# Leadership and Homosexuality: An Orthodox Viewpoint

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**Abstract**

*Conditioned as it is by Enlightenment approaches to authority the Church today is divided over the question of who may appropriately engage in leadership, especially whether those involved in same-sex relationships are able to do so. In the New Testament leadership was exercised within the context of the fundamental equality of the entire body of Christ. Among the gifts given to the Church some, such as the charisms of being an overseer or elder, emerged as permanent leadership roles. In the early church bishops who had been appointed by the apostles, continued the apostolic ministry, safeguarding the unity of the Church, being a sign of koinonia and witnessing to the presence and action of Jesus Christ. The necessary qualifications for bishops are not determined by subjective attitudes or scientific claims but by the scriptural vision as described in the pastoral epistles and involves a male and marital character. This is confirmed by other scriptures dealing with same-sex relationships. From the traditional Orthodox viewpoint, Christian leadership therefore is incompatible with homosexual activity as same-sex relations cannot reflect complementary, unitive, life-creating, and life-enhancing love.*

## Preliminary Remarks

The question of leadership in the Church is one of the most divisive issues facing Christians today.[1] Even though the fruits of biblical, patristic, historical and liturgical studies have shed much light on the true nature of Church leadership, the unfortunate fact remains that discussions continue to be conditioned by the approach which emerged from the time of the Enlightenment. And so, leadership within the Church has continued to focus, for example, on the 'power' of those in authority whereas, in the early Church, it is clear that leadership roles gradually evolved to hold together and in harmony the great diversity of *charisms* exercised

[1] This is especially seen in the great diversity of Church responses to *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry,* particularly the section on ministry. See M. Thurian, ed. *Churches Respond to BEM. Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry" text.* Six volumes. Faith and Order Papers 129 and 132 (1986), 135 and 137 (1987) and 144 (1988); WCC, Geneva.

by the faithful for the building up of the 'body of Christ', especially when they would assemble to celebrate the Eucharist (cf 1 Cor. 12). Indeed, as we shall see, the place of leadership in the early Christian communities, very quickly, came to be seen as an expression of God's continued provision for the Church so that the salvific ministry of Christ could continue through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. It follows therefore that, in contradistinction to the early Christian experience and practice of Christian leadership, the subsequent hierarchical and authoritarian understandings caused inestimable harm and confusion to later generations of Christians across various denominations. Nevertheless, the challenges facing the notion of leadership today – and who in fact can minister - should not necessarily be seen in a negative light, since such unrest may prove to occasion a reassessment of the vision and exercise of leadership on the part of the different Christian denominations, leading to a recovery of its genuine nature.

In the New Testament it is evident that the question of leadership arose so that order could continue to be maintained within the various local communities until Christ would come again (cf 1 Cor. 11:26). Moreover, all forms of Christian leadership developed not only for the sake of order – or for the *bene esse* of the Church - but also to facilitate the communal integration and participation of all the faithful within the *ekklesia*. And this communal mode of the Church's existence, far from being only a sociological experience, was based on the divine *koinonia* in the life of the Trinitarian Godhead. Consequently, the early Church attributed the primordial root and ultimate source of all its permanent leadership structures to the divine initiative of God. And so, the claim made by Eastern Orthodoxy that all forms of ecclesial leadership were instituted by, and founded upon the communal understanding of Christ's leadership, together with that of the Spirit's abiding presence, is very important for any discussion on the specific ministry of ordained leadership within the Church.[2] It is precisely for this reason that the Orthodox Church teaches that leadership cannot be culturally conditioned; and so, the Church has had to take seriously the historical facts and canonical prohibitions regulating who can be ordained. Now, being a divine *gift* bestowed upon the Church, ecclesial leadership (especially the ministry of the bishop, as will be shown) was, at the same time, a visible *sign* of *koinonia* promoting the Church's continual pilgrimage towards the eschatological kingdom.[3] Accordingly, the Church could continue to maintain and preserve its *integrity* and *identity* with the apostolic Church throughout history. Before focusing, however, specifically on the issue of leadership and homosexuality, an overview of

[2] For this reason, it must always be kept in mind that Christian leadership is at the same time, christological, pneumatological and of course ecclesial.

