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The Spectre of Homosexuality is Haunting Macedonia

A spectre is haunting Macedonia - the spectre of homosexuality. All the powers of conservative Macedonia have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, the ethno-nationalist's political parties, even the former President of the Republic of Macedonia. In the following contribution, I will illustrate how these political "ghost-busters" were supported by a few public opinion-makers who offered "irrefutable arguments" against homosexuality, against human rights of non-heterosexuals, and even against the very concept of human rights.

The opening of a public debate on homosexuality and the human rights of non-heterosexuals was provoked by the publication "The Boundaries of Freedom and Choice: Homosexuality in the Republic of Macedonia."¹ The publication featured the results of a survey regarding the perception of homosexuality in the Republic of Macedonia.² The analysis of the beliefs and opinions of the surveyed individuals revealed shocking results: only 25.40 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement "I consider homosexuality a normal thing," 64.1 percent of the surveyed believe that "Homosexuality is a disease or psychological disorder," whereas only 51.7 percent

disagree with the belief that “Homosexuality should be punishable by law.” Although homosexual acts were decriminalized in 1996, 34.2 percent agree that homosexuality should be penalized, whereas 17.3 fully agree with this statement.³

The results of the publication triggered a more open public discussion on sex and sexual orientation.⁴ These results were also used in the public campaign of the Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR) promoting the slogan “Face the differences!” Soon thereafter other organizations were formed, other surveys were carried out, and other initiatives took place. Several years later, it can be stated with much certainty that the Republic of Macedonia is no longer one of the few countries in the world lacking an intensive debate on sexual equality, regulation of sexuality and the future of the family.⁵ Such debates were opened in the printed and electronic media, and several public figures and representatives of political parties participated in them.

This text examines part of the arguments that appeared as a reaction of the attempt to raise public awareness regarding the problems faced by homosexuals.⁶ The arguments are presented through three points of view: a) the traditional, theological-nationalistic point of view of a philosophy professor; b) the church-oriented, theological point of view expressed by a respectable Bishop (member of the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church); c) the philosophic (“essentialist”) position of a respectable university professor of philosophy.⁷

Denying Homosexuality in the Republic of Macedonia

One of the first intellectual attempts to publicly argue against the initiatives for homosexual rights and homosexuality in general, appeared in the journal "Forum," in the text with the controversial title "Who here, is in fact, a homosexual?"⁸ In the very title the author anticipates one of the key arguments against the analyses published in "The Boundaries of Freedom and Choice: Homosexuality in the Republic of Macedonia" and against the public campaign of the Center for Civil and Human Rights:

"CCHR always operates with fictive numbers, stating that in Macedonia there are many homosexuals, whereas only three registered because the rest are afraid of social bigotry. In general it is unprofessional to 'terrorize with assumptions.'"

The author makes use of the fact that at that time in the Republic of Macedonia there were no public figures who openly declared their homosexual orientation. One of the basic assumptions of the text "Who here, is in fact, a homosexual?" is that homosexuality is something common for another civilization, and the Macedonians are *forced* to accept it:

"The Macedonians are far away from this. It is thus pointless for them to culturally destroy themselves by force, making themselves accept everything in an inferior way from a different culture."

Obviously, the author of the text has a problem with accepting the fact that some Macedonians are homosexuals. For him, the *holy* idea of "being Macedonian" makes

it impossible to relate to the *sin* of “homosexuality.” The text suggests many times that homosexuality is something foreign for the Macedonian people.⁹ What is foreign is seen as a threat which will, by force, culturally destroy the Macedonians, who are put in the position to accept all that comes from Europe in an inferior and uncritical way:

“The question is posed: whether we, as a people-subject (and not object), can remain outside the system; must we uncritically accept all of Europe’s trash?”

Meanwhile, homosexuality is not only alluded to as “Europe’s trash”, but also as a threat that may lead to the downfall of the Macedonians as people. Interestingly, and not in the least symptomatically, the choice for the “representative sample” of the typical Macedonian fell on the great-grandfather of the author, who “... for the first time faced the idea of homosexuality and sodomy when a friend of his came back from Paris and told him that over there such a thing was ‘in.’” Until then, if we trust the author’s great-grandfather, “He could never have imagined that man could fall so low.” In such a context, the idea of homosexuality is seen as the lowest moral fall of man.¹⁰ In the meantime, the readers are put in the position of having to accept that what was once the belief of the author’s great-grandfather is supposed to represent the belief of all Macedonians in the present day.

