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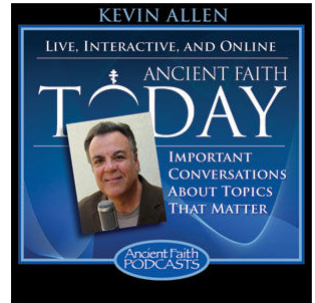
Ancient Faith Today: Christianity and Same-Sex Attraction

Kevin Allen · May 20, 2012

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Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Andrew Williams, the creators and facilitators of “Finding the freedom to live in the image of God,” a new therapeutic program based on Orthodox principles for sexual addictions and sex-related issues.

Kevin Allen: Christ is risen! Truly he is risen! Welcome to *Ancient Faith Today*. It’s May 20, and it’s great to have you with us on Orthodox Media’s only live-listener call-in program, where we’re discussing contemporary issues from the perspective of the holy Tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. I hope you’ll join the conversation tonight we’re having on an Eastern Orthodox perspective on same-sex attraction, which is an issue, as you know, that is literally dividing our society as well as many Christian denominations.

We’ll begin taking emails and calls in about twenty minutes. Our call-in number is 1-855-A-F-RADIO. That’s 1-855-237-2346. Our email is aft@ancientfaith.com, if you’re a little timid about calling us. You can also comment—this is a new one—on our live chat room. You can find the link on the *Ancient Faith Today* page or at ancientfaith.com/ancientfaithtoday, that’s all one word.

Before introducing my guests, I also want to mention that in keeping with the subject of tonight’s program, Conciliar Press is offering a 50% discount on Fr. Thomas Hopko’s book, *Christianity and Same-Sex Attraction*. I used this as part of my research for tonight’s program, by the way, and the offer can be obtained or realized by using the coupon code AFT-50 when you order online at conciliarpress.com or call the toll-free number tomorrow which is shown on the Conciliar Press website. That offer is good through June 2 exclusively for *Ancient Faith Today* listeners.

My guests tonight are Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Andrew Williams. Philip is Associate Professor of Pastoral Care at Holy Cross Theological Seminary in the Boston area, and a therapist in marriage and family counseling. He’s been my guest on *The Illumined Heart*. Andrew Williams is currently a graduate student working on his Master’s degree in theology at Holy Cross, having graduated seminary as a valedictorian. His Master’s thesis forms the basis for the first therapeutic program in the Orthodox Church specifically focusing on sexual addictions and sex-related issues called, “Freedom to Live in the Image of God,” which they claim in their materials is based on Orthodox Christian principles, and, of course, part of which we’ll be discussing tonight. They just completed the first run of the program between January and May in Boston.

We'll be discussing the issue of same-sex attraction in some depth this evening, as well as some of the details about the program itself. I'm putting a parental advisory out there at this point. You may not want to have pre-high-schoolers listening. Philip Mamalakis, welcome to *Ancient Faith Today*!

Dr. Philip Mamalakis: Thank you, Kevin.

Kevin Allen: Andrew Williams, thanks for joining us. It's a pleasure to have you.

Andrew Williams: Thank you. I'm blessed to be here.

Kevin Allen: Let's get right in it. We've got a lot of material I want to cover, and if we have to go a little bit over our allotted 90 minutes tonight, I'm all game, because this is a subject I really want to understand and discuss in depth. Let me ask you gentlemen—and I know both of you will have a response to this—how do you approach the issue—as leaders, as theologians, as therapists, as facilitators of this program? How do you approach the issue of same-sex attraction?

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, this is Philip speaking. Before I answer that, I just want to tell you how glad I am that you're having this program, because there is a great need to have open and honest discussions around these issues. These are deeply personal issues, and oftentimes really emotionally and politically charged. So thanks for having us today.

We approach the issue of same-sex attraction *personally*. That is, we deal with people, not problems. People who, like all of us, are seeking the kingdom of God and struggle with various aspects of relationships and sexuality. One manifestation, or one expression of this is same-sex attraction. These issues are deeply connected to identity: how we view ourselves. But we don't identify ourselves according to our sexual desires, but that often gets confused. These issues are really related to intimacy, how we relate to others. Intimacy is related to but separate from sexual desire and drive, but that also gets confused. It's related to having relationships, allowing ourselves to be known and being known.

So we approach the issue of same-sex attraction in the context of living out our vocation, to love God and neighbor with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength within the sacramental life of the Church in our most intimate relationships. In fact, it's *through* these struggles that we *have* communion with each other and with God, and through these struggles that we are saved.

Mr. Williams: This is Andrew, Kevin. Our culture tends to think about things in modernist categories, so we like to classify people into different groups, give them labels, but it's important not to categorize people. It's artificial, apart from anything else. Really, each one of us is unique; each relationship is unique. In *that* sense, there are as many different sexualities as there are people, but, obviously, these things fall into patterns, but patterns rather than labels.

Also I think it's important that we see sexuality not as something that's fixed or static, but something that's fluid. All of us experience change in our sexual desires across our lives. Change is inevitable. What we do with our lives affects who we are as well as being an expression of who we are. For example, this is visible in people who use pornography. They start with the kind of pornography that fits their particular desires, but as they do that, it changes their actual desires. What they see changes their desires, and you can see a progression. Like in any addiction, you can see a progression. So the desires do actually change. We like to think that desires can change in a positive way as well as in a negative way, so therefore, that's really the purpose of the program. Sexuality forms from our very earliest years, maybe even from before we're born, and continues to change throughout our lives.

Mr. Allen: You mentioned the fluid nature, and when we start to talk about gender, I want to come back to that a little bit, because that, I think, requires some clarification, but before we get to that point, because that is in my question list, I want to ask you this one. Obviously, though, there is a segment of our population—of all populations, in fact, as I understand it—who are erotically attracted to people of their own sex. So what does our tradition, our holy Tradition, scriptural Tradition, teach about the causes of homoerotic and/or same-sex attraction?

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, we actually don't focus so much this explicitly on same-sex attraction as a condition that has causes. Rather, when we think about sexuality, it's part of our make-up, and it starts with what we've received genetically, and it's shaped through relationships. We know that the primary relationships that we have with our mother and father play a disproportionate role in our sense of identity and our experience of intimacy, and as we grow and we enter puberty, our sexuality develops and forms, again, in the context of our relationships or in the absence of relationships.

Along this process of growth and development, we have experiences, both constructive and destructive, that affect us in terms of intimate relationships and sexuality. In the face of this development and growth, the Church offers a path of *true* intimacy and communion in our whole lives.

So when I think about the best answer in terms of the causes, what comes to my mind is the Gospel from today when Christ is asked about the man who was born blind from birth. They ask him, "Who sinned? He or his parents?" Essentially, asking Christ about the causes, and Christ's answer in the Gospel today is [as] relevant for us today in this discussion as it was back then, that is, so that God may be glorified. So we focus on *how* we glorify God in the face of these struggles and experience the true intimacy and communion that comes from that life in Christ.

Mr. Williams: Yes, but I think the tradition doesn't talk very much about the causes of these things except inasmuch as we talk about the passions. We talk about the passions in each person and how to treat them, and about love and how to express it in a way that's honoring to God and neighbor, and how to pattern our lives so that we can grow into that way of being.

You mentioned again about fluidity and sexuality, and I think that's also relevant, actually, to causes. I can give you an interesting example, because sometimes we've experienced on at least two occasions that somebody who has come with an issue that *isn't* actually same-sex attraction—for example, misogyny, a kind of a hatred or a fear of the feminine—has actually then *experienced* same-sex attraction as part of the process of healing from the misogyny. So this is when the hatred of the feminine turns into a love for the feminine which sort of gets over-activated and comes out in a sexualized expression. It usually doesn't last very long, but it's interesting because that's a cause that you wouldn't necessarily think about, and it's a temporary phenomenon: it comes and it goes away again.

Mr. Allen: One of the things that certainly our young millennials deal with, and one of the reasons why they're so upset with so many religious conservatives is over this idea of *choice*. A majority of secular psychologists and psychiatrists, even some contemporary Orthodox theologians—Fr. Tom Hopko, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware come to mind—acknowledge that sexual feelings and dispositions—whether they be same-sex attraction or heterosexual, and we've talked a little bit about this—are not necessarily chosen by the individual. My question is: if this is true, that is, that not everybody chooses what they're passion is, if you want to say it that way, or their sexual tendency is, why should and how

should people with long-standing SSA (same-sex attraction) impulses be told that they must reject them in order to live a Christian life?

