

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch
ACTS. 9:26
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NATURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the comedy film, *Monty Python's The Life of Brian*, there is a scene where a group of revolutionaries is discussing tactics. One of them, played by Michael Palin, suddenly announces that he wants to be a woman from now on and have babies. After a certain amount of puzzlement, the group finally decides that, although he can't actually have babies, they agree that he has the *right* to have babies. Perfectly in line with the post-modern culture of rights, even outside the bounds of nature, this satire seems to mirror recent events in the Swedish Lutheran Church.

The recent news that the Swedish Church is to permit ceremonies for the marriage of same-sex couples came as no surprise at all. The states of Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Norway all recognise such unions as having the same status as heterosexual marriage and we might seek the reasons as to why this has happened now. There is no question but that, from the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, Holy Tradition knows nothing of such unions and ceremonies purporting to bless such 'marriages' can, at best, be seen as a sham.

Looking at the countries that have sanctioned same-sex marriage, the first thing that is obvious is that they can no longer be called Christian societies. From their point of view, the social normalisation of same-sex relationships is entirely consonant with the new secular understanding of human rights. Rooted in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the newly autonomous and free human being lives a life liberated from the shackles of tradition or social obligations and, in his (and no doubt, her) post-modern incarnation, is able to select from the supermarket of life-style choices. Equally, it must be of no surprise that this is entirely at odds with our Orthodox Christian way of life.

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From our Orthodox Christian perspective, of course, this new understanding of our humanity, is precisely a social construction; mankind refashioning himself in his own fanciful image. As soon as one loses sight of the concept that God has made us for Himself in His own image and likeness, then we arrive at something less than human; we fall into the baser man, the fallen Adam. It is precisely what the world considers the avenues of indulgent self-fulfilment that we as Orthodox Christian must recognise as blind alleys, ultimately devaluing our true dignity as children of God.

This is, of course, the paradox of all Christian morality, in that our true liberty is not found in the idea that we have only to set at liberty the noble savage within - but in our humble obedience towards God. In other words, the truly fulfilled person is the Orthodox saint, the one who has discovered the true meaning of his humanity by fulfilling and completing his human nature in Christ: the process we called *Theosis*. In short, any form of sexual expression outside what God has blessed for our good must necessarily be sinful, a falling short of the glory of God. When it comes to the question of same-sex relations, I do not think we need be especially condemnatory as such. As Orthodox, we may rightly point out that monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only context where our sexuality can lead to sanctification. Therefore, any other indulged form, from thought to action, rooted in the passion of lust is, by nature, sinful. This is equally true of heterosexual fornication or adultery as it is of any homosexual activity.

My principle point, therefore, is to ask a question concerning the idea of human rights: *Can we have the right to something if it is, in fact, unnatural?* The idea

That we can is emerging as both a false and a dominating notion in the post-modern world. This, of course, begs the question as to what *is* natural. From our perspective, it is only partly our present, fallen human condition. We contend that the present, natural Man, the fallen Adam, has slipped from the humanity intended as the very image (icon) and likeness of God. This is the very Man that the Lutheran Church of Sweden imagines must be afforded the right to marry someone of the same sex, if he or she so desires - and woe betide anyone with the temerity to deny such a human right! We, however, beg to differ and affirm that our whole Orthodox way of life is predicated on the pursuit of eternal salvation. We understand this as meaning that the present fallen creature, Man and his instincts, no matter how powerful, need directing aright if we are to be fully human; we have a different vision of what it means to be fully human in Christ. In other words, the first duty of Man (that is, duty, not right) is to seek ones own salvation; to become fully human as laid down *in the beginning*, as created: male and female. Ultimately, we are dealing here with the perception of the source of our freedom. Drawing on the Enlightenment ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, we can only presume that the Swedish Lutheran Church imagines that Mankind is autonomous and at liberty to construct the world of its own devising. Around this notion in recent years, a whole industry has been built, championing the rights of the unnatural, ultimately rooted in the cult of death (abortion and euthanasia for example.) For Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, the source of freedom is in the service to God, for freedom is not the random surrender to the