[3] Having affirmed the divine origin of leadership in the church, it must be also remembered that a human factor is also involved in the exercise of ecclesial leadership. It follows from this that the ultimate aim of leadership – i.e., to realise the communal being of the church - will only be fully realised in the eschatological kingdom. The importance of seeing the question of leadership from within the context of a *theandric* understanding of ministry cannot be overstated, especially if one remembers that more often than not irresolvable tensions have arisen in the church's history precisely because leadership/ministry has either been seen entirely as being divinely instituted without an appreciation of the human factor, or simply historically conditioned – a mere human construct - and therefore not essential for the church. And so, in order to avoid such diametrically opposed positions, leadership must not only be seen as a divine gift whose raison d'etre was to bring about the world's *koinonia* with God, their fellow human beings and the entire created order, but also at the same time, it is to be seen dynamically – that is, in terms of a constant struggle, by the Church on earth, to embody the *koinonia* which all leadership structures look towards.

the historical emergence of leadership will follow as this will shed light on the Orthodox viewpoint on the question at hand.

**Christian Leadership**

*Biblical Witness*

After affirming the fundamental equality of all faithful and the responsibility of the entire body of Christ serving the needs of the community (esp. 1Cor. 12:4-7)[4], St Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, went on to distinguish different degrees of leadership ranging from apostles to other more occasional services such as forms of ministry applicable to concrete situations within the life of the Church. In this way, he emphasised that the Church was a richly gifted and '*structured communion*' of God. Far from being democratic or hierocratic, the Church, as rightly pointed out by Harkianakis is an '*ordered pneumatocracy* [ierarchmenh pneumatokratia]'.[5] And so, from the outset, it must be noted that, in speaking of the Church as an *ordered* or *structured communion*, the Eastern Orthodox tradition would claim that this does not, in any way, imply a hierocratic or pyramidal view of the Church that developed in the West during the Middle Ages. On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 12 brings to the fore the rich variety of *charisms* of all baptised faithful where different members of the community had been allotted specific gifts giving rise to an ordered communion:

> There are a variety of gifts… but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good… (1 Cor. 12:4-7) Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way (1 Cor. 12:27-31).

For Paul, even though all baptised members were bestowed with a distinct ministry by the Spirit, apostles nevertheless occupied first place in his list of *charisms* followed by the prophets and teachers. That these were considered to be the leading orders of the local worshipping communities is also seen in the book of Acts and the *Didache*.[6] Elsewhere, Paul mentioned leaders in terms of 'presiders' [proistamenoi] (cf 1 Thess. 5:12; Rom. 12:8); overseers [episkopoi] and ministers [diakonoi] (cf Phil. 1:1).[7]

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[4] The list of nine charisms specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians – word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues – is not to be understood as being exhaustive but simply representative of the rich diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Church for its good order in the world.

[5] Lectures delivered in ecclesiology by His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia, Dean and Professor of Dogmatic Theology at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College (Sydney), 2005.

[6] Acts 13:2 ("While they [i.e. the prophets and teachers] were worshiping [leitourgountwn] the Lord") and *Didache* 10:7 ("Allow the prophets to give thanks as long as they wish") indicate that prophets and teachers may have led the 'breaking of bread' service.

[7] The terminology used in other books of the New Testament with regards to the diversity of gifts differs. In Ephesians, for example there are five *charisms* listed: "But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift… The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ… " (Eph. 4:7, 11-12). In 1 Pt. 4:10 there is the general term 'stewards' [oikonomoi] used, whilst Hebrews referred to its leaders as hgoumenoi (cf Heb. 13:7).

