021, 208).

²⁰ However, St. Maximos even speaks of the inevitability of the Divine incarnation as part of the Creator's plan before the creation of the world, regardless of the foreparents’ fall into sin. Deification of manhood is regarded as the final goal of the creation of the World: “It is the Divine end for the sake of which all [created things] came into being. It is the divine end, conceived [by God] before the beginning of creatures, which we define in this way: it is the end conceived [by God] beforehand, for the sake of which all [created things] <...> exist. With this end in mind, God brought into being the essence of [all] beings.” – transl. from Russian: *Maximos Confessor*. Quaest. ad Thalass., 60. <http://www.rodon.org/mi/vkf.htm#a58> (this quotation refers to PG 90, 621A–B)

The Venerable Justin, following St. Maximos, says that God the Word, without Adam's fall into sin, would have become incarnate in a glorified body, just as He appeared in a glorified body after the resurrection.

²¹ For more details, see Skrzypek, J. W. (2023).



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For example, persons suffering from the Swyer syndrome (Meyer et al. 2019) have XY chromosomes and yet the appearance of a female, with corresponding female sex characteristics. There is also congenital hermaphroditism with both male and female sex organs. There are people with mosaicism - the simultaneous presence of cells with XX and XY in the same body. However, these abnormalities do not support any call for sex determination after birth or later at will. Such cases are pathological; they deviate from the normal process of sex formation as a result of the fallen world we are inhabiting. In the case of such pathology, the Russian Orthodox Church even allows surgical correction, applied in the context of medical care.²²

Moreover, in the creation of Adam and Eve, God's affirmation of the monogamous union of man and woman is manifested. Being sinless and having an enlightened mind in communion with God, Adam uttered an important statement that is relevant both to Eve and to the subsequent sexual intercourse between man and woman: "She shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2: 23-24). The necessity of monogamous union, i.e. sexual relations of one man with one woman, was reconfirmed by God Himself after the incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt 19:5-6). Christ's reiteration of Adam's words is important because it is after the Fall that God shows the continued validity of His affirmation of the overcoming of the separation between man and woman in marriage. Furthermore, Christ goes on to answer the question about the permissibility of polygamy and divorce in the Old Testament by saying: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Mt 19:8).

Therefore, even after the fall, the *logos* of sexual relationships has not changed; the divine definition of what it means to become one flesh remains unchanged: 1. It is limited to heterosexual relationships; 2. It occurs within the context of marriage; 3. Sexual partners should join for the whole life, excluding the possibility of divorce and the formation of "new flesh" with another man or woman.

The *logos* of being in view of sexual relationships is revealed in other places of both sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition that are equally important to Orthodoxy. For example, in the Old Testament, the story of the execution of Sodom and Gomorrah is associated with the lecherous character of its inhabitants. The immediate reason for the execution was the demand of the inhabitants of Sodom that Lot to hand over his guests for sexual abuse (Gen. 19: 4-9). The book of Leviticus affirms the categorical inadmissibility of homosexual relations, incest and bestiality, which should be punished by death (Lev. 20:12-14).

Despite the fact that the moral law of the Old Testament does not offer the full extent of the Divine teaching, the New Testament confirms the sexual norms of the Old Testament; it

²² For more detail see in Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. 2000. .



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further purifies those provisions that were caused by the hard-heartedness of the old man and the lack of graceful help in the fulfillment of divine decrees. So, the apostle Paul speaks several times about the inadmissibility of sexual immorality: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men” (1 Cor 6:9).²³ In the context of St. Maximos’ teaching on the *logos* of being, St. Paul’s words about the impossibility of inheriting the Kingdom of God can mean only one thing: The *logos* of being concerning sexual relations does exclude homosexuality, fornication and adultery. If a person in his sexual life moves in accordance with the *logos* of being, which is found in God and affirmed by Him as normative, the person is improved spiritually and will receive the Kingdom of God. God knows such a person not merely externally, but internally, because the person does not oppose God, does not go against Him and His *logoi*, and thus proves that he wants God to remember and know him. Conversely, if a person moves contrary to the preordained *logos* of sexual relations, he does not reach the right goal, receiving “ill-being”. God will not know (in the sense of recognize as His own) such a person because the person himself does not want to conform to the *logos* ordained by God.

Certainly, sexual relations are not indispensable for moving toward God. In the Tradition of the Church, there are other ways of spiritual perfection, such as monasticism or celibacy, which correspond to Christ’s idea of the varying degrees of spiritual perfection of man: “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:12). Explaining this statement which in today’s world can be easily misunderstood, St. Gregory Nazianzus states that these words “represent higher things by bodily figures” so that this passage should be taken in a spiritual sense. This is why under eunuchs he refers not to persons who are bodily mutilated but rather to persons who spiritually cut themselves off from the passions.²⁴

²³ Another clear place with the prohibition of homosexual acts is 1 Tim 1:9-10.

²⁴ St. Gregory explains “There are, He says, some eunuchs which were so born from their mother’s womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. I think that the discourse would sever itself from the body and represent higher things by bodily figures; for to stop the meaning at bodily eunuchs would be small and very weak, and unworthy of the Word; and we must understand in addition something worthy of the Spirit. Some, then, seem by nature to incline to good. And when I speak of nature, I am not slighting free will, but supposing both—an aptitude for good, and that which brings the natural aptitude to effect. And there are others whom reason cleanses, by cutting them off from the passions. These I imagine to be meant by those whom men have made Eunuchs, when the word of teaching distinguishing the better from the worse and rejecting the one and commanding the other (like the verse, Depart from evil and do good), works spiritual chastity. This sort of making eunuchs I approve; and I highly praise both teachers and taught, that the one have nobly effected, and the other still more nobly endured, the cutting off”. – Gregory of Nazianzus 1995, 343.



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Conclusion

Patristic teaching, as presented in this essay with St. Justin and St. Maximos Confessor, does indeed consider man as the center of the universe. It does so, however, only insofar as man preserves his connection with God, the true center and true supporter of that universe. Having set aside God in Humanism, humanity was destined for nihilism. Gradually, in postmodernism, humanity evaporated: From a personal subject with an immortal soul and free will man was reduced to a mere series of psychological processes, deprived of the ability for foundational reasoning and moral agency.

As one of consequences, all moral norms were deflated into lifestyle preferences being defined by momentary human desire and will. The denial of objectivity in postmodernism repudiates the very possibility of moral truth-claims regarding sexual behavior. The moral anarchy of arbitrarily choosing sexual experiences (with partners of the same or other sex) paved the way towards reducing sexual differences to mere social constructs. Transsexual surgery and puberty suppression in children have become a 'normal' medical practice.

All of this violates humans' Divine design. Eternal life in communion with God Himself is available only to those who conform to the Divine will (and thus also the *logoi* of being human). These *logoi* define not only individuals' path to eternal life but also the general moral rules governing sexual behavior. As St. Justin's turn to the theology of Maxim the Confessor makes clear:

To sum up again, the Divine decision to join men and women in one flesh, as revealed by God Himself, establishes the norms of exclusively heterosexual relationships within marriage blessed by God and maintained for the whole life, excluding the possibility of divorce and the formation of "new flesh" with another man or woman.

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