It is clear that, on the one hand, the analyses of the results from the survey carried out on a representative sample (2002) have been cancelled out as unserious “terrorizing with assumptions.”¹¹ On the other hand, “terrorizing with assumptions” is out of the question when a general statement regarding all Macedonians is based on the statement of the author’s great-grandfather, who neither

lived in the present time, nor in the existing boundaries of the Republic of Macedonia.

Homosexuality as a Danger to “the Existence of the Macedonians”

Through a curious mix of nationalistic and theological arguments, the author of the text “Who here, is in fact, a homosexual?” warns his readers of the approaching danger from Europe. At the same time, nationalistic sentiments are used to reduce sexuality to “missed eros” or “trampled eros,” to a “decadent phenomenon,” to “illness of the soul.”¹² Even if one accepts the fact that every people has a right to its own discourse, the author does not state why it is precisely him that has the right to speak in the name of the people and to create its discourse (the people seen exclusively as an *ethnos*). The totalitarian arguments that Jews (and also Roma, Slavs and homosexuals) are a danger to “the existence of the Germans,” that the capitalist “bourgeoisie” is the greatest danger to the existence of the proletariat (socialist) nations – could these arguments have been forgotten so soon?

The sentimental anti-individualism¹³ of the author feeds upon the Nazi-arguments that homosexuality is “a biological cul-de-sac,”¹⁴ and that “anti-vitalism is the wrong point of view for a nation full of life’s fluids.” Unfortunately, the author possesses neither the spiritual nor the intellectual potential of grasping the narrow-mindedness of his own nationalistic arguments. Hence, by following the logic of the author, if homosexuality is “a biological

cul-de-sac,” this is also true for monasticism. Does this mean that monasticism, bearing in mind that it does not create life, is a danger to “the existence of the Macedonians?”

If it is possible to argue, just like the author, that the “weakened genetic structure of the population”¹⁵ in Sweden “is due to the advance of homosexuality,” isn’t it possible to argue that the advance of monasticism in Macedonia can weaken the “genetic structure of the population?” Why, for example, does the author not issue a warning against the dangers of philosophy and theology – bearing in mind how many philosophers and theologians chose not to leave descendants?

Cultural Devaluation of Homosexuality

The text “Who here, is in fact, a homosexual” abounds with a multitude of anthological examples of the cultural devaluation of homosexuality. As witnessed in the following selected examples, the employed “arguments” speak more of the contempt the author feels rather than of the phenomenon of homosexuality.

1. Homosexuality as a psychological illness

Although the text refers to homosexuality as a form of “alternative’ (or even perverted) sexuality,” it is usually alluded to as a stage of “psychopathological disorder” or as “mental disorder and type of mental illness.” The following counter-argument is an anthological example of argumentative abuse, as well as the abuse of medical facts:

“Stressing the phenomenon that homosexuals and lesbians in the world are well-situated and organized groups which function extremely well in their workplace is not proof of their psychological health, because even exceptionally jealous people work extremely well in their field, and yet psychiatry speaks of jealousy as a mental disorder and type of mental illness.”

If this counter-argument is paraphrased, it is easy to notice that it represents a frantic mental attempt to suggest a representation of homosexuality not only as a mental disorder, but also as a type of mental illness:

Just as it is impossible to say that jealous people are psychologically sane (psychiatry states that they are mentally ill), even though they perform well at their workplace, it is impossible to say that homosexuals and lesbians are sane, although they, too, perform well at their workplace.

In the meantime, not just the argumentative principles of the text suffer “collateral damage,” but also psychiatry. The explicit intent of the author is to point to manipulation, but implicitly he himself manipulates by using a false premise (“psychiatry speaks of jealousy as a mental disorder or type of mental illness”)!

In fact, jealousy is not on the list of mental disorders,¹⁶ just like homosexuality has not been for a while. But even if we accept hypothetically that jealousy and homosexuality are “a type of mental illness,” it is still unclear why the author did not write a text named “Who here, is in fact, jealous?” in which jealousy will be devalued as a danger to the “existence of the Macedonians?”

2. Homosexuality as a result of "erectile dysfunction"

At times you may come to a dilemma of whether to continue to read the text seriously, or simply because it becomes unexpectedly amusing:

“Today, with many men, homosexuality goes hand in hand with the phenomenon of erectile dysfunction. Statistics show that this is a frequent occurrence.”