Mr. Williams: This is a complex question, and it's certainly true that most people, especially inside the Church, do not experience this as a choice, but it's also important to note that some people do. Some people actually deliberately say, "This is a definite choice, and I'm making it for these reasons."

Mr. Allen: Yes, we've heard that.

Mr. Williams: "Society has this problem, and this is a critique of society." So that does exist, and that does exist even occasionally within the Church, but most people, it's true, in the Church, do not make this as a choice. Also, it's an interesting note that there is a different pattern here between the sexes. It's definitely true that more women would experience this as a conscious choice than men. Men tend to experience this as something that they're kind of dragged into, as it were; they're forced to acknowledge in themselves that they don't choose.

I think this is, again—I mentioned passions—this is related to passions. I don't explicitly choose any of my passions. I may have a tendency to get angry. It's not something I choose. I don't *want* to get angry, but I do get angry. So I think this is a good parallel here: we don't choose our passions. We are formed into this way of living, and we attempt to allow ourselves to be formed out of it.

The other thing that I think is very interesting about your question is the question of rejection. I think it's very important to say that it's not good to reject any of our desires, because another word for rejection is basically repression, and this is not a healing answer. Our tradition is not about rejecting parts of us, but about exploring the dark recesses of the heart. We are supposed to look into our hearts and find what darkness is hidden there and what it indicates about who we are so that we can deal with it.

We talk about mortification of the passions, and I think that sometimes may be a little bit confusing language, because it sounds like we just want to kill the passions. What do we mean by that? Christ defeated sin, not by *killing*, but by *dying*. When we mortify the passions, we are putting them to death by death, by our own willingness to sacrifice ourselves, in love of God and in love of neighbor. It's not about rejection of our desires, but the transformation of all of our desires, sexual or otherwise, out of love for God and for neighbor.

Dr. Mamalakis: The question of rejecting, Kevin, oftentimes comes from this perception that these desires I have are a problem, and I want this problem to go away or this problem is bad. Really, the way we approach this is not that these desires are a problem to be *solved*, but they're a fact. They're a fact that they're there, they're real, and they're transformed in communion of love. They're transformed as we, like Andrew mentioned, go into the dark recesses of our souls and bring that out. The goal is not to overcome these desires or make them heterosexual desires, because same-sex attraction, again, is not necessarily a problem to be solved—and that's a huge problem in the debate today!

Mr. Allen: It is. It's a big difference, too, as you know.

Dr. Mamalakis: If the presence of these desires is a problem, then I *have* to get rid of them! Once they realize, well, that's impossible, then they come to a logical conclusion: I must embrace them. But the goal is not to reject them, but to seek the kingdom of God in the face of them, that the path toward the

kingdom of God is going to be *through* these particular struggles, and that path is what the Church lays out for us, and *that's* what we focus on.

Mr. Allen: With everything, that's a very therapeutic approach which our tradition gives us, thank God, for that. Philip, does the Church differentiate pastorally between sins or passions, based on whether they're homoerotic or heteroerotic? In other words, are fornication, adultery, and homosexual activity—all sexual activity outside of marriage, say—are they understood as equivalent sins in need of healing? The reason I ask—I want to slip this in and turn it over to you guys—is this: I've heard some gay folk in the Church say they feel they're sins are seen as the greater of two evils when compared with heterosexual issues, adultery, etc. So please respond.

Dr. Mamalakis: The best answer is no, we don't differentiate. Christ shares that to look at a woman with lust is the same thing as adultery, essentially putting all levels, if you will, of sin as equivalent. Pastorally, they're different issues, but if we somehow label these particular struggles as "These are *really* bad, unlike 'normal' sexual sins," this *doesn't* reflect our faith, and it loses sight of our focus on loving persons and calling *all* to seek the kingdom of God. Love sees persons, not better or worse degrees of sin.

This type of thinking seems to be informed by a sense that heterosexual is normal, with normal sins, and same-sex attraction is *abnormal*, with *abnormal* sins. This leads to misguided treatment approaches, such as, on one hand, a permissiveness toward premarital heterosexual relations. "Oh, that's *normal*." Then also a reaction against same-sex attraction, as if the goal is to have everyone to have *normal* sins, and we reject that.

Mr. Williams: I think that's right. I think that's the ideal situation. That's the situation that we *should* see in the Church. What we actually see in the Church is not always like that, unfortunately. We do hear the word "homophobia" bantered about nowadays, and it's definitely overused, but it does exist. It's a real phenomenon. If we're not actually afraid of the same-sex attraction itself, then we're afraid of having to face it. We're going to be afraid of one thing or the other. Sometimes we criticize people with same-sex attraction for making it the center of their identity, but we have to realize that a lot of the time they do that because we do it to them. *We* make it the center of their identity as soon as we find out that this is a fact about them.

I think that all the sins you listed are the same—the fornication, the adultery—because [of] the nature of sex as an icon. What I mean by that is in the Old Testament we see that God speaks of Israel as his bride, and in the New Testament Christ speaks of the Church as his bride. So sex is actually an icon of these relationships. If I have any lustful thoughts for anyone other than my wife, I am being unfaithful, and it doesn't matter if my lustful thoughts are for a man or a woman or whatever. If they're not for my wife—and even if they are; if they're *lustful*, they're probably not good—they're certainly outside of that relationship, it's unfaithfulness. Our standard, I think, on sin, is to say that my sins are worse than anyone else's; I'm the chief among sinners. That's where we start.

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, if I could add, I think also in the pews or the reaction from the communities and from people is, "I would much rather have my child struggle with drug addiction or struggle with other things. It's much better than if they struggle with this." So we do see that, like Andrew mentioned, there is that fear; in the community we see it, but that's *not* the position of the Church.

Mr. Allen: I have a question from Ionis who is chatting at this point, and my producer is sending it my way, and it asks the question as to whether same-sex sexual activity can ever be considered healthy by the Church.

Dr. Mamalakis: When we think about sexual relations as healthy, when we use the language of health, the way we would understand that is that the purpose of our relationship is for salvation, so when we think about “healthy,” we think about: “Are we growing in Christ? Are we pursuing righteousness?” And when we look at that, we say, “Where does the Church reveal to us the place where sexual contact is in the context of a healthy, godly relationship?” And of all the Christian relationships we have, in all of our lives—brother and sister, parent and child, community member—all of these relationships are called towards righteousness, but it is only within heterosexual *marriage* where sexual contact is part of that journey towards righteousness and healing. So when we use language of “healthy,” the language we might use is “toward salvation, righteousness, and healing,” and that is *only* within that marital bond.

Mr. Williams: I would say, to add to that, the other thing that is important is that there are no relationships in this fallen world that are perfectly healthy, so all of our relationships have some degree of health, some degree of unhealth, and really we’re talking about a question of that. Every relationship that involves love has something to do with God’s love, because we can’t love other than through God. So there is an element of health in any relationship that involves love, but at the same time, if it’s a relationship that is moving away from reality, the reality I was talking about that’s portrayed in the icon, the reality of marriage as we understand it, then to that degree, it’s unhealthy.

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, just to continue on what we said that we approach things personally, my answer to the email or to the caller would be a personal question: Tell me *why* you’re engaged in sexual relations with this person. Tell me about the relationship. Tell me about who you are, and tell me about this relationship. Then, from within that conversation, we could better understand what it means to become healthy or to grow in a relationship.

Mr. Allen: Gentlemen, Seraphim, also from the chat room, asks whether there’s a patron saint for people struggling with homosexuality. An interesting and good question.

Mr. Williams: It is an interesting and good question, and I haven’t found a very good answer to it yet.

Dr. Mamalakis: We might say, what comes to mind...

Mr. Williams: We have several possible answers.

Dr. Mamalakis: ...is St. Mary of Egypt.

Mr. Williams: St. Mary of Egypt is the obvious one.

Dr. Mamalakis: There is an obvious example of somebody who really struggled with sexual addiction. Here we have a case of somebody who struggled with *horriblesin*, very shameful sin. If we were going to level sins, that would be at the top. Now, this woman, in her journey, the Church recognizes her on one of the five Sundays of Lent, that she has this place of honor. So we see this message that in the face of these terrible sexual addictions, she not only transforms her life, but she attains to a holiness that surpasses even the Monk Zosimos, who was a monk who lives his life. So that’s one example that keeps coming up in our work of a kind of patron saint.

