

# GRAMMATA ON CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES

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THE VOCATION OF THE CHURCH is to serve in God's love and faithful to his will, involved at all times and throughout history with the task of proclaiming His truth, that is above all human whim and time. The mission of the Church therefore is to clarify and to proclaim what God has revealed as being holy from that what is sinful and thus destructive to the human soul and society. It is to clearly teach what is of divine origin and what is not, what is holy and what is not, and ultimately what leads to accepting or rejecting God's authority.

It would be a grave error to assume that our faith is relative to the boundaries of its cultural context and therefore could not convey to every society at every age in history its ethical and divinely received premises.

God has revealed Himself to all humanity in His creation. He speaks through His Church to all people, not just to the faithful. For this reason we cannot be silent or indifferent to the questions of paramount importance in our times.

The last century has witnessed an unparalleled and unrelenting assault on human ethics and dignity. Unlike during past eras where relatively few tyrants and their minions perpetrated such attacks, today they are waged across a broad spectrum of traditional human institutions of society, including government, commerce, education, law, the sciences and the arts. Through various elements of our civilization, the human being, who has been created as an *Icon of God*, is increasingly reduced to the status of a rational, utilitarian being. We are told that there are humans unworthy of life, and that, for instance, a healthy animal could be more useful than a defective child. Additionally, God's gift of gender and its attendant purpose of sexuality have been debased and perverted into the exercise of sensual gratification.

The value of individual human dignity, valued as the crown of creation in God's holy Scriptures, is now measured by its peripheral considerations, such as age, state of health, material possessions and the perceived ability to contribute to society. The subjective conditions of being unwanted and a burden on society have been translated into death sentences. Thus, the traditional Christian values of the sanctity and dignity of human life, still held by most segments of society, have been largely dismissed by most secular governments.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century we now face these unprecedented challenges to human culture, traditional values for survival, and the spiritual care through the Savior who came two thousand years ago in order to free this world from such decay. We therefore must resist the attempts made by the enemies of God that try to silence the fundamental issues surrounding abortion, euthanasia, the acceptance of licentiousness, including the destruction of marriage and the traditional family.

We therefore are strongly committed to the affirmation of the divine purpose and value of human life. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness for everlasting life. We hereby call for credible witness on the sanctity and dignity of human life at any stage.

## ON ABORTION

The Church – from its founding on St. Peter, the rock, the inception by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and throughout her walk through the turbulent times of history – has always condemned abortion as a grievous sin.

We hold firm that children are to be received by their parents as gifts of their creator, to be cared for lovingly, joyfully and sacrificially. We therefore must reject the willful abortion of the unborn as a horrible act; yet equal is our moral responsibility to be supportive of those who care for the unwanted or disabled children, as we follow Christ's love, *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly* (John 10:10).

Since the dignity and protection of human life both begin at the moment of conception and end until the natural death and since the willful termination of unborn human life may never be dependent – neither logically nor consequentially – upon peripheral conditions such as age, health, social status, wealth and personal preferences, we demand from civil governments that innocent human life must again be respected and preserved as always throughout history. Whether or not secular or Supreme Court decisions grant protection to unborn human life, civil authority may never be the gauge for legitimacy or an excuse for sinful action. We include in this plea for protection other contemporary threats to life, such as fair and loving treatment of the disabled, the infirm and the elderly.

We therefore reiterate the Orthodox Christian opposition to abortion in all cases, except to save the life of the mother, and that we do so on theological and moral grounds, given under the authority of Christ who has commissioned us to carry out his divine will. We commend the efforts of clergy and laity to bear peaceful and respectful witness to the sanctity of life in the public arena. Additionally, we have a moral obligation to work for the creation and maintenance of adoption agencies and for the facilitation of adoption procedures for families that consider adopting an unwanted or disabled infant, regardless of the child's racial or ethnic background. The Church as a whole and the parish community in particular are called to give active material and spiritual support to those who accept the responsibility of adoption and participate in crisis pregnancy matters.