Bearing in mind that the author does not state the source of this original statistic data (surely not from the State Statistical Office), the doubt remains whether again this information comes from the author's great-grandfather (or from his great-grandmother, aunt, or sister-in-law). In any case, try to picture how the author imagines homosexual relations in the absence of an erection. Or is it that he cannot even imagine such a thing?!

3. Anal sex as abuse of the body

The following argument against the “autonomy over one's body”¹⁷ is just as anthological (and symptomatic) as the previous ones:

“Our body is, in fact, far from being our property, since by definition we do not create it ourselves, rather it is given to us by God – or nature, if someone happens to mind theism. Do we really have the right to abuse our thus created body? (The absurdity and unnaturalness of anal sex!?)”

The core of the argument is that we do not have the right to abuse our own body, which is not our property, because it has been given to us by God (or Nature). At the

same time, in parentheses, anal sex (in all its “absurdity” and “unnaturalness”) is presented as a form of abuse of the body, which on the one hand is our – “own,” and on the other hand “is not our property!”

Therefore, the author does not have a cognitive problem in the presentation of the picture of homosexual relations.¹⁸ However, it is obvious that he definitely has a problem with the concept “abuse of the body.” It remains unclear what he means with “abuse of the body,” bearing in mind that during voluntary sexual relations the partners do not feel pain, rather pleasure that might lead to an orgasm? Perhaps, if the body is truly only God’s possession, God suffers “abuse over the body” during anal sex. When homosexuals have sex God experiences pain, and when heterosexuals have sex, God rejoices?!

Also the author does not touch upon the following questions that emerge logically: How is it that heterosexuals do not abuse the body, but homosexuals do? Is anal sex between homosexuals abuse of the body just as it is between heterosexuals? Is only anal sex abuse of the body, or is oral sex, too?

4. Homosexuality as an indication of a decadent civilization

The cultural devaluation of homosexuality continues with the construction of grandiose transhistorical arguments based on the “general law of historical repetitive cycles.” Thus, according to the author’s knowledge, “homosexuality.”

“[...] always appeared as an indication of the decadence of a separate civilization, as a result of the deterioration of the

ethical systems, as a sign that, in a vitalistic way, civilization – which at first was strong enough to dominate the world – has elapsed and has started to rot and decompose from within (for instance, the old Greek, Roman and even Turkish civilizations), as some kind of general law of historical repetitive cycles.”

Thus, we first have to agree that “homosexuality”¹⁹ by rule always appeared as an indication of the decadence of a dominant civilization (the statistics of reference remain unclear). If we accept this (hypothetically, of course), as well as the fact that nowadays homosexuality is an integral part of the “ethical system” of contemporary “European” civilization,² then we would have to agree that contemporary Europe “has started to rot and decompose from within,” as that had previously happened to “the old Greek,² Roman, and even Turkish civilizations.”

In short, accepting homosexuality is presented as the beginning of the decline of civilization. Surely, homosexuality brings the flood, and only those who will condemn and reject homosexuality will find salvation in “the holy kingdom.”²²

Haven’t we heard enough of similar transhistorical “arguments” in a time not so long ago, when based on the laws of “materialist dialectics,” the inevitable fall of capitalism and emerging of capitalism was foreseen?

5. Lesbianism as perversion inevitably related to feminism

The truth behind the saying that “paper bears everything” can be seen in the page of “Forum” presenting the thesis that lesbianism, as “female homosexuality” and “the decadence of eros into perverted sex,” is “an interesting phenomenon, because it is inevitably related to feminism (the more intelligent and feminine feminists are by chance bisexuals)?!” In short, all lesbians are feminists, and merely some feminists are, by chance, bisexuals?

Here, too, some questions emerge: According to which statistical sources are there no heterosexual feminists – from sources related to the author’s great-grandfather? According to which criteria and statistical sources some feminists (bisexuals) are “more intelligent and feminine” than other feminists (lesbians) – according to the criteria and sources related to the author’s great-grandmother? Or, perhaps, the Faculty of Philosophy²³ has special criteria (and statistical methods) for recognizing (and registering) “decadent” and “perverted” feminists, and distinguishing between bisexuals and lesbians? How is feminist philosophy at the Faculty of Philology named – “decadent” and “perverted” philosophy of unintelligent and un-feminine lesbians (and, by chance, “more intelligent and feminine” bisexuals)? Then what is the case with male feminists – or is such a thing inconceivable?