Mr. Williams: It's true, and also there's a strong contrast drawn in the hymns of St. Mary of Egypt between the image, the icon that she portrays and the icon of the Mother of God, because of the part in the story where she can't enter the church because she looks upon the icon of the Mother of God, and then she's prevented from entering the church. So there's this contrast between "the pollution of past sins prevented me from entering the church"...

Mr. Allen: ...and the All-Holy one, yes. I don't want to get us into the subject topic of the legalization of civil same-sex unions or marriage. We're going to have another show on that in several more weeks as you both know. But I think, however, marriage is obviously a sideline of this conversation, and since all sexual activity, as we've been discussing, outside of marriage, is considered wrongful in the Orthodox Church as well as by other Christian groups, this is one reason we hear advocates advocate for the fact that there should be same-sex marriage, which our bishops have rejected. Do either of you want to make a short comment on that one?

Mr. Williams: I can *try* and make a short comment, but it may not be short. Again, it's not a simple question. We have to ask, "What is marriage, and do we have the right to redefine it?" Because if we're changing whether it's a man and a woman or a man and a man or a woman and a woman, then we're basically redefining it. The concept of marriage and our identity is all tied up with the question of masculine and feminine. Masculine and feminine, I think we have to say, are distinct realities from our experience of being male or female.

For example, in our tradition, we talk about the powers of the soul. We have these things which become the passions when they're corrupted, but when they're perfected they're powers of the soul. The two physical powers of the soul are sometimes called incensive or driving power, which becomes a fighting passion, and the desiring power, which becomes a concupiscent or acquiring passion. The first, the fighting passion, is seen as masculine in character, and the desiring passion is seen as feminine in character.

The idea is that each of us has both of these masculine and feminine powers of the soul inside us, and we're supposed to bring these things into harmony under the direction of our *nous*, which is the part of our soul that is receptive to God. Basically, our soul's relationship with God is what brings these masculine and feminine powers of the soul into a harmony, into a transformative relationship for God, or you might say a kind of marriage.

Because we're all a combination of masculine and feminine aspects, we can talk about the soul as a bride of Christ in a man just as we can as in a woman. And Israel, which is man's name, which is given to a nation, is spoken of as the bride of God in the Old Testament. God is beyond gender categories, but in relationship to us, he is the ultimate masculine. Likewise, Christ is masculine in relation to his Church, the bride, and we are all feminine in relation to God.

So marriage isn't an abstract concept that we can redefine; it's at the center of how we define reality. Scripture begins and ends with marriage. It starts with marriage between a man and a woman, and it ends with the wedding-feast of the Lamb. So marriage is the icon of the relationship between God and Israel, between Christ and the Church. Marriage is the icon of the order and harmony of the soul in each of us. Whatever we do with our definition, this is going to be the reality of marriage. We can't change that.

Dr. Mamalakis: I will say that nobody comes to me who's preparing for marriage and tells me that I'm getting married because I'd like to reorient my passions in a union together such that I may be transformed. People get married for all sorts of reasons that have very little to do with how the Church understands marriage. St. Gregory of Nazianzus writes that "marriage is the key that opens the door to discover chastity and perfect love." The Church reveals to us this reality of what marriage is as a sacrament. Marriage is a path of our transformation in Christ, through our daily communion with another person.

This journey of marriage is specifically what the Church offers us to transform our distorted passions from selfish love to divine love, but most couples, that's really not why they come in to marriage. We think that marriage is where I'm going to get all my desires *met*. So what happens then is, when we're on this journey, people will come to a grinding halt and realize, "Boy, this isn't what I expected at all!" What the Church offers is: we don't redefine marriage to help people meet their desires, but we teach people, we offer them: this is just the *nature* of marriage, that God reveals to us this reality of marriage. He reveals to us this reality, and nothing we can do is going to change that reality.

Mr. Allen: I like that, and I hate to rush, but we're going to have to take a break. Before we do, I want to remind everybody that the lines are open. Troy, our screener, is ready to take your calls. We will take a break now. When I come back, I will ask a question from Nick who has been in our chat room.

Mr. Allen: Welcome back to *Ancient Faith Today*. We're speaking on the subject of same-sex attraction from an Eastern Orthodox perspective. My guests are Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Andrew Williams. I would like to welcome to the program Nick from Beverly Shores, Indiana. Nick, how are you this evening?

Nick: Not too bad. How are you doing, Kevin?

Mr. Allen: Doing very well. Thank you so much for calling. What's your question, Nick?

Nick: I have a question. One of the burning issues in our culture today is the question of "Do I *choose* same-sex attraction or am I *born* that way?" In my research—the research itself, medically, has been limited; I'll admit that—at least the best that I have been able to find is that when you look at identical twins who are genetically the same, it seems like 20 to 30% of both identical twins have same-sex attraction, which means that 70 to 75% do *not*. My question is: How do we correlate the medical evidence that seems to indicate that it's not a genetic predisposition to what I may or may not have misunderstood earlier, that there's a lot of choice involved?

Mr. Allen: Andrew, I think you might have spoken to that choice issue. Do you want to take a whack at that one first?

Mr. Williams: Sure. What I was trying to say—and maybe I didn't express myself very well—is that there's a whole range of things that go into making up who we are, of which our sexual desires are a part. There may be a genetic element to it, but I certainly would agree that it's not the major part. Apart from that, the reason why it can still happen and not be a choice, which I think is probably what the question was about, is because there are many other things that happen to us in our lives that we react to without it being a free choice. We are formed into the people we are through genetic material, yes, but also through even our experiences in the womb, our experience at the birth, our experiences in

relationships within our family, our relationships with our parents, our relationships with peers at school. All of these different things go into forming who we are, of which our sexuality is a significant part. I think it can be not a choice for all of these reasons, as well as the genetic reason.

Dr. Mamalakis: I would add to that that we have to distinguish between a choice and genetics. Some people experience this not as a choice, but the question between how much is nature and how much is nurture has been answered, and we know it's both, both on these issues. And that, as Andrew mentioned, that we have choices on how to respond, and our choices in terms of how we respond affect how much these desires control us or we can step forward in the face of these desires.

Mr. Allen: Nick, does that answer that question?

Nick: Yes, I think it does.

Mr. Allen: Thanks a lot for calling. Appreciate it.

Nick: Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Allen: You're welcome. Gentlemen, carrying forward on some of my questions here: Divorce and remarriage is considered adultery in the Church. Our Lord himself says so in Matthew 19, and the Apostles' Canon 48 reiterates this teaching that divorce and remarriage are grounds for excommunication. Yet we've seen a gradual relaxing of sanctions, one often hears, due to pastoral *oikonomia*, or mercy if you will. And also a gradual relaxation of penances even in the Church for those who want to remarry after they've been married. Is this simply a case of—and I'll address this to you, Philip, and then Andrew, you'll jump in if you want to—getting divorces and the Church just needing to accommodate them?

Dr. Mamalakis: I think the Church has a beautiful pastoral approach to our own limitations and our own failures, that this *oikonomia* for marriage is the Church's way of helping us get back on the path of chastity and transformation in Christ that is marriage. As we mentioned, many people get married with all sorts of different ideas about what marriage is. The *oikonomia* of the Church is a response to those who realize that they've gone the wrong way, and they desire to return or repent, to get back on the path and be married *for* the right reasons, *in* the right way.

This is why the marriage ceremony for the second marriage is not the same as the first marriage ceremony. The marriage ceremony for the second marriage is penitential. Some people misinterpret the Church's pastoral economy as an endorsement. However, *allowing* people a chance to repent is not the same thing as endorsing second marriage. We would never tell our children, "Don't worry about it, just get married, because the Church gives you three tries. If you don't make it the first time, don't worry." That's devastating! That the notion of economy maintains this tension between the belief that there's only one marriage and the recognition that in our fallenness, for a variety of reasons, people get lost and desire to repent.

So I would caution against marrying someone for the second time without really understanding what marriage is and without a real repentance, because without understanding marriage and a real repentance, they're destined to fail again. The Church knows this, which is why she prescribes exactly what she does.

Mr. Allen: Andrew, let me ask you a follow-up question on that one, and that is: Do you think, given this *oikonomia*, not that we're playing some kind of game with the Church, obviously, but do you think that the Church's view on homosexuality and/or homosexual marriage could possibly change or, in the words of our commander-in-chief "evolve" over time through *oikonomia*, or given enough time and pressure, just as, in this case, as Philip points out, remarriage has? Connected to that, then I will turn it over to you: Why is one ecclesiastical sanction on a sin relaxed, i.e., marriage, and not another, i.e., homosexuality?