whims and dictates of human passions: that way lies our enslavement to a false humanity. Rather, we would say that freedom is the ability to fulfil our true nature, as the Creator intended - freedom is the ability to be true to what we were meant to be and what we were meant to be was established by God in the beginning. I know that this is difficult for our contemporaries to grasp: for them, freedom is constructed from their own fantasies and dreams, emerging unshackled from the old social and religious constraints. Neither will this be appreciated by them, for their minds have not been renewed in Christ. With great sadness we can only conclude that the Protestant Church of Sweden has manifestly taken leave of the mind of Christ. Rather like Michael Palin's character referred to above, the Swedes appear to have agreed to the right of homosexuals to marry when, in fact, the very word *marry* means, by the natural definition, the union of a man and a woman. All they have done is to pervert the word's meaning into semantic nonsense. Same-sex couples can participate in mutual sexual activity; they can even be emotionally enwrapped with each other but that does not make it a Christian marriage: an icon of Christ's relationship - bride and bridegroom - with his Church. Just a woman cannot be ordained priest, the icon of Christ the Bridegroom at the Divine Liturgy, so a same-sex marriage cannot be sacramental of the mystery St. Paul speaks of in the epistle to the Ephesians. In fact, the Swedes have voted for a sham, not far short of a blasphemy drawn from an heretical idea of what the Church is.

There is a real difficulty here, both practical and philosophical. Do people have the right to pursue a course that leads to their spiritual destruction? Political lawmakers have always recognised that there are limits to human freedom within any society, if we are to maintain concord and harmony. The right to pursue wealth stops at theft or tax evasion; the instinct to avenge wrong is curtailed and surrendered to the law courts, which punish on behalf of society. However, dealing with private relationships has always been problematic. Yet the crux of my argument against the Swedish Church's action is that it has

surrendered to the mores of its environment, rather as if St. Paul had given up and merely told the Corinthians to go ahead and 'play the Corinthian!' It is typical of post-modern morality that it can take what is fundamentally unnatural and just because it becomes possible, elevates it into a human right and, of course, the culture of human rights lies at the very heart of this controversy.

I must, though, end by warning that in abiding by our Tradition we will increasingly come under attack from the habitual intolerance of liberalism. No matter! Orthodox has survived worse. In a recent address, Metropolitan Hilarion of the Moscow Patriarchate spoke of how the real divisions in Christianity now are not between Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant so much as between liberals and traditionalists. Being in the latter camp, as far as we are able, we must align ourselves with our co-religionists. True, this innovation is the product of the post-Catholic and post-Protestant worlds but secularism has a way of creeping up on our institutions and for Orthodoxy in the West, where our people live the life in Christ but often very isolated, we need to speak out very clearly. Only, we must be positive, we are not 'anti' anybody; we are not 'anti' any group in society but we are certainly for marriage as part of the way to salvation.

Fr. Chrysostom

The original version of this article was can be seen at: www.pravmir.com

*Please pray for the repose of the soul of the servant of God, the priest DENNIS of St. Columba and St. Kentigern Antiochian Orthodox Church, Doncaster
Memory Eternal*



SERVICES

OCTOBER

3rd 19th Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

10th 20th Sunday after
Pentecost Divine Liturgy 11.00am

17th 21st Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

24th 22nd Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

31st 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 11.00am

NOVEMBER

7TH 24th Sunday after
Pentecost Divine Liturgy 11.00am

14th 25th Sunday after
Pentecost Divine Liturgy 11.00am
Remembrance Sunday

15th Monday
Beginning of the Nativity Fast

21st 26th Sunday after
Pentecost Divine Liturgy 11.00am
The Entry of the Theotokos

28th 27th Sunday after
Pentecost Divine Liturgy 11.00am

[NB The times and place of these services might change. Look out for announcements.]

