

TO WHOM DO WE BELONG?

In our day and age, we are witnesses to radical changes taking place from the traditional Judaeo-Christian principles which have been guiding human behavior and consequently our Western society for several centuries. The recent decision of the Supreme Court of the United States of America legalizing the behavior of people who decide to choose their gender based on the newly recognized transgender identity, has created a plethora of human identities, not to mention contradictions.

This new lawful regulation implies that an individual has no higher authority in existence to define sexuality other than one's self. The current concept is now accepted as natural. Consequently, the scriptural verse in the Holy Bible which states that God created only two distinct intellectual creatures, the male and the female, is not applicable. Thus, it is totally rejected.

The definition of the human person regarding one's gender is not new. It began in different ways in ancient cultures of the past. We see from recorded history that there was a time when eunuchs existed in large numbers and for different reasons. However, their bodies were disfigured with the removal of their male organs in order to live without sexual desires.

This reality does not necessarily go against current human behavior. For we can say that from the early 1970's to the present, the concept that a woman's body is her very own to do what she wishes with it, is acceptable to many people. This concept has been accepted initially with the legalization of abortion for over thirty years. Consequently, the recent law recognizing the normalcy of transgender identities strengthens the belief that we do not belong to anyone, but only to ourselves.

Today, we are also seeing an increasing number of body piercing and tattooing only for personal desire among younger persons, even though family members may not be in agreement. We also know from some earlier cultures that there was skin piercing and tattooing either by desire or by force. We can also add to this concept that the legalization of same sex marriage and also doctor assisted suicide is a right of the individual.

With these realities, the concept that we belong to ourselves is in total contradiction to the teaching of the Holy Bible. This means that any transgender person cannot be in agreement with any part of Judaeo-Christian teachings which are based on Holy Scripture.

When a person disfigures one's face or parts of the body with excessive tattoos and radically changes one's appearance especially with the piercing of the face, the mouth and the tongue with foreign objects, such a person can never be identified as an icon of Christ as Holy Scripture reminds us.

From the Holy Bible we read that we are icons of Christ, although distorted in one way or another. An icon, as we know, is a reflection of the prototype, the prototype being

the Lord Jesus Christ. It should be known that the Septuagint Old Testament, which was translated from the original Hebrew language to the then international Greek language at least two hundred years before the Christian era began, was translated in Alexandria, Egypt by seventy-two Jewish theologians and is the same Holy Scriptures used today in the Greek Orthodox Church.

On the basis of this, if Orthodox Christians wish to remain faithful to their religious and ecclesiological history, as taught by the church, they must be faithful to the church teachings identifying themselves as icons of Christ. The Church must educate and discourage church members who deliberately distort their appearances, believing that they have every right to create their own identity.

The Church has always taught that for one to find one's true identity, such a person must try to emulate Christ the Lord through a life of prayer with love for God. Saint Paul is a perfect example of someone finding his true identity. Once he changed his lifestyle and sought the peace and love of God in his heart, he confidently and truthfully wrote, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

It must be agreed by all reasonable people that the radical changes which have been taking place concerning human behavior in our society is the fact that there is an absence of filial love and an increasing presence of the spirit of disagreement and anger among many people, even to the extremity of hatred. This is in total contradiction of the Judaeo-Christian teachings which confess that the perfect creation which God first established, as recorded in the book of Genesis, has been distorted. In its place one sees only dissensions, divisions, and disorder throughout human nature.

If people believe that they do not belong to a higher authority, but belong to themselves, then it can be said that the Lord Jesus Christ would not have bothered to come into the world to save humanity. From the teachings of Orthodox Christianity, He came because humans are His icons, although distorted. He came to bring perfection to humanity. On the feastday of the Samaritan Woman, which falls on a Sunday after the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, one reads in one of the prayers that Christ Who shares the throne with the Father and the Holy Spirit came into the world seeking His icon (humanity) to have it eternally celebrating, having been restored.

Consequently, on the basis of one being reasonable and intellectually accepting that each person is an icon of Christ, striving for perfection through free will, spiritual development, increased prayer and a moral way of life, one can find one's true identity through the words of the Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (6:19,20) when he writes that, "you are not your own – therefore – glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."

+Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver

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