The author of the text attempts to enlighten us in terms of the reasons for the emergence of feminism. According to the junior assistant of Contemporary Philosophy, feminism occurs because “... masculinity, as a principle

– is unbalanced and cannot find a way to touch the other sex, and only frustrates it with its spiritual impotence.” In the manner characteristic of his colleagues from the former Department of Marxist Philosophy, he claims that “alienation among people is the reason for the decadence of Eros into perverted sex, and not vice versa; homosexuality as an orientation creates alienation between heterosexuals and homosexuals.”²⁴

In this case, such public attempts to culturally devalue homosexuality and women would be unworthy of our attention were they not expressed from a position of a person who has a license to educate students in the history of philosophy at state University of Skopje. What would the students of philosophy have to conclude after reading their pedagogue’s opinion on the appearance of “the decadence of Eros into perverted sex” in lesbian/feminists due to their frustration from “the crisis of masculinity?” What kind of notion would they acquire of women, men and non-heterosexuals when facing his views that “Nietzsche would ridicule the philosophy of eunuchs (men who do not know how to play with women) which claims that ‘everyone can pass?’”

Is it possible that the presentation of men who “do not know how to play with women” as “eunuchs,” of women as “toys,” of feminists as unintelligent and un-feminine lesbians (by chance bisexuals), of homosexuality as “perverted sex” can pass so easily not just in the public, but also at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje?

Finally, how is Plato’s *Symposium* analyzed at the Department of Philosophy, including the idea that it is not

important *who* you love, but *how* you love? Do Socrates and his friends deserve to be presented as people who “roamed with their sex,” as “people who do not perceive the difference between eros and sex, and who missed love?”²⁵

On Respecting Differences and the Right to be Different

The first campaign promoting sexual differences stirred up violent reactions in the wider public. The billboards carrying the message “Face the differences!” infuriated not just part of the media but also some politicians.

At the same time, the negative reactions of some media drew support from the argument that the campaign does not promote the rights of non-heterosexuals, rather it promotes non-heterosexual lifestyles – above all, promoting homosexuality as a lifestyle. Unfortunately, the argument “We have nothing against the rights of homosexuals, but we do have something against the promotion of homosexuality as a lifestyle” was not deconstructed neither by the organizers nor by the critical thinkers who shape public opinion. No particular effort had been put into promoting the right to follow a different lifestyle. Nor was the right to be different supported as an essential aspect of the right to privacy (which incorporates sexual privacy and freedom of expressing the individual’s sexual identity).

The negative reactions of some politicians were quite indicative. At first, the statement of the president at the time, Boris Trajkovski (a Christian minister himself)

caused a true uproar. In this statement he expressed shock at learning that the campaign was supported by the US Embassy:

“U.S. taxpayer funds should not be used to promote alternative lifestyles in my country, and I do not believe that most Americans would appreciate this. We have many more pressing issues that the money could be used for. This is deeply offensive to most people in Macedonia which represents a very conservative mix of the Orthodox Christian and Muslim faiths.”²⁶

Apart from the argument that promoting alternative lifestyles was an insult for the “conservative”²⁷ majority, the “political” argument was used that promoting sexual difference is not a prioritized issue. Representatives from oppositional parties also supported such arguments.²⁸ A similar argument, but in a much more radical form was used to discredit the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republic of Macedonia in order to label the support of the human rights of homosexuals as “terrorization.”²⁹

Nevertheless, the most radical arguments against the Center for Civil and Human Rights emerged a year later, in the text bombastically titled “I Do Not Accept Differences, But Personalities” (bearing a pretentious subtitle “The Great False Dilemma”).³⁰ We shall address particular attention to this text, not only because its author is a respectable Bishop (and member of the Holy Archpriest’s Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church), but also because it is an interesting variation of one of the classic arguments culturally devaluing homosexuality.

