

## The Grammys and the Church's Beacon of Light

by Timothy Patitsas, Ph.D.

At the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on Jan. 26, celebrity Queen Latifa performed a mass wedding for couples traditionally not part of the concept of marriage.

It is hard to know what to say about this difficult and thorny issue, because the pastoral needs of the people who might read this are so diverse. The most important thing is that we see that reacting in love becomes easier, if we attempt to honor every aspect of the truth which might be present in a situation like this.

The purpose of the display at the Grammy Awards was political. In part, it was meant to establish a new visual sense of what is ethical regarding marriage, thus cementing political gains made for gay unions. By frequent repetition of such scenes, proponents of the redefinition of marriage hope to make what was once commonly seen as abhorrent, seem fully normal. The targets of such displays are, of course, those who are spiritually unready, including those without a mature commitment to Christian Orthodox faith.

For the vulnerable, such scenes may have the affect over time of weakening their primary ethical sense, which is the aesthetic. Some, overcome by the propaganda, will no longer be able to “just know” that it is somehow not right for people of the same gender to enter into “marriage.” They will have lost some part of the gains in human morality bequeathed to all of us by organized religion. Nevertheless, and I emphasize this, we must react with love.

A second purpose of this provocative display may have been retaliation against the recent strong statements condemning same-sex attraction made by another popular celebrity just weeks before, in a magazine interview. When the producers of that show had attempted to silence the would-be Christian evangelist, many Americans had rallied to his defense, forcing his reinstatement.

Thus the Grammys were a strong “take that” to defenders of Christian sexual morality, and a clear message: The drive to wipe out every last farthing of cultural and even religious resistance to the spiritual malady of same sex attraction – a malady that the Holy Scripture, every major world religion, the entire tradition of

the Jewish and Christian faiths, and the full mystical experience of the Orthodox Church have always known to be serious, even mortal, for the human soul – will continue apace.

Late last year, the Ecumenical Patriarch issued his own statement on the matter of same sex attraction. This statement had been earlier corroborated by statements of synods of bishops in the United States, Romania, Greece, Russia, and elsewhere. The entire Orthodox Christian faith speaks with one voice in saying that same-sex attraction is a spiritual affliction that can be healed; that it is a malady which when left untreated can destroy the human soul; that it is a symptom of other spiritual mistakes; and, that under no circumstances can the Orthodox Church ever bless same-sex unions.

The Church's view on this matter is partly historical. When the very first council of the Church bequeathed the Gospel to the Gentiles, it asked essentially only one thing: That we follow the sexual morality which God had revealed to Israel, and that we not descend into the uncleanness regarding sexual life which had gripped the Greeks and other pagans. This charge from the first Apostolic Council is one which we cannot deny, and which we will never have the authority to rescind.

Rather, accepting the truth revealed from God about sexual purity is the condition of our membership in the Apostolic Church, and thus we would cease to be members of that Church, should we reject that revelation.

Some point to Old Testament prohibitions of homosexuality, and ask whether the Old Testament did not say other things that we no longer accept, for example about slavery. But our strongest witness in Scripture for bodily purity is not the Old Testament, but the New. The example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the letters of St. Paul, and the life of the early Church, when taken together, all point in the same direction: For Christians, sexual relations outside of marriage between a man and a woman are a serious spiritual matter, and lead to spiritual death.

As for the slavery argument, it is illustrative that both slavery and same-sex unions lost their force and disappeared under the light of the Gospel message.

These are strong arguments from both history and the Holy Bible. What do they mean? St. Paul's discussion of same-sex attraction in Romans is the most interesting and helpful Scriptural treatment of this phenomenon. St. Paul says two

things that we must keep in mind, and which will help us to both stay true to our holy Faith, and to consider all men in a spirit of sober love.

First, St. Paul says that same sex practices are a symptom of an even more serious underlying spiritual error: The failure to know who God really is and to worship him properly. Second, he warns us not to judge too harshly those who have fallen into such sins, stating that we are also guilty of closely related sins – all the while making clear in no uncertain terms the seriousness of this particular fall.

Sexual sins are the worst of sins, says St. Paul elsewhere, because by them a person injures his own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Such acts reorganize the psyche and in some cases even the outward appearance of the person involved. The sin no longer is an external force to be fought, but may possess them, become their identity. This is part of the homosexual “identity” which the proponents of gay rights are struggling to defend, which is tragic. For the person trying to escape all this, a difficult struggle ensues, one made even harder if a true spiritual doctor is not available—or if the struggler meets with coldness, judgment, or rejection.

When we witness these public displays of same sex marriage, we probably have two reactions. On the one hand, we feel happy that two people have found a good friendship, perhaps one that in many ways gives them genuine love. Too, if we think about it, we know that they may feel themselves to be rebelling against the current societal conception of heterosexual marriage and sexuality which is often selfish, smug, and may even be but another instance of hedonistic consumerism. But on the other hand, we mourn the fact that hidden within this best friendship being celebrated as a “gay marriage” is already a “Judas’ kiss,” a betrayal, as the two friends lead each other away from sexual and spiritual wholeness.

On the whole, when we see such displays as happened at the Grammy Awards, let us see primarily not the sexual sin nor rush to condemn the participants, but let us reflect on what it means to live in a society that since the 1960’s has blessed heterosexual lust, that since the 1970’s has often made a mockery of Christian marriage, that a million times a year tears its mothers from their own children, that often turns its men into wage-slaves, and many of its children into drugged or regimented desperados. Gay marriage can be seen, and in large part is, a misguided protest against these heterosexual abuses, which we have somehow come to accept as normal, even just.

In the words of St. Paul, we ourselves are guilty of these sins against the body, against womanhood, manhood, and childhood, and are in need of repentance. However, that is no excuse now to proceed still further off the cliff of spiritual health.

We can say without a doubt that, should the drive be successful to normalize same sex marriage not only from a legal perspective, but from a religious one, it would take our beloved American nation into uncharted spiritual territory, in which literally anything might befall us.

And so, in the face of this decades- long societal descent into both “heterosexual” and “homosexual” sin — a descent that Scripture traces directly to the prior failure to worship properly — the Orthodox Church’s stance remains a beacon of purest light. We must not allow ourselves to be provoked into hatred of our fellow man, but must hold fast to the Gospel of hope.

We must attend to the idolatries and impure practices in our own lives, replacing them with Orthodox faith and life, and simultaneously continue to confess the Gospel witness of who God is, and who we are meant to be.

The teaching of the Church about sexuality has always seemed strange to the world, but with time is always shown to be a true deliverance for the human soul grown weary of the world. So, too, will it be in our times.

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