Mr. Williams: Sanctions for both *have* been relaxed through *oikonomia*, so you can see if you look at the prescribed penances for the things in the canons and then you look at what we do today, the sanctions for both have been relaxed. There isn't a difference there. But we can't change our relationship with reality, because that's *notoikonomia*. *Oikonomia* is recognizing people's weaknesses, giving them a second chance. We can't change the nature of marriage, because as I said, marriage is an icon, and an icon, as we know, is something that is not only an image of a greater reality, but also mystically participates in that reality that it expresses. Marriage is an icon like that, and that's why Christ spoke so strictly about faithfulness and spoke out against divorce, because our earthly marriages are icons of this marriage between Christ and his Church.

As Philip said, we don't admit divorce; we recognize that because of our sinful nature, these things happen, and we *allow* a second marriage, but we make it have the character of a repentance, if we follow the Church's path and we do actually have a different style of service the second time around. So, yes, we can give people a second try, but we can't change the nature of marriage, because the sexual union between two men or two women is a different thing. It's not an icon of the same relationship of God and Israel or of Christ and the Church.

Dr. Mamalakis: In many ways, the issue of same-sex marriage comes in part from a confusion about the nature of marriage itself, that if we understood marriage how the Church understood it, it makes a lot more sense why the Church would say it is like it is, it is heterosexual.

Mr. Allen: I have a call from Maria from Chicago I'd like to take. Maria, good evening. How are you?

Maria: Hi! How are you?

Mr. Allen: I'm very well. Thank you for calling. What's your question, please?

Maria: I have a question about... I've heard the mantra before: "Love the sinner, hate the sin." I just wonder how that applies to Orthodox spirituality and same-sex attraction.

Mr. Allen: Good question.

Mr. Williams: "Love the sin, hate the sinner"? No. Is that right or is it the other way round?

Dr. Mamalakis: "Hate the sin, love the sinner." That's a great question.

Mr. Williams: "Love the sinner, hate the sin." For what it is, it has truth in it, but it's a dangerous phrase in a way, just because it's an artificial distinction. Our passions are really part of us. We have to acknowledge that reality. They don't take away the image of God in us, but they are really part of us. If we try and hate the sin in another person, I think it's going to be very hard to separate that and actually have that be a part of loving the sinner. I think we hate the sin in ourselves, and we love the person who's opposite us.

Dr. Mamalakis: Maria, Elder Porphyrios mentions this, and he talks about: It's not so much "Hate the sin, love the sinner" as it is "Love the sinner, love the sinner!" That no one gains the kingdom of God by hating sin, but we gain the kingdom of God simply by loving the sinner, that that seems to be more resonant with our Orthodox tradition, that we *just* love the sinner. We see that in Christ's treatment of the prostitute before her stoning. He simply loved the sinner. And the way he handled the tax collectors, the way he spoke to the Samaritan woman. He didn't make a point to hate the sin; he simply loved the sinner.

Mr. Allen: Maria, does that answer your question?

Maria: That does. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Mr. Allen: Thanks for the call, Maria. I appreciate your calling. I have a question from an email. Amy asks, "What do you mean by 'in-womb experience for same-sex attraction'?"

Mr. Williams: That's a good question. I'm really giving all of the possibilities of things that can affect people's make-up: our personalities, everything about us. We know that in the womb, we're physically united. As a baby in the womb, I'm physically united with my mother, so what my mother experiences has an impact on me. That is going to have an impact already on what kind of a person I'm going to become. This again is related to that question of choices. I don't choose those things, but they affect me anyway. Lots of things in life affect me without my choosing them.

Dr. Mamalakis: So I don't think we have a specific answer as to what aspects of what a mother does affects the fetus in what ways. I think the point is very clear, like Elder Porphyrios writes: Parenting begins at the moment of conception, that we are aware that this is a life and that the life of the mother *and* the father actually affect the fetus in some way. Now, we don't have evidence or research to show which affects it in what way, but we know simply that how the mother conducts herself and the life around her affect this life.

Mr. Williams: We do have some evidence, actually, in that there was a psychiatrist in England called Frank Lake, working in the 1950s to the 1980s, roughly, and he was looking at some of these issues. He found that there was a correlation between the difficulty of the birth experience and some of these experiences and issues later in life. If people had a particularly difficult birth for whatever reason—if the cord had been tangled around their neck, any of these kinds of things that made coming out of the womb a difficult task—it had an impact on how people experienced sexuality and relationships later in life.

Dr. Mamalakis: We also have a lot of biological evidence, like in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. We understand biologically very clearly that the life of the mother affects the child. We would simply add that it's the whole person that's affected.

Mr. Allen: One of the things that I have heard from priests is that there is really no uniform catechism or teaching and a singular pastoral approach for priests who are on the front line, obviously, in churches, for dealing with same-sex attraction. So my question is: are priests just kind of out there on their own on how to deal with SSA individuals and/or couples that may be inquiring or coming in?

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, part of the beauty of Orthodoxy is that the way we approach things pastorally is *not* uniform, that it really comes out of the relationship between a person and his or her spiritual father. Part of the *challenge* is oftentimes the pastoral approach is not uniform or consistent,

particularly in areas where there isn't necessarily a catechism, there isn't a lot of conversation and clarity, and in a culture where there's a lot of pressures to think a certain way, and the terms of the debate have been defined in a certain way, which is why we put together this program: to offer some research and some experience and the thinking-through with our Orthodox tradition, to actually *help* priests and to support those pastors to understand the nature of the issues and the possible approaches, to kind of help the pastoral guidance be informed so that we can be clear where we stand firmly, and then how we pastorally allow for certain differences. Essentially, in this program, we're not adding to our tradition, but we're just attempting to articulate this timeless faith we have to that contemporary situation, specifically to address and offer resources for pastors.

Mr. Allen: I like it. I've got a call from Bruce from Yorba Linda. Good evening, Bruce.

Bruce: Hi, how are you guys?

Mr. Allen: We're fine, thanks.

Bruce: Good. The question I have, Dr. Mamalakis, is just a quick comment that does lead to the question. One of the struggles I had as a convert, before I converted to Orthodoxy, I felt that the Evangelical Church had taught me that homosexuality was wrong, yet I knew I needed to love the homosexual, and I felt this conflict of loving them, yet at the same time letting them know how wrong they were.

One of the things I've enjoyed about Orthodoxy, and I'm curious if you agree with this, is that ultimately now when I run into the homosexual who may or may not be attending my church, I don't feel any need to let them know how wrong they are, because if I'm not mistaken, if there's any judgment—that's a bad word; I hate it, but I don't know a better word to come up with—or any decision that can be made about them, it would come from the priest deciding to commune them or not, just like he would myself. I happen to be a married man. If I decided to go outside the commitment of my marriage, he may make the same decision to me. Is that a correct take?

Dr. Mamalakis: It's "Bruce" you said?

Bruce: Yes.

Dr. Mamalakis: Bruce, I think you said it rather nicely. While there are some real pastoral [decisions] that priests have to make on these [issues], when we meet a person, we're meeting a person who has a *name*, not "a homosexual," that we look at this person. We look them in the eye. They have a name, they have a story, and we *love* persons. That love is healing, is real, and we're not watering down our faith simply by loving people. We actually recognize ourselves as sinners, and we act in love.

It frees us, and as Orthodox we're not in fear that if we love, somehow all the churches are going to allow same-sex marriage or something. We don't walk in fear; we walk in love, and this is a real powerful model that Christ revealed to us. As a fulfillment of the commandments, he simply loved. He didn't come to wipe out the Law, but he expressed [it]. This is how we express the fullness of the Law in this loving persons. I think you're right on, and it's freeing.

Bruce: That's great. Wonderful. Thank you very much.

Mr. Allen: Thanks, Bruce. Appreciate your call very much. I have a question from Hope, and she asks, “Is same-sex attraction and sexual immorality tied to a demonic spirit? Is this a common thing that would be a problem for a person being tormented by a demon spirit?”

Dr. Mamalakis: Is it a common thing for someone?

Mr. Williams: I can say that in my experience so far, I have met people struggling with same-sex attraction. I have not met any who have shown any signs of demon possession.

Mr. Allen: They can be tormented, though, right? People can be tormented.