Of False Dilemmas

As presented in the analysis of the text published in “Forum,” the debate regarding the human rights of homosexuals began with the opposition of “theological” arguments. This fashion continued with two television debates on A1 television. On the one hand, the debates were used to promote the results from the new survey carried out by MASSO and the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. The survey showed that in the Republic of Macedonia there is a significant number of people who have sexual relations with people from the same sex.³¹ On the other hand, we witnessed the first public “coming out” of a person who was prepared to openly discuss his homosexual orientation and advocate his human rights. During this public appearance, the arguments of MASSO’s president (derived from the concept of human rights) were opposed by setting forth theological counter-arguments and dubious quotes from the Bible explicitly referring to “homosexuality.”³²

The approach of Bishop Metodij in his columns continues the tradition of opposing the human rights of homosexuals by expressing classical theological counter-arguments. However, his approach is also a sort of theoretical and critical departure. His texts do not classically refer to particular orthodox-theological dogmas or quote parts from Holy Scripture. Bishop Metodij’s approach is not conceived as *dogmatic*, rather as *critical*. It involves a set of rhetorical steps aiming to unveil a great manipulation (“The Great False Dilemma”) and to put forward logically irrefutable arguments undermining the basic principles of the campaign “Face the differences!”

At first, with a Shakesporean pathos, the reader is drawn into the topic by the explanation that “questions of fate” are not posed by ourselves (“with Yorick’s skull and the finger on the temple”), but rather “today billboards cheat us into this” (“the exceptionally ugly commercial ads”). Then, with no lesser dramatic tone, the campaign “Face the differences!” – calling for tolerance and acceptance of differences – is deemed “an unprecedented provocation.” The author of the text attempts to sincerely reply to this provocation, at first putting forward his own dilemmas and “speculations”³³ regarding homosexuals, and later presenting his own well-developed opinion.

Calmly and steadily, Bishop Metodij attempts to create his own coherent viewpoint as opposed to “the great false dilemma.” “The great false dilemma,” according to the author, feeds upon the intuition which indicates only two possible positions: the position of “extreme liberals” (supporting “hypocritical tolerance of differences”) and the position of “rigid homophobes” (supporting “a solution of the problem on the streets and by means of lynching,” “by exterminating the disgusting little faggots and dykes!”).

Bishop Metodij attempts to construct a third position which is neither “hypocritically liberal”, nor “rigidly” homophobic. In fact, he builds his own personal position on the dogmas of “Christian asceticism.” His initial hypothesis is that one’s own eros is something that should be transformed, and this is something we are all called upon to do.³⁴ Then, he states that some things are “a gift,

and not an option” (these are not an option: “our specific features as a sex, our sexual orientaion, the bodily aspect of love”). In the end, his own premises exhibit the attempt to degrade difference: To be different is to be unlike one’s own nature! Sin is what makes us different!³⁵

Bishop Metodij’s argument, at least at first glance, is not aimed at homosexuality in general, rather at the presentation of homosexuality as a choice, as an option. After the opening suggestive question “Is our choice of essential meaning, or is something else in question?,” he points out the upcoming dangers of accepting that “our specific features as a sex, our sexual orientaion, the bodily aspect of love” are an option, and not a gift (“a great holiness”). Namely, if we accept that our sexual orientation is an option, then, Bishop Metodij warns, “there is no phenomenon that cannot be justified”:

“If we enlighten the little children about the choice of being homosexuals or heterosexuals, why should we not be able to offer them the possiblilty of orienting themselves to people much older than them, for example? Should we accept differences and legalize pedophilia? If children can choose, although inexperienced, why, in turn should we not let addults choose as well?”

After indicating the first great danger for little children – pedophilia, the argument continues with the indication of several other dangers, several other phenomena “that cannot be justified”:

“Or should we point out to them, that with a certain risk to the genetic structure of their descendants, they may choose someone from their next of kin. Something beginning with the letter ‘i’.”

After warning of the danger “beginning with the letter ‘i’” – incest, Bishop Metodij’s argument against homosexuality as a choice draws moral energy from what is to him the obvious unacceptability of other possible sexual differences:

“Our tolerance and fantasy can go as far as to offer or accept someone to realize their orientation towards different types of brutes and wild creatures as well as towards other examples of livestock. What sorts of variations and permutations there are just in the realms of sexuality.”

The quote is an unusual example of the use of rhetorical figures in argumentative purposes. However, the author of the text “I Do Not Accept Differences, But Personalities” does not stop here, rather he continues to name other dangers and threats “little children” will face if by accepting difference we accept sexual orientation as a choice:

“We have not even mentioned transvestism and transsexuality. However, things do not stop here. Imagine all we could offer, tolerate and make legal in regard to political consciousness (fascism, racism, defeatism, nihilism, machiavellism...), to cultural schemes (canibalism, fetishism, sadism), to social and intellectual disintegrations. Let us accept differences! Sarcasm here is simply inevitable.”