As can be seen from within the list of the diversity of *charisms*, certain more permanent leadership roles can be discerned out of which the 'structured communion' of the *ekklesia* transpired.[8] In the later Pastoral letters, the terms episkopo" (overseer) and presbutero" (elder; found in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; the term also appears in James 5:14) began to emerge as the standard name for the leaders of the local communities who were appointed by the laying on of hands (cf 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Alongside the elders/overseers there was also the diaconate (1 Tim. 3:8-13).[9] A more developed structure of leadership began to emerge which would ultimately evolve into the threefold ministerial office so that everything within the Church could be done "decently and in order." (1 Cor. 14:40).[10] Accordingly, it can be seen that insofar as Paul promoted a diversity of spiritual gifts within the ecclesial communion, he did so, also by attending to a definite *taxis* within the community. Furthermore, far from referring to any external or objectified authority, which could understandably become oppressive, Paul spoke of the Church as a structured and interdependent communion within which the various ministries necessarily co-existed and functioned. In accordance with the Pauline understanding of leadership, Harkianakis viewed the Church as an ordered communion according to the model of concentric circles which included the various ministries within the people of God.[11] His model of concentric circles not only situated the ministry of the Church in the broader context of the whole community, as Paul did in his letter to the Corinthians, but at the same time recognised the reality of the different degrees of responsibilities within the Church. Accordingly, the faithful members of the Church together, as 'bearers of truth', would be empowered for the Church's mission to witness Christ within the world. And today, faithful to Paul's Corinthian correspondence, the reality of the various structures within the Orthodox Church serve as concrete realities so that

[8] One of the major challenges faced by theologians today is outlining exactly the different stages of the development of leadership within the early Church, due to the limited scope of the available sources. Indeed, hardly anyone would deny that some form of permanent orders existed already within the New Testament Church. However, a number of scholars, influenced by Harnack and Sohm have argued that while there was evidence of the Church as an ordered communion in the New Testament, this could at best be placed in a secondary position to the so-called 'charismatic' structures. Such a dichotomy between 'institutional' and 'charismatic' order however is hardly helpful since all ministries were grounded in some *charism*. Far from being seen as an insitutionalisation of *charisms*, ministry, in our understanding could be described in terms of a charismatisation of institutions. To be a presbyter, for example, would have presupposed the *charism* of preaching and leadership. Indeed, the mutual conditioning of ordination and *charismata* was long cherished in the church if one considers the charismatic presbyters of the ascetic communities in Egypt, or the vision of the bishop according to the Areopagitic corpus and St Symeon the New Theologian. The Eastern Orthodox tradition would therefore note that such an antithesis was unfounded for the simple reason that even the more permanent ministries were appointed by the 'laying on of hands' which was a special gift of the Holy Spirit for a distinct service within the Church.

[9] By the end of the first century there is evidence of three distinct offices in the church. St Ignatius of Antioch envisioned a local church headed by one bishop and consisting of the presbytery and the diaconate (Philadelphians 4:1) where all were harmoniously united as strings are to a harp (Ephesians 4:1).

[10] In his ministerial ordering of the *ekklesia* in New Testament times, Zizioulas distinguished between internal and external ministries. With regards to the church's ministry *ad intra* he recognised specifically four ministries; namely that of "(i) the laity, (ii) the deacons, (iii) the presbyters and (iv) the bishop." (John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion, [*Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985], 221) and attributed all other *charisms*, which arose according to the concrete needs of the times, to the church's ministry *ad extra.* However a central Pauline presupposition was precisely that even the *ad intra* ministerial ordering of the *ekklesia* could not be exhausted to those four. Such a distinction is reminiscent of the Roman Catholic 1917 Code of Canon Law - which understood the role of the ordained ministry to be primarily internal, whilst that of the laity to be orientated to those outside the canonical boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church - and the teaching of Vatican II - which distinguished between those engaged in sacred ministry (*sacrum ministerium,* see Lumen Gentium *(LG)*, 31) and the rest of the people of God (*inter sacros ministeros et reliquum Populum Dei,* LG 32) who were ministers of the good news (*ministry Evangelii,* LG35).