Mr. Williams: Yes, all sin is demonic in one sense or another. We’re at the mercy of our thoughts unless we learn how to be attentive to our thoughts and stop them before we [yield] to temptation.

Mr. Allen: And demons *use* thoughts, right?

Mr. Williams: The demons use that. The demons use our passions to inject thoughts into our minds that enflame the passions. So, yes, in that sense, that’s true. But in terms of this being something that we give ourselves over to the demons any more than anything else, I haven’t seen any indication that that would be the case.

Dr. Mamalakis: More tends to be given over to the passions of lust.

Mr. Allen: Which is a problem obviously for people struggling with that particular passion and for others that are struggling with their heterosexual passions as well. I am struggling here with the fact that we have about seven more minutes. I want to ask a question about gender identity which may take a little time. Let’s try, and if we have to break and come back to finishing that up, we’ll do it.

Here’s my question, which we’ll start with a statement, but then it’ll end with a question. There’s obviously a great deal of confusion in our culture today about what gender and gender identity means. According to the extract that I got from the “Freedom to Live” materials that you sent me, you don’t seem to define gender identity in terms of simply masculine or feminine or by body parts either. You write that, “Gender identity is relational, iconic, and dynamic.” I must say that, having read that, I thought to myself, “That sounds a little, I don’t know, wishy-washy or a little open-ended.” So my question is: What do you mean by that? How do you understand gender identity in terms of “relational, iconic, and dynamic,” and how does that differ from other views of gender?

Mr. Williams: I’ll start with Adam and Eve. St. Ephrem the Syrian says that before Eve was taken out of Adam, the original human was both male *and* female. Similarly, I said earlier that in terms of gender, each one of us has a soul that reflects both masculine and feminine aspects of personhood, and that these are brought into harmony by the *nous*, the soul in relationship to God.

To make this clearer, we’ll talk about gender in an iconic way in terms of the human vocation to be a priest, a king, and a prophet. This idea actually comes from Dr. Tim Patitsas, who’s the ethics professor at Holy Cross. We think of the kingly character as being essentially masculine, and the prophetic as being essentially feminine. We all have both these aspects in our soul, but the relative priority of these is different. So men will generally show a priority of the kingly aspect over the prophetic, and women will generally show a priority of the prophet over the king. But the central location, for all of us, male or female, is that of a priest. We reflect Christ’s high priesthood. We are called to sacrifice ourselves for others.

St. Maximus the Confessor says that the human vocation is to reunite all of the differences in the cosmos. Creation proceeded by God's separating things, separating the light from the darkness and so on, and so the recreation proceeds by *reuniting* all these things, but in a new way. Because they have existed separately there's a diversity in the union. So he talks about, and he says we have to *start* this reunification with our own differentiation into male and female, and that this will culminate even in overcoming the distinction between the uncreated and the created. Of course, this is fulfilled in Christ, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, but also through his marriage with his Church, so we all play our part in this through transformative relationships.

When I say transformative relationship—which we also call *chiasm*, but that's another term... *Chiasm* is actually a literary term. It's about reflection, so you pick up something and you reflect it again, and then you can reflect it back again. This is what happens in a transformative relationship. We open ourselves to the other person. We stand opposite each other. We are on different sides of the divide. We're different, if we're male and female or if we're talking about the top of the chain, uncreated and created. And we offer to one another what we have, and it gets returned with something of the other person in it.

The best, easiest example of this is the Holy Gifts in the Liturgy. God gives us wheat and grapes, and we put part of ourselves into that gift, making it into bread and wine, and then we offer it back to God. Then God puts himself into those gifts, literally, and offers them to us. We receive from him the same thing again, but now it's the Body and the Blood of Christ. We receive it into our bodies, and then we offer our bodies, having received that, as a living sacrifice to God. It's this constantly expansive, growing relationship which is transformative.

We see this in parallel as the relationship between a man and a woman. This is how it should work if we're really fulfilling our iconic vocation. We make an offering. I make an offering to the other, and she transforms it and offers it back, and this operates on all of the levels, from spiritual to physical. That's what happens in marriage. Through this offering and receiving, we're transformed into a fuller humanity, a more perfect masculine and feminine in each of us. But our primary gender identity, then, is actually as a priest, as one who offers himself to the other.

Mr. Allen: But you're not saying—or correct me if you *are* saying—that, again, we're not saying there are no differences when it comes to gender. I'm just concerned about opening the doors to even more possible confusion. Christ himself says, "He who made them at the beginning, male and female."

Dr. Mamalakis: Exactly. And I think what Andrew is saying is we see the nature of reality here, that the way God has created reality, that we can't reduce what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman into sort of role or any sort of category, because that just won't fit. So if you imagine what it means to be a man as a cowboy, well, then cowboys shouldn't cry or shouldn't have any tenderness, and if you imagine woman to be a princess or something, well, she shouldn't be strong. These simply are not true, and when we force *persons* into these categories and boxes, abuses and distortions occur. We get confusion because we don't really *fit* those stereotypes.

What we fit, the reality as revealed to the Church, is we are *all*, each of us, called to be priests, to selflessly offer to one another. So there's a commonality between all of us, and in our priesthood of all believers, then the male has the kingly and the prophetic, and the woman the prophetic and the kingly. So between genders, what we see in this relationship of back and forth and of giving, that there's

similarities, but there's differences. In fact, those differences are very important so that this back and forth actually happens.

We really, in relationships, focus on chastity, purity, and selfless giving in love, which then allows our own real uniqueness to come through. So you'll get a man who might be maybe more effeminate, or a woman who might tend to be more masculine, but that's part of the uniqueness and diversity of creation, but it still fits within this dynamic and this relational and iconic experience.

Mr. Allen: Thank you for that. I appreciate that. We have a caller, but I'm going to ask our caller to hold while we take a short break, and when we come back, I will put on Kimberly from Los Angeles who wants to ask a question, and hope you'll stay with us on *Ancient Faith Today* where we're discussing same-sex attraction [from] an Eastern Orthodox perspective.

Mr. Allen: Welcome back to *Ancient Faith Today*. We're speaking with Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Andrew Williams on the very important subject of same-sex attraction. My producers, [whom] I can hear in my head and you can't, would like to say that there's no way we're going to finish this program in the next half-hour. I would like to request that we carry on a little bit further, because this is a great show, great guests, great questions, great callers, and I want to continue on just a little bit further.

I have a call from Kimberly from Los Angeles. Kimberly, how are you this evening?

Kimberly: I'm great. How are you?

Mr. Allen: I'm very well. Thank you so much. What's your question, please?

Kimberly: I am a college student in L.A., and I just happen to have always had many gay friends, and I really agree what they've been saying on the show. I've always treated them with love and felt that it's not my place to judge. Not that I'm partaking or encouraging their lifestyle; I just love them as a person. I've encountered people within the Church and outside that don't always agree with that, and I'm wondering how to practically deal with people who are disgusted or just don't agree with being friends or loving people who are same-sex attracted.

Mr. Allen: Great question.

Dr. Mamalakis: Kimberly, great question. When I think about an answer to that, it goes back to "Love the sinner, love the sinner," that even those who will be confused by your treatment of people, we respond with love to *them*, and we witness that, you know, "This is not what I think and this is not how I'm going to relate. You're free to not agree with me. I'm simply going to love you in response." That when we see people who say, "Why are you talking to them?" or "You shouldn't be doing that," it's oftentimes, we don't know why, but it could be fear or you're betraying your faith and our response is to love those persecute us for doing what we think makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Allen: Kim, does that answer your question?

Kimberly: Yes. Definitely.

Mr. Allen: Thank you for your call. Appreciate it very, very much. I have a question from Amani, who asks, "Does same-sex attraction prevent taking communion?" He doesn't clarify whether it's a tendency

or a passion or whether someone is acting on that passion, but he's asking, "Does SSA prevent taking communion?"

Dr. Mamalakis: If same-sex attraction prevented taking communion, then none of us should take communion, because like any sort of struggles that we have, and there is no one who lives and sins not, and there is no one who lives and doesn't struggle with passions, we would all be prohibited from taking communion. It's the nature of the Eucharist to actually be this communion that we bring, we open up our brokenness to Christ and he responds in love. The presence of same-sex attraction does not and should not prohibit communing. The acting out on a lifestyle is a different story, but the question was simply the presence of same-sex attraction.