We recognize and affirm that all spiritual, pastoral and educational efforts towards higher moral ends of responsibility are directed to the father as much as to the mother in order to help stem the present crisis of unwanted lives. We ask all Christians, as well as all men and women of good will throughout the world to support those organizations that strive to protect peacefully and lovingly, yet firmly the rights of the unborn.

## ON EUTHANASIA OR MERCY KILLING

All human beings, who are in a condition of medical dependency due to illness, age or other reasons, must be provided with the basic amenities of food, water, hygiene, warmth and relief

from pain. Such basic care must never be considered extraordinary measures in the context of medical treatment. We as Orthodox Christians see bodily death merely as a transition between earthly life and eternal life. All medical treatments that unnecessarily prolong the dying process while offering no benefit to the individual (with the exception of those ordinary measures stated beforehand) may, in good conscience, be refused by the individual or those acting on his or her behalf. However, these individual circumstances should always be decided after thorough spiritual counsel while seeking the will of God.

We therefore affirm that the willful taking of a human life, however understandable the motive, constitutes a serious sin and an affront against God, the lover of humankind. Even when perceived as an act of mercy, such as the attempt to alleviate suffering or "assisted suicide", is to ignore God's divine purpose and plan in all things. Our trust, i.e. belief in God's wisdom, is only sincere if it includes the patient acceptance of those burdens that may seem, as in the biblical example of Job's sufferings, to be unbearable.

### *ON MATTERS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY*

Human sexuality is properly expressed in only two chaste conditions as instituted by divine revelation and providence: Voluntary celibacy and marriage. Thus, the physical act of love is limited to the context of marriage. Since one of the fruits of marriage is having children, all couples must be open to the possibility of both, obtaining or not obtaining this blessing when they make their prayerful decision: *Thy will be done*. There is no command, neither in Holy Scriptures nor in the doctrines of Orthodoxy, that birth control measures, whether natural or artificial, would be in violation of God's law.

The Church acts in accordance with God's command by always rejecting expressions of sexuality outside the traditional role of marriage while at the same time offering forgiveness to the repentant for the weakness of the flesh.

Thus, we must never discriminate, disdainfully judge or mistreat any individual in spite of his or her condition or persuasion, but lovingly offer our help and prayer.

At the same time, we strongly reject all forms of forced celibacy, for clergy as well as laity, this being in direct violation of Christ's teaching and that of the Holy Apostles as recorded many times in the New Testament.

Thus, we call upon any church who still upholds illegitimate rules of forcing young men, called to be ministers of Christ, into celibacy; to restore the virtue of voluntary celibacy *for the kingdom's sake* without concoction and to give back to the clergy of all ranks the privilege of choosing a believing spouse before ordination.

We condemn all forms of pornography, associated media violence whether in print, in motion pictures or under the disguise of art. All such things seriously disfigure true human dignity and undermine faithfulness, commitment and stability, as well as family values.

### *ON THE ENVIRONMENT*

All men and women are created as an *Icon of God*. God brought forth the whole of creation as a blessing to us; nevertheless, we are made stewards of that creation. Our proper concern for

the environment can never allow us to approve of or indulge in abuse or destructive acts. The popular dichotomy of saving the environment or endangered species while at the same time accepting the destruction of society through sinful acts and licentiousness is deemed utter hypocrisy.

We sadly observe that our planet is encountering in its last stages an unprecedented overpopulation problem due to various circumstances. We must face this issue in seeking solutions that respect human dignity as the Icon of God, environmental concerns as to respect God's creation and sober apocalyptic views as God's providence.

The scarcity of resources could never be an excuse for either the neglect or the destruction of our neighbor through selfish means. Our aim ought not to focus on the size of world population in relation to its supposed resources, but by correcting the uneven distribution of those resources due to greed, power and wastefulness created by human pride and egotism. The call goes out to each one of us for alleviating the suffering – caused by human error and sinfulness – through individual effort as well as peaceful political solutions. Both must be in accordance with God's supreme law: *Love God and thy neighbor as thyself.*