[11] Cf Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis), 'Commemoration in Orthodox Worship and Life', *Phronema* 19(2004): 5.

the gift of *koinonia* between God and the world may be realised proleptically, and fully so in the age to come.

*Early Church*

With the death of the apostles, the bishops, who themselves had been appointed by the apostles, would continue the apostolic ministry, in this way preserving the identity and integrity of the apostolic faith for future generations. Indeed, this was especially important in the face of the growing danger of division and schism, which one would expect within the growing communities.[12] In reflecting upon the basis of leadership in the early Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church would claim that safeguarding the unity of the Church in the one apostolic tradition and presiding over its essential unity and Eucharist were inextricably linked. This is the reason why different aspects of leadership came to be merged in the one person of the bishop. Already the sub-apostolic Church called for the ordination of responsible leaders who not only exhibited the appropriate moral qualities befitting a leader (cf 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), but who were also gifted and authoritative teachers, "faithful people… able to teach others as well" (2 Tim. 2:2), as well as "rightly explaining the word of truth [orqotomounta ton logon th" alhqeia"][13]" (2 Tim. 2:15). From this it is clear that episcopacy and teaching office came to be identified since witness and fidelity to the apostolic faith was of paramount importance for maintaining the *koinonia* of the Church – that is, Christ's organic and *integral* presence amongst the faithful.

Whereas for St Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca 110AD), the bishop was the one who brought the faithful into *koinonia* through the celebration of the Eucharist, by the time of St Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca 202AD)[14], authoritatively teaching the truth of the Gospel within the community had become an indispensable characteristic of the bishop's ministry for upholding unity.[15] In writing against the different Gnostic sects, Irenaeus regarded the bishop as the authoritative organ of the genuine apostolic tradition who could therefore ensure the Church's inward

[12] Already in the sub-apostolic period, the problem of heterodoxy was an issue which can be inferred from some of the later catholic epistles which urge the leaders to safeguard the faith 'handed down' (cf Jude 1:3; also 1 Tim. 1:3-4: "I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people *not to teach any different doctrine*, and *not to occupy themselves with myths* and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith"; 6:2-4: "Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the Church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions" and 2 Tim. 1:13-14: "*Hold to the standard of sound teaching* that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. *Guard the good treasure entrusted to you* [paraqhkhn fulaxon], with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us").

[13] In Orthodox worship today, as witnessed in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, the conviction that the bishop expresses and is witness to the apostolic faith is made clear in the Eucharistic prayer, where the priest proclaims: "Among the first, remember, Lord, our Archbishop (name); grant to your holy churches that he remain in peace, safety, honour, health and length of days, *rightly teaching the word of your truth*." *The Divine Liturgy of our Father amongst the Saints John Chrysostom*, trans, Committee for the Translation of Liturgical Texts (Sydney: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2005), 81. The text asks for the bishop to be preserved on the safe grounds of orthodoxy. It does not espouse a conviction that the bishop is *rightly teaching* simply because he is ordained bishop; one must not forget that many condemned heretics were clergymen, bishops and priests.

[14] This is not to say that there was a change of content with respect to the Episcopal function but rather a different emphasis which resulted from the different historical contexts.

[15] Today, the general consensus of modern scholarship is that the Episcopal ministry in fact ultimately developed approximately half way through the second century precisely in order to guarantee the faithful transmission of the genuine apostolic teaching in the face of a growing number of false teachings. Sullivan, for example specifically noted that bishops were recognised as "successors to the apostles in teaching ministry." F. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops,(* New York: The Newman Press, 2001), 225.

continuity with the apostolic faith. The connection between apostolic identity and the bishop's ministry of leadership is explicitly expressed in the following:

> Anyone who wishes to discern the truth may see in every Church in the whole world the apostolic tradition clear and manifest. We can enumerate those who were appointed as bishops in the Churches by the apostles and their successors to our own day.[16]