Mr. Allen: I have a question from John from California, who asks, "Becoming Orthodox and having same-sex attraction tendencies, passions, what have you—would you wait to be chrismated before dealing with this issue or go ahead?" I think you've answered it with your previous [answer], but that is his question.

Dr. Mamalakis: Without over[simplifying], I would *hurry* and become Orthodox! By that, I don't mean to rush the catechism process, but we believe that within the Church is a real healing process, and a real communion and a real encounter with God. To encounter the love of God enables us, paradoxically, to see our brokenness even more deeply. And the more deeply we see our brokenness, the more we encounter his love. So with good catechism, I would hurry on up!

Mr. Allen: I appreciate that, Dr. Philip. I really do. I read this—and I actually read this in Fr. Tom's book, which we're discounting through June 2 on Conciliar Press and by Conciliar Press. I read in his book that the Orthodox view is that sexual relations, sexual intercourse, is sanctioned between a man and a woman in marriage, and can then only be capable of expressing divine love, but same-sex relations in incapable of expressing divine love. I've heard words used like "narcissistic" and "not the way God intended" and "lacking procreative purpose" as *reasons* for this. Can you respond to that, though? Why would it be that one is and one isn't?

Mr. Williams: Obviously, I can't answer for what Fr. Hopko was talking about when he wrote that, but I can certainly take a stab at what I think he might be getting at. Divine love he was talking about, it's the same thing, again, that I mentioned: the love of God for us. This is the love expressed between God and Israel, between Christ and his Church. As we've already said, these are both masculine-feminine unions in our understanding of gender as being something that's not about our simple existence as male and female, but our existence as male and female are iconic of these greater masculine-feminine realities. These are iconic.

Maximus is talking about the need to join together the uncreated and the created, the noetic or spiritual world and the physical world, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, and male and female. For sexual intercourse to be a true icon of all these unions, it *has* to be a joining together of male and female, and that's an expression of divine love. Just as marriage has to be between a man and a woman in order to be a true icon of the marriage of God-Israel or of Christ-Church.

With regard to "narcissistic" and "narcissism," of course, means "self-love," and St. Maximus says that self-love is the root of all the passions. Pretty much everything we do that drives a wedge between us and God is rooted in narcissism in that sense.

Mr. Allen: I like that answer. I think that's very illuminating. Thank you so much, Andrew.

I have a call from Amanda from Massachusetts. Amanda, good evening. How are you?

Amanda: Good. How are you?

Mr. Allen: Fine, thank you. Thank you for calling. What's your question, please?

Amanda: I'm calling about people who are born with both male and female parts and how they make a decision of how they want to be and how that affects their relationships as they get older.

Dr. Mamalakis: Amanda, that's a great question, and what I think we've seen as we understand the Orthodox perspective is that that person *now* is going to challenge these categories of cowboy and princess, but that person will not challenge the reality that he or she is called to be priest, is called to serve and to love in relationships. In that service, his or her uniqueness will still manifest itself, but he or she knows they will never fall into a simple category, and we won't be able to get our heads around a category, but really they're still completely and fully a person.

The Church actually frees us up simply to love [him] or [her] is a person, even when he or she can't be even used within our language; we don't have a neuter category in the English language, but that doesn't change the fact that this is a full person, fully human and fully called to become priest and to be transformed in real intimate relationships.

Mr. Williams: I think it's an important point about categorization, which I mentioned at the beginning. We *want* to categorize people. We want to classify them so we can understand who they are by their classification.

Dr. Mamalakis: So they can check a box on a form, too.

Mr. Williams: Exactly, and this is not about reality. This is a very serious issue, because in our society what happens in most cases when people are born in a way that makes it unclear whether they're male or female is that doctors decide to assign one sex or the other. Often this is done, in a sense, arbitrarily. It's based on what is the easiest operation. It certainly doesn't take account of spiritual realities. Then [there is] somebody who's been artificially assigned to a sex that may not be appropriate.

Mr. Allen: Amanda, does that get to the heart of your question?

Amanda: Yes, it does. Thank you.

Mr. Allen: Thank you for your call, Amanda. Appreciate it very much. I have a question from J.J. from the chat room, and it goes like this: "I was born a male, but have identified as a female all of my life. If I have a relationship with another male, is that same-sex attraction, or would it be same-sex attraction if I had a relationship with a female?"

Dr. Mamalakis: If we're going to try to categorize things, we're going to be confused on how to respond. I would suggest that J.J. as a person to be in relationships that are close, that are pursuing chastity, and what does it mean to be a priest in his relationships or her relationships? And as we pursue priesthood, within the sacramental life of the Church, that the Holy Spirit actually provides clarity. If we're going to try to find clarity anywhere else, it's not; it's going to lead to confusion. Clarity will come in Christ through the Holy Spirit as we pursue righteousness and chastity within the sacramental life of the Church.

What is same-sex and what is heterosex? I'm not sure I can answer that; neither would I. My question would be: What does it mean to follow Christ, to die for Christ, and to pursue this righteousness and chastity?

Mr. Williams: I think that's right. It's impossible to make assessments of this nature without its being personal. This is a question for J.J. to discuss with a priest who *knows* him or her and can help with the struggles and the issues on a personal level.

Dr. Mamalakis: And can get to know him and to get J.J. to know himself. Absolutely. This is *why* we approach it personally, because it resists formulaic answers.

Mr. Allen: I understand, and it makes it tough to discuss these on a radio-talk format, but I appreciate the nuance that you're bringing to this discussion.

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, can I just interject? Let me just interject, Kevin: I think there's something to be said, that these kind of things cannot be addressed on a radio show. I think that's an important point. If we're looking for an *answer*, we're probably down the wrong path. We want to look for a relationship. We want to be [or] come into a relationship with a guide, with a spiritual father, in a community, and there the *path* is revealed to us rather than the answer to a question. We can only do our best on a radio show.

Mr. Allen: I like that. Knowing you, I get that. I get that. Here's my question—I want to try now to get into some of the practical questions—how do same-sex-attracted people trying to live out their lives as, in our case, Orthodox Christians, then express and experience basic, innate human desires—love, human touch, intimacy—with another person without sinning if same-sex marriage, which our bishops have rejected, or same-sex cohabitation are not options with the idea in mind that the monastic model is clearly not for everyone?

Dr. Mamalakis: I think in our society we get intimacy confused with sex, and that our job is to actually *overcome* our brokenness, or within our brokenness enter into real intimate relationships. Love, touch, intimacy are all possible even without sex. As I mentioned earlier, most of our relationships in our lives do not include sex. We hope that to live fully is to have deep, intimate relationships with *many* people. Not by suppressing any personal desire, but our persons are fulfilled in these intimate, loving relationships without the confusion and distortion that would essentially destroy most of our relationships if we introduced sex into all of them, because intimacy is about knowing someone and being known by someone, which is available to all of us in our relationships.

The monastic path, that's a very severe, very strict path, that [is] chosen by some who seek to follow this path of Christ alone, under guidance, but for most of us, our lives are surrounded by persons who know us and need to know us and are known by us. That fulfills our deepest desires for intimacy.

Mr. Allen: Andrew, let me ask you this question. When we interviewed Metropolitan Kallistos Ware on *Ancient Faith Today*, he brought up the guidance that he has sometimes given to same-sex couples. He says some people think he's crazy, but he recommended that they try to live out their life in a non-genitally erotic approach for those that want to live together in love but without sin. What's your comment about that approach?

Mr. Williams: There was a stir some years ago about a book written by a scholar called John Boswell who claimed to have discovered a liturgical rite in ancient Orthodoxy for same-sex unions. What he

had discovered was a rite called *adelphopoiesios*, which means “making of brothers.” So it was a liturgical rite, and it was for joining together two men in a committed, intimate friendship. Of course, it wasn’t a same-sex union in the sense that we now understand the term, as many other scholars have since pointed out. But it is a good thing that he drew our attention to this rite and its surmise, because it helps us to see that we have isolated marriage and the so-called “nuclear family” as the only place for intimacy. You might even say that, in a lot of ways, we’ve made marriage an idol instead of an icon, and this has come back to bite us.

Metropolitan Kallistos, when he says this, you’re right, he says, “People laugh at me for saying it,” but maybe his advice is *not* as silly as it seems at first glance, although it would probably not be wise to try this with a relationship that had already been sexualized. But we should probably recover the possibility for intimate friendships that are not sexual.