The argument closes sarcastically, by defying what Bishop Metodij feels as a morally “indecent proposal” – “Let us accept differences!”³⁶ The structure of the argument

can be seen as a veil in which two threads intertwine: *the rational* (do we have criteria for determining differences?)³⁷ and *the irrational* (activating fears by using the rhetorical effect of “opening Pandora’s box”). As the argument progresses, we can see more clearly that the rational thread has a function of nourishing the irrational – activating the reader’s fears of what danger awaits the innocent “little children.” Steadily and with rhetorical skill, Bishop Metodij faces the reader with the “curse of choice” regarding what is morally acceptable and what is not.

Namely, if the readers accept that sexual orientation (as well as sex and “the bodily aspect of love”) is a choice, then *they themselves* open “Pandora’s box.” If they accept homosexuality as a choice, they must accept pedophilia, incest, zoophilia, transvestism, transsexuality as possible choices. If they accept to expose the innocent little children to the opinion that homosexuality is a choice, then they expose them to the danger of many other “-isms” lurking in Pandora’s box: fascism, racism, defeatism, nihilism, machiavellism, cannibalism, fetishism, sadism...

Bishop Metodij perceived sharply that the campaign “Face the differences!” does not offer an ethical criterion setting the limits in the great variety of differences. Based on this, and based on his own belief that sexual orientation is a personal issue,³⁸ he promotes his own slogan instead of a conclusion: “I do not accept differences. I accept personalities!”

Inconsistency of Approach

The inconsistency of approach is obvious: Bishop Metodij does the same thing for which he criticises his opponents. For instance, on the one hand he points out that it is absurd “to reduce the question of homosexuality to whether we accept something or not.” On the other hand, his conclusion “I do not accept differences” can be interpreted as an answer to such a question. Namely, if difference originates from sin, and homosexuality is difference, not accepting difference implies not accepting homosexuality!

Also, one of his chief objections is that the message “Face the differences!” does not set moral limits among differences. However, instead of offering an ethical criterion setting the limit in the great realm of differences, Bishop Metodij casts everyone away with the slogan “I do not accept differences!” For him, every difference originates from sin and as such is morally unacceptable.

Then what is acceptable for Bishop Metodij? In fact, what does he really accept when he says he accepts “personalities?” Does he give homosexuals the opportunity to be “personalities?” For him, homosexuality is a sin making us different – unlike our nature! Homosexuality is difference, and Bishop Metodij does not accept differences just like he does not accept sins. This possible interpretation implies not only that he does not accept homosexuality as a choice, but homosexuality in general!

Another possible interpretation is that his slogan “I accept personalities,” still, at least in its origin contains a moral criterion which suggests the accepting of people with different sexual orientations. Namely, if “personalities” are those who decide to transform their own eros (according to the principles of Christian asceticism), those who accept that their sexual orientation is not an option (but rather, a “gift”), and those who will not “wave it around” (“like a flag”), then sexual orientation would not be important in judging whether someone is a “person” or not!

According to this more favorable interpretation, Bishop Metodij would accept as “personalities” even those who decided to transform their homosexual eros by taking monastic vows. Namely, if someone chooses an asexual ascetic life in order to transform their own eros (regardless of whether it is homosexual or heterosexual), then they will be rewarded as “personalities” by the Church. More precisely, by those “personalities” of the Church who have the criteria, authority and power to decide what “our nature” means, what is like and what unlike our nature, what is sin and what is not, and finally, which people are, and which are not “personalities.”

However, Bishop Metodij’s position faces us with another paradoxical consequence. If only those accepting and living by the principles of Christian asceticism can be accepted as “personalities,” then it turns out that Bishop Metodij also does not accept the majority of heterosexuals who try to express their own sexual eros in many different ways.

Rhetorical Manipulation and Category Mistakes

“Some bad arguments never die!”³⁹ – was Corvino’s witty remark in pointing out that accepting homosexuality leads to accepting polygamy, bestiality and incest. The appeal of such “arguments” lies in the fact that they do not prove anything, rather attempt to shift the burden of proof on the opposite side. Thus, we are put in the position to prove why polygamy, bestiality and incest would be unacceptable. Similarly, Bishop Metodij attempts to shift the burden of proof: if homosexuality (as a choice) is morally acceptable, then why aren’t pedophilia, incest, zoophilia, transvestism, transsexualism and a whole lot of other scary “-isms?” Now it is our turn to prove a whole lot of things.