Consequently, for Irenaeus the relationship between apostolic continuity and the bishop came to be clearly connected, resulting in the bishop assuming the role not only of authoritative teacher of the apostolic faith in his local Church, but also the guarantor and witness to the faith held by all within the community.[17] Having highlighted the apostolic character of the bishop's ministry, Irenaeus also stressed that such a ministry was undoubtedly a gift of the Holy Spirit:

> Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters[18] who are in the Church – those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with succession in the episcopate, have received the assured *charisma* of the truth (*certum charisma veritatis*).[19]

Having received the Spirit's gift – i.e. *charisma* - of truth, by virtue of his succession from the apostles, the bishop, according to Irenaeus, could act as the discernible link to the authentic apostolic faith of previous ecclesial communities thereby being an authentic witness, for the faithful within the Church, to that same apostolic tradition. Outward continuity in apostolic succession, for Irenaeus served as the sign of inward continuity in the apostolic faith.[20] Moreover, apostolic succession, far from being a transmission of power handed over by one individual to another, was the visible sign that the entire Church's life was in continuity with past communities. This meant that apostolic succession, for Irenaeus, was inextricably linked with the local community as a whole into which the bishop, as its head, was ordained and it could therefore never be conceived apart from it. In this way, apostolic succession was a sign of the entire Church's *koinonia* in truth, which would continue to be sustained by the bishop's authentic witness to the apostolic faith.

**Qualifications for Christian Leadership**

Having traced the historical trajectory of the emergence of Christian leadership, the task at hand is to reflect upon the extent to which this experience and vision of the early Church's leadership is compatible with those who today aspire to become leaders within the Church, but who are actively engaged in same-sex sexual activity. To be sure, what must guide the

[16] *Adv. Haer.* 3, 3, 1. Cited in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology,* vol. 1 (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1986), 301.
[17] This aspect was later emphasised by the synodal decisions and confessions of faith, where the orthodoxy of a bishop was shared by the majority of bishops.
[18] Read in context, by the term 'presbyter' was meant 'bishop', which is evidence that even in Irenaeus' time there was still some fluidity between the terms betraying the New Testament application of the term.
[19] *Adv. Haer.* 4, 26, 2, trans. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 497.
[20] The relationship between the continuity of apostolic faith and external continuity by the laying on of hands was summed up succinctly by Androutsos: "Both of these are internally related and presuppose one another, and as the apostolic teaching is the basis of apostolic succession, so also the apostolic succession constitutes the external sign that a certain church is genuine and in agreement with the ancient church both in teaching and in administration." C. Androutsos, *Dogmatics of the Orthodox Eastern Church* [in Greek] (Athens: Astir, 1992), 281.

Church on this issue is not each society's subjective attitudes or modern scientific claims – especially the behavioural sciences which examine, what theology would call, the 'fallen' human condition – but the Scriptural vision of the person and the experience of the Church as a whole. Even though scientific study is taken most seriously, Orthodoxy understands that its area of expertise is restricted to physical nature; and so, the fact that it may 'prove' that a percentage of human persons are of 'homosexual orientation' – or even born this way - is not a determinative factor for its vision of the human person as God intended it from the beginning.[21] Indeed, according to Orthodox interpretation, with the passing of time, the world will become more confused – Christ asked, "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8) – and traditional values will, at best be questioned or openly rejected. Already in the fourth century, St Anthony the Great had said: "A time is coming when people will go mad, and when they will see someone who is not mad, they will attack them saying, 'you are mad, you are not like us'."[22] For this reason, the stable and unwavering reality of God's truth, as it has been witnessed to in the Scriptures, experienced and preserved in the Church, has to be the normative measure, by which each Christian generation must be guided.