Mr. Allen: Philip, let me ask you a practical question. We’ve been discussing it some, but I’d like to just hit it head on. If an Orthodox parent suspects or learns from their child or relative or close friend that they’re struggling with same-sex attraction, or if a person, a young person, he or she has same-sex attractions and they’re in the Church, what should they do?

Dr. Mamalakis: The Church has such a beautiful focus on persons that the best thing to do is to find real close relations within which to *share* your particular struggles, any particular confusions that might happen, that you *stay* in communion. You enter into communion, maintaining relationships with your parents or with your child, with the Church, with the priest, with the spiritual father. The best-case scenarios are that we are *close* to the Church, that we are growing in our relationship with Christ, and that we have those who love us and those who are loved by us, so we encounter the real intimacy and fullness that comes from these relationships.

It doesn’t mean that we can bless any sort of acting out on these desires, but it’s best to really create an atmosphere where someone is free to share: “Here’s what I’m experiencing.” The problems really come in when people are condemned, isolated, shamed, or cut off in some ways, because they’re told or deemed that: your struggle is not okay. The reality is that within this life of communion and intimacy, our path becomes clear, that I know many people who are very aware that this is my particular struggle, and here is how I’m living out a full life, with full relationships in a beautiful way. We live in a culture that has so many confused ideas about “I need to be this way to be full,” and the Church says, “No. Enter into communion. Enter into communion sacramentally and relationally.”

Mr. Allen: We’ve been talking about loving people and knowing people and risking through intimacy with people as Christians. I have a friend who has struggled with same-sex attraction since he was a very young boy, in fact, as early as he can remember. He struggles to be a faithful member of the Eastern Orthodox Church through celibacy in his case, yet he says he does not feel comfortable telling anyone at his parish of his personal struggles because he feels he would be misunderstood, rejected, or scorned. The result, and he said this to me with tears in his eyes, is a sense of loneliness and alienation. I’m even welling up as I’m asking the question. My question is: What should *our* proper response to homosexuals in and outside of the Church be? Yeah, you’ve answered it, but I want to come right at it and then I want to move on to the Orthodox program that you’ve developed.

Dr. Mamalakis: That’s a great question, Kevin, because not only are people misunderstood, rejected, and scorned, they’re oftentimes become lepers. If you find out that someone else has this people are:

“Oh my goodness, it’s contagious! We can’t get close!” It’s all these distorted ideas that we’ve been mentioning all along in our program that somehow this is a different category of sin. I would say that everyone needs to be known. We need a place where we are known fully. It doesn’t need to be all the people who go to church on Sunday. It needs to be *someone*. So I would encourage this person, number one, to allow himself to be known. The very fact that he’s sharing with you this struggle is actually very healing. It’s an antidote to isolation, the fact that he’s able to speak with you.

For the rest of us in our parish, we really need to think about how we talk about these issues, and we really need to change the language of condemnation and also when churches are getting into the political battles around these issues, it can be *very* isolating to those within the community who might struggle with that. It can be confusing. So it’s important for him, and I would encourage him, to get involved with people who can love him and know him for who he is as a person, and embrace whatever struggles he brings to the table.

Mr. Allen: Thank God. J.J., back again, gentlemen, from the chat room, asks the question: “God made me and created me this way. Why wouldn’t he accept me this way?”

Dr. Mamalakis: Absolutely. J.J., God accepts each one of us. However, there’s a recognition that God didn’t create us broken. Yet each one of us carries a brokenness, so we can’t say that heterosexuals aren’t broken, and homosexuals *are* broken. We can actually reflect on the fact that each one of us is broken in some way. So we can’t say, “Well, God created me broken, so I should just act out of my brokenness.” Actually, God creates us, and we find ourselves broken, and it becomes an invitation to receive the love of God, to be known by Christ and enter a relationship with Christ. That relationship is healing, and we don’t want to do anything to limit what that looks like, that we really don’t know who we are *until we’re transformed in the Holy Spirit*.

The answer to “This is the way I am” is actually not entirely accurate. That might be who we are right now, but it’s actually *not* who we are. We only *become* who we are when we’re filled with the Holy Spirit. I want to challenge you and invite you to leave the question of who you are *open* for the rest of your life to see who you become and how you become as you’re transformed in the Holy Spirit. That’s the same for me, that’s the same for Andrew, it’s the same for Kevin, it’s the same for each one of us.

Mr. Williams: Yes, I think it’s important to say, more than our brokenness not defining us, it’s [that] our particular brokenness is a particular vocation. Just because we’ve been given this thing that seems like a thorn in the flesh, in the Holy Spirit it can be transformed into something beautiful and glorious. This is like the wounds of Christ. After the crucifixion, those wounds are glorified wounds. He still has the wounds in the resurrection. Everything that is still is. Nothing was taken away. But the wounds, by going through the suffering and living through the suffering, the wounds have been glorified. Every one of us has a brokenness that’s a vocation.

Dr. Mamalakis: It’s a vocation because it’ll determine the unique path that J.J. is going to navigate. I would reject anyone who’s going to try and categorize J.J. into this or that or someone who’s going to limit that to a brokenness. But his brokenness, like Andrew said, will actually shape his particular vocation. The goal in the invitation is to be a priest: to die to Christ, to pursue righteousness, and watch how the Holy Spirit gives, offers, and reveals a beautiful vocation for you.

Mr. Allen: Gentlemen, I want to move into the second part of our program. This is where we’re going to extend our conversation a little bit further and talk about the Orthodox group therapy program that

you've developed: "The Freedom to Live in the Image of God." Let me direct this towards Andrew if I might. Andrew, what is the goal of the program? Is it to change the feelings, desires, and predispositions of the participants or to help participants struggle against and resist them?

Mr. Williams: It's certainly not our role to change people or to "fix" them or "cure" them or whatever. Basically, the idea is that we can bring hope to people's lives so that we know, for all of us, how to express who we are in a way that, as I said earlier on, honors God and honors our neighbor; and to put all of us into the freedom of the Orthodox path, which doesn't tie us down. It's sin that limits us, and in the Holy Spirit we are unlimited. All of our commandments are negative—don't do this and don't do that—because we can't say what you *have* to do, because what you have to do is really something that's an infinite world of possibilities.

So we introduce possibilities; we introduce approaches; we give an environment where we can all try and open ourselves up to the light of Christ. We're all participants in the program. We don't really make a distinction between leaders and non-leaders. We all participate, and our basic aim is to shed the light of Christ into our lives and to find our vocation.

Mr. Allen: Speaking as a layman who has not had much experience with this area at all, I'm wondering—and you've said what you're goal is *not*, but I'm wondering—have you experienced situations, Andrew, where men or women who have struggled with same-sex attraction have become heterosexual?

Mr. Williams: I think Philip mentioned earlier that we kind of reject the terminology and the idea that sexuality is a condition, so the terminology of "a homosexual" and "a heterosexual"... And I said earlier that changes in sexual desire are inevitable, so transformation is possible. But to make it your goal, to aim at becoming heterosexual, is a kind of idolatry. It's not a healing goal at all. It's not a Christian goal. Our aim is just to grow closer to God by learning how to deal with our passions.

It's interesting that when the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" first came into existence—which was only about 130 years ago—*both* were used for neurotic conditions. Both "homosexual" and "heterosexual" were considered to be neuroses. Nobody thought of "heterosexual" as normal sexuality then. It only began to be used that way toward the middle of the 20th century, and really only in popular use since the 1960s had it been that normal sexuality, so-called, as been equated with heterosexuality, so-called. So as Christians, our goal is not heterosexuality; it's a full-blooded and faithful desire for God, which has as one of its results a life of chastity.

Dr. Mamalakis: We wouldn't want to hint the success of something be that we're never tempted, because we'll be tempted, we know, until the day we die. So the goal is not to never be tempted, but to pursue transformation in the face of temptation.

Mr. Williams: I'd just add, to be more direct, I suppose, as it may look as if I was avoiding the question; I don't want to avoid the question. Yes, I've seen people experience transformation in desires from being exclusively same-sex attracted to not being same-sex attracted in experience. But those people that I know for whom that has happened did not aim at that as the goal. Their goal in any kind of therapy or whatever program they were in has been to grow closer to Christ and to find their true vocation; it has not been, as it were, to "convert" to heterosexuality.

Mr. Allen: Andrew, I want to follow up on something you said previous to your last comment—which I appreciate, by the way; thank you for being so direct—and that is this: you mentioned chastity in the context of marriage, I believe. There’s going to be somebody out there, including myself in this case, who’s going to say, “I don’t get the chaste thing when it comes to marriage. I may not have the correct definition of ‘chaste,’ but I’m thinking ‘chaste’ meaning no sexual activity.”