Bishop Metodij’s argument is a variation of a classic rhetorical manipulation: If A (accepting homosexuality as a choice) can occur, then B (accepting pedophilia, incest, zoophilia... as a choice) will inevitably occur, as well. At first, a “slippery slope” is skillfully created, and combined with the “straw man”: B is wrong, thus A is wrong too! Such manipulation is favored among the opposers of any type of social change. They see every initiative for changing the *status quo* of a situation as an endeavour to open Pandora’s box. Such “arguments” offer no excuse as to why homosexuality should be logically linked to pedophilia, incest, zoophilia... Without establishing such logical links, these seeming “arguments” amount to mere rhetorical manipulation.

In addition, Bishop Metodij's rhetorical manipulation is not immune to category mistakes – putting categories of one logical type in the same basket with categories of another logical type. Homosexuality (together with heterosexuality and bisexuality) is a category of the *sexual orientation* logical type. Pedophilia, incest and zoophilia are categories of another logical type - *paraphilia*. Fascism, racism, defeatism, nihilism, machiavellism, cannibalism, fetishism, sadism... - all end in “-ism,” however they belong to categories of different logical types. Putting sexual orientation in the same basket with *paraphilia*, and in the same basket with a whole lot of different “-isms” without establishing any kind of logical link among them whatsoever is an extremely transparent rhetorical manipulation.

Bishop Metodij's “argument” is a modern version of the ancient “arguments” that sodomy is the most detestable act of crime over the body, prophesying plagues, hunger, cholera and earthquakes.⁴⁰ Sodomy was severely prosecuted as a sin and as a crime against nature,⁴¹ and this term marked every unconventional sexual behavior: not just anal sex, but also oral sex, masturbation, and in some cases even the heterosexual relations between a Jewish man and a Christian woman. The claim that accepting homosexuality as a choice leads to the accepting of fascism, racism, defeatism, nihilism, machavelism, cannibalism, etc., is just as logically sound as claiming that masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, etc., prophesy plagues, hunger, cholera and earthquakes.

(Ab)using Incest against “Abnormal” Homosexuality!

Some rhetorical manipulations indeed never die: if we accept homosexual marriages, why cannot we accept incest, too? What is the logical reason for ruling out incest between two adults? The fervent opponents of homosexual marriages in the USA presented the following “counter-argument”: if two men can wed, then “a man and a woman - consensual, 25 years old, who are brother and sister - should not be discriminated against because they have a genetic relationship.”⁴²

The variations on the theme incest vs. homosexuality became increasingly popular in our regions, as well. Such a hypothetical variation was presented by the university professor Ferid Muhic during the promotion of the Kenneth J. Dover’s book “Greek Homosexuality.” The hypothetical ponderings of the professor meanwhile developed into crucial “counter-arguments”, supported with a belligerent, boxer jargon in his column published in “Montenegrin Monitor”:

“Let us presume that all three pre-requirements have been met: the partners are adults and want to engage in a relationship by free will; in addition to this they also love each other. I suggest we presume the existence of another trivial matter (in two variations), that these are: a) father and daughter; b) mother and son; c) sister and brother; d) father and son; e) mother and daughter, f) brother and brother; g) sister and sister!”⁴³

The philosophy professor intends to establish a very simple and rhetorically convincing logical consequence. Namely, if homosexual relations are normal, then,

accordingly, incestuous relationships are also normal:

“Is there at least one upholder of the thesis regarding homosexuality as a completely legitimate, normal relationship, in no way differing from the heterosexual, who will agree to draw a conclusion on the normality of such relationships on the basis of their own premises?!”

This is followed by the philosophy professor’s classic manoeuvre – a game of tennis in which instead of a ball, the burden of proof is ironically tossed over the net: If there is anyone who agrees that incestuous relationships are normal “[...] it will be fun to see how they try to promote their own incestuousness as a normal relationship.” If, on the other hand, there is no upholder of the thesis that incestuous relationships are something normal, “where is the difference upon which they base their refusal to associate these relationships with their support of the normality of homosexuality?”