As we have seen, what is referred to as Christian leadership in the New Testament is the ministry of those with the particular calling of *headship* within the Church, whose role it was to witness to the presence and action of Jesus Christ. In the attempt to provide guiding principles for this fixed and defined form of leadership, the New Testament Scriptures provided some guidelines for the Church's good order, effective service and witness to the world. The pastoral letters (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) for example list various personal qualities those in leadership were expected to possess. They are all qualities of Christ Himself, which confirms that Christ was seen as the source of all leadership. Christ's ministry was complete and could not be added to,[23] but the Church, as we have shown, claimed to share in this mission and to be an extension of it in its witness of Him, in this way giving permanence to Jesus' ministry.[24] First Timothy spells out what is entailed in such a leadership role by listing fourteen qualities for effective leadership. The author begins by stressing the nobility of such a ministry and the requirement that leaders be 'above reproach' (1 Tim. 3:1-2). The bishop who is God's steward here on earth has to be temperate (1 Tim. 3:3), 'blameless' (1 Tim. 1:6), *'the husband of one wife*' (1 Tim. 3:2), clear-minded, meek, slow to anger, not addicted to alcohol, not violent or greedy. He has to be hospitable, gentle, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout and self-controlled. Timothy also states the importance of the bishop managing his household well and being a respected member of the community.

[21] It must be noted that there is no agreement between behavioural scientists themselves, for example, they do not agree whether homosexual emotions and desires are simply there when a child is born or if they are caused as a result of a traumatic relationship break-up in early childhood with a same sex parent (or primary care-giver) or if such orientation lies in that person failing to be able to relate to the opposite sex.
[22] St Anthony the Great, *The Saying of the Desert Fathers,* Saying 25.
[23] In this regard Küng wrote, 'Jesus Christ… is himself *the* apostle, prophet, teacher, evangelist, pastor and deacon'; Hans Küng, *The Church* (London: Burn & Oates, 1968), 395.
[24] The resurrected Christ commissioned the apostles to continue in his ministry, promising to send the Spirit to equip them for their task. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15f; Luke 24:46-49 and John 20:21-23).

Clearly, the requirement that a bishop/presbyter be 'the husband of one wife' would suggest not only the male character of the ordained leader but also the natural context in which such a ministry could be accomplished – namely, in a committed marriage to one other person, not of the same gender. In carrying out their ministry, the bishop/presbyters were considered 'fathers' of the community where God alone was Father. And as 'fathers' and leaders of the community, they had to have their household in order – the implication being that this was to be achieved in a committed marriage between a man and a woman. Indeed, first Timothy makes this connection clearly:

> He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?' (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

According to 1 Timothy, same-sex relations could not fulfil such roles within the community, particularly fathering a child. Accordingly, it would be the Orthodox conviction that the responsibilities and qualifications implied in such leadership serve to indicate the limitations on ministry by those committed to same-sex relationships in this regard.

In the traditional Orthodox viewpoint, Christian leadership therefore is seen to be incompatible with homosexual activity precisely because attraction between persons of the same sex cannot reflect the love of God – such love being *complementary*, *unitive*, *life-creating*, and *life-enhancing*. Such leaders could not be expected to model such human relationships as intended by God 'from the beginning' for the community, since Orthodox theology would affirm that same-sex sexual activity 'misses the mark' and is therefore misdirected.[25] Unlike countless people today and some Christian Churches who would argue the contrary by claiming that sexual activity between people of the same sex is capable of being 'natural' [kata fusin] – that is, divinely loving, godly and holy – the Eastern Orthodox tradition would hold that praiseworthy sexual love can only have the opportunity to blossom between a married man and woman[26] as this is exemplified in Christ's love for the Church (cf Eph 5:21-33). Such a position regarding homosexuality is further based on the first chapter of St Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:18-32)[27], which Orthodox Christianity interprets in light of its Tradition and the Church's councils and canons, which were the practical applications of the Bible.[28] According to this vision, sexual actions between people of the same gender have come about as a result of humanity's rebellion against God and nature since they have refused to 'glorify Him as God' and 'give thanks to Him' (cf Rom. 1:21). The interpretation that

[25] For Orthodox Christianity, 'passions' are misdirected energies. And so, the longing of every person to love and be loved – to be in communion with God who is love, after whose image they have been created – cannot be satisfied and therefore be liberating in homosexual relations. Therefore the argument put forward by many that such people do not choose their sexual orientation hardly justifies the acting out of such activity. The Eastern Orthodox tradition would claim that this is one of the countless 'crosses' that human persons may be asked to bear for their salvation. In this way, homosexuality, however unbearable, may indeed be a *providential* cross given so that a person may transform it by God's grace into a victory and triumph of divine love.