Mr. Williams: Right, well, ‘chaste’ actually means no sexual activity outside of marriage, and that includes lust and it includes, as we said earlier—Jesus said that to lust after another woman is the same as adultery. In fact, it’s interesting: if you look at the Greek, it’s even stronger than it seems in English, because the “adultery” is a word that has a direct object, so it’s like “to commit adultery *to* somebody.” That’s what we do when we lust after someone is actually to commit adultery *against* them without their consent, and if we talk about sex without consent, we’re talking about rape. “A lustful thought” for another woman is actually “rape.” Any kind of expression of sexual activity outside marriage is unchastity.

Dr. Mamalakis: Chastity is actually a broader term than just sex. It has this idea of being self-controlled, not a slave to your desires. Marriage is actually a journey of being transformed so that you are *not* a slave to your desires. So chastity and marriage are like Gregory Nazianzus writes that marriage actually nurtures chastity, that in the marriage journey, you’re transformed such that you’re not constantly acting out of your desires, and within the relationship you acquire a chastity, a self-control, across the whole relationship.

Mr. Williams: And across all the passions.

Mr. Allen: I’m being told I’ve got a few more minutes to go. I was a little surprised when I saw the syllabus and the materials and talked to you about the inclusive nature of “The Freedom to Live in the Image of God” program, and I think this has to do with the way my brain works, that is, I was categorizing same-sex attraction as this thing in and of itself. In fact, the program is for, as you mentioned, anyone and everyone dealing with sexual issues, and that would include, you said it, fetishism, domestic violence, promiscuity, adultery, divorce, the broader effects of all of these, child abuse, and early sexualization. Are you not trivializing same-sex attraction in some way by including them with all these others and kind of lumping all these in one place?

Mr. Williams: No, I don’t think so. We have one therapeutic path in the tradition, which is for everybody. We work on the passions, not on the objects of the passions. The only reason, actually, we *limit* it to these kinds of issues is because we want to focus on them and use clear examples and help each other with shared experiences that are obviously common, but *none* of these issues are trivial to the people who are struggling with them. In fact, I can definitely say that in some cases some people have found same-sex attraction to be easier to deal with than other things like pornography addiction, which sometimes proves to be more difficult. Everybody is unique; everybody’s situation is unique. We can’t make blanket judgments like that, I don’t think.

Mr. Allen: Is a rational understanding of these issues, as I would expect would be part of the therapeutic process, in fact curative, or will it always require sacrifice and struggle against these very passions?

Dr. Mamalakis: You know, Kevin, sometimes insight alone can be very freeing, because when we’re confused about how to understand things or can’t make sense of what we’re feeling or thinking, it

makes it really difficult to pursue a path. But understanding the path, alone, is not the same as walking the path. In many ways, this program doesn't solve any problems, and it doesn't take away the struggles. What it does is it kind of levels the playing field. By changing how we think of the problem or even what we think the problem is, *everything* changes.

Learning that it's okay to experience temptation and learning that pursuing chastity *even in the little things* enables you to resist *greater* temptations—these types of things teach us *how* to fight. So the insight allows us to see the path, but it doesn't change from the process of walking the path. We're always going to struggle with temptations, but as we experience the transformation that comes in the *face* of these struggles, then we learn more and more. It kind of affirms itself that we encounter God's love, which changes our approach to our brokenness, and then we experience our brokenness actually as not a problem to be solved, that our brokenness is just a fact to be transformed in communion of love, which then enables us to shift our whole focus, that we're actually not having a group [so] that we can stop acting out on these desires. No, we're actually a group that's focused on pursuing loving communion with God and neighbor.

Mr. Allen: I love it. We have a call from Andrew from New Mexico. Andrew, good evening.

Andrew: Hi, guys. It's great to hear your show. One of the things that as an Orthodox Christian that has really supported my journey in chastity [is] the teachings of Pope John Paul II, especially his theology of the body. What I'd like to ask the panel: is there anything in his work or in his body of thought that is unhealthy for an Orthodox Christian to engage?

Mr. Williams: That's a hard question to answer, because his writings are very extensive! I can't say that I've read all of them. I've also found some very nice things in some of his reflections on the Song of Songs. Very nice.

Dr. Mamalakis: And on marriage.

Mr. Williams: I can't say that I've noticed anything that is unhelpful, but I wouldn't like to categorically say that it's not there.

Andrew: Well, I think that there are a lot of Orthodox Christians who, when they hear the [name] John Paul II, are immediately taken back. I have found that when I have engaged his work, it's been very helpful for my spiritual journey.

Mr. Williams: Yes, that's good.

Dr. Mamalakis: That's great, because what the Church reveals to us is not Orthodoxy, but it's reality. As we understand God's revelation as simply reality, then we can affirm reality wherever it exists, and it actually frees us up to recognize that which is beautiful. It exists in the writings of John Paul II, but that doesn't undermine our faith. It just witnesses that, as Orthodox, we don't possess the truth, because the truth is not something that you possess. It's something you live within, in relation to, and die to, and it exists; it's what sustains the universe.

Andrew: Thank you very much.

Mr. Allen: Thanks for your call, Andrew. Gentlemen, I have another one from Sean from Massachusetts. Sean, good evening; thank you for calling. Sean, are you there? Hello? Do I have Sean on the line?

Sean: Yes, you do.

Mr. Allen: Hi, Sean. What's your question, please? And good evening.

Sean: Good evening! How are you, Kevin?

Mr. Allen: I'm doing very well. Thank you so much.

Sean: My question was: where can we go to find out more about the programs at Holy Cross.

Mr. Allen: That's a great question.

Sean: I live in the area, so I'm interested.

Dr. Mamalakis: Sean, you're welcome to make a personal contact with me. I'd be happy to answer your questions and send you that information. The program itself is in a real transition now, but what we know is that there's a real need in the United States to facilitate these conversations in a respectful way, and you can reach me directly through my email or the website if you'd like.

Sean: What's the email or the website?

Dr. Mamalakis: I'll give you two emails. If you'd like to find more information on this specific program, "Freedom to Live," the email is mail.ftlive@yahoo.com. Or you can reach me at pmamalakis@hchc.edu.

Sean: Can you spell that?

Dr. Mamalakis: I could. What I would suggest is that you visit the website at Holy Cross in Brookline. You'll see it there in the faculty.

Sean: All right. Perfect!

Mr. Allen: Thank you so much, Sean. I appreciate your call.

Dr. Mamalakis: I look forward to hearing from you.

Sean: Have a good night, now!

Mr. Allen: Thank you for your calling. What is the ultimate shape and form, gentlemen, as we're coming to a close here; what do you imagine and hope this program will take in terms of shape and form? Will it be a very broad program all over the country? Who will train it? Are you thinking in terms of expanding it? Where do you see yourselves down the road in terms of your vision for this program?

Mr. Williams: I think it's important to have no expectations, so I don't have any expectations, but what we're hoping is that this is going to be a useful resource, that people are going to find it helpful, and that therefore it's going to spread if that's the case. It should be a pastoral resource that's available to people, and hopefully, yes, it will be available to people wherever it's needed. And hopefully it will also be a contribution to our understanding to how we understand these questions in line with our tradition. I am sure that we'll get feedback from people who both agree and disagree with what we're doing.

Mr. Allen: Well, *I* hope, speaking personally, that we have a program like this in all of the major Orthodox churches around the country eventually long-term. You'll have to bilocate or something; I don't know what you'll have to do.

Dr. Mamalakis: Our goal is to get the *information* out and to make the programs available.

Mr. Allen: As we're coming to a close, gentlemen, we've talked a little bit about more information. So the email for this particular program is mail.ftlive@yahoo.com. Philip and Andrew, I really want to thank you for being my guests and for the development of this program. You're terrific interview guests. Thank you so much, and may God bless your program.

Mr. Williams: Thank you.

Dr. Mamalakis: Kevin, thank you so much.

Mr. Allen: You're very welcome. Please join me on June 3, where our topic will be "I'm Spiritual But Not Religious" with Fr. Daniel Rogich, very interesting priest, author, and teacher on the subject of spirituality. Also, if you're interested, email us or Facebook us on any show topics that you would like to see covered in future *Ancient Faith Today* programs. Good night, and have a great week.

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