[26] Obviously this is not to say that all heterosexual relationships are God-pleasing - indeed, those who are also sacramentally married must strive to actualise the love willed by God for the world.

[27] Other texts include the story of Sodom and Gomorrah which is interpreted by the Patristic tradition not only as a story about violence, rape and the degradation of strangers but also as a story about sexual perversion and immorality. Furthermore, the Mosaic laws are not simply about 'ritual purity' but explicitly concerned with forbidding same-sex relations along with adultery, fornication, incest, rape and bestiality. (Cf Gen. 18-19; 2 Pt. 2:4 and Jude 7).

[28] The Patristic tradition is clear on this subject as can be seen in certain canons of the Church: eg, the *Canons* of St John the Faster (7th cent.)

argues that Paul was correct on the one hand in forbidding acts which are 'contrary to nature' but was unaware of the 'fact' that many people are 'by nature' homosexual and therefore ought to act accordingly, is not an accepted interpretation of this passage since, throughout history, this text has never been understood in this way. On the contrary, it affirms precisely that the reality of homosexuality is one of the countless indications of the world's fallen state.

**Concluding Remarks**

The New Testament Church was shown to be a *theanthropic* reality, comprised of a community of believers intimately united to God and to one another, thus forming, through the Spirit, the one body of the Lord. Indeed, it was also noted that precisely because of its communal nature, the Church, throughout the centuries, was right to claim that it was the sacramental presence of Christ on earth.[29] And so, in continuing the work of the apostles, the bishops/presbyters, were fittingly able continue the redemptive work of Christ by their witness of Him in their respective local communities. It was also demonstrated that the significant moment for leadership came when the first witnesses died. Following on from this, the early Church, through its ordained leadership was able to perpetuate the integrity and presence of the Lord's teachings as attested by the apostles to subsequent Christian generations. That is, the ordained leaders came to be seen in terms of a special grace bestowed on some, by the laying on of hands, who would be empowered to build up the body of Christ in the unity of faith, so that, filled with the Holy Spirit, the faithful could be assured of the presence of the risen Lord.

Having reflected upon the emergence of leadership within the Church, our attention was then turned to examining the compatibility between leadership and homosexuality. In speaking the truth in love [alhqeuonte" en agaph (Eph. 4:15)], the issue of homosexual activity and ecclesial leadership was shown to be mutually exclusive. In being called to be a word and icon of God in Christ, it was observed that the leaders of the Church had to meet certain qualifications prescribed for this specific ministry in the Bible, one of which was to be in a committed marriage – this, therefore precluded such a ministry to those engaged in same-sex sexual activity. Whilst upholding the truth that God's love extends to all human persons without condition or discrimination, we saw that the Orthodox Church, in its interpretation of the Scriptures - as witnessed to in its liturgical texts, worship, dogmatic teaching and canonical order – could not therefore sanction unions between persons of the same-sex, since it believes that marriage, from the beginning was intended to be between a man and woman. This is, at least one of the reasons why the Orthodox Church cannot give its approval for such people to become leaders of Church communities. This would give the false impression, to the faithful, that such actions were divinely loving and therefore life-enhancing, even though, on the contrary, we have seen that they do not allow for full mutuality. We end by coming back to the way we began this paragraph: namely, whilst wanting to avoid all stereotyping, or be seen to be condemnatory or judgemental, the Orthodox Church, on the

[29] Cf 1 Cor. 10:16-17; Eph. 1:22-23 and Col.1:18.

contrary wishes to be truly loving towards all people, but it is convinced that it can only do this by:

> *speaking the truth in love*, we must *grow up* in every way *into him* who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, *promotes the body's growth* in *building* itself up *in love*. (Eph. 4:15-16).