Thus, this is a small rhetorical manoeuvre attempting to prove that those who consider homosexual relationships as something not normal have nothing to prove, unlike those who believe that these relationships are just as normal as heterosexual ones. The latter have to prove that incestuous relationships are normal, or explain why they refuse to accept incestuous relationships when they, too, meet the restricting requirements set by themselves: adult partners, free decision, mutual love.

As pointed out by Corvino, such “arguments” are neither new nor unfamiliar. Incest is also used as a “straw man” in rhetorical manoeuvres against accepting inter-racial marriages. Incest is used as a “straw man” against the

legalization of prostitution. Incest was used as a “straw man” in a controversial interview of an American Senator.⁴⁴ The striking outcome of such “arguments” is based on the either-or effect in setting the false dilemma: *either* unlimited sexual freedom for all (including incest, pedophilia, zoophilia, bigamy, polygamy, adultery...), *or* rejecting homosexuality! The moral unacceptability of limitless sexual freedom by the majority should automatically imply moral rejection of homosexuality.

Such “arguments” employ the systematic weakness of those who attempt to make homosexual relationships legitimate by ticking off the key restrictive conditions applied to heterosexual relationships. Pointing out the prohibition of incest indicates that the listed restrictive conditions (adult partners, free decision and mutual love) are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for making homosexual relationships legitimate.⁴⁵

However, if the reference to incest bears any argumentative weight in challenging homosexuality, it should bear the same argumentative weight in challenging heterosexuality. The first three out of the seven variations listed by professor Muhic (a) father and daughter; b) mother and son; c) sister and brother) are in fact prohibited sorts of heterosexual relationships! It seems that the professor is cognitively blind to the principles of equality and consistency: if incest is used as an argument against homosexual relationships, it stands in an equally strong position in opposing heterosexual relationships.⁴⁶ If the incest taboo applies to heterosexuals, why can't it equally

apply to homosexuals? Or is it that professor Muhic has obtained some data (perhaps from the great-grandfather of his assistant) that homosexual incest is far more common than heterosexual incest?⁴⁷

Whatever the case, the “argument” of professor Muhic proves more than initially conceived. If we paraphrase his favorite philosopher Hegel, he throws out the baby (heterosexuality) with the bathwater (homosexuality)!

The Rhetoric of Disgust

Nevertheless, the ending conclusion of professor Muhic’s text provides grounds for a different understanding. His exploitation of the rhetoric of the mythical horror of the incest taboo can be seen more as an attempt to legitimize the personal feeling of disgust at the very thought of same-sex relations, rather than an attempt to critically delegitimize homosexuality:

“Do what you will, but do not challenge the authenticity of the feelings of all those men and women who find the very thought of sexual relations with people of the same sex disgusting!”

The fear that someone is trying to challenge the authenticity of professor Muhic’s feelings is of undoubtedly irrational. Who, in fact, is trying to challenge the feeling of disgust in all those men and women when they think of sexual relations with people of the same sex? The cultural devaluing of homosexuality is typically accompanied by the expression of those very types of feel-

ings. What is particularly interesting is how the professor attempts to legitimize the feeling of disgust as if it is a rationally based feeling. In this case, the convincing rhetoric of disgust feeds upon an implicit argument by analogy: the justification of our own feeling of disgust at the very thought of incest is analogous to the justification of our feeling of disgust at the thought of same-sex intercourse!

Unfortunately, the persuasiveness of such judgement seems immune to the remarks that the arguments based on analogy do not always deliver logical certainty. Otherwise, the arguments that the taboo against homosexuality functions similarly to the taboo against incest and that it has just as useful a social function as the incest taboo would not be so popular.⁴⁸

Incest is not only mentioned in the arguments based on analogy, but also, as previously presented, in the rhetoric which exploits the metaphor of the “slippery slope.” Some analysts cleverly noted that incest frequently takes up a privileged position in such arguments not because the arguments of “the slippery slope to incest” are logically convincing, but because of “the enormous power of incest to elicit disgust.”⁴⁹ In fact, those who insist to associate same-sex relations with incest use it as “a potent symbol of disgust” in order to elicit negative emotions in the reader towards a certain contaminant which is to be incorporated or assimilated (in this case, homosexuality).⁵⁰

We have here at our disposal various strategies of weakening the persuasiveness of rhetorical manoeuvres which exploit incest as a mechanism for eliciting disgust. We

already tested some strategies of formally unveiling the “logical certainty” these arguments claim. It is also useful to point out historical examples where incest already failed in argumentation - for instance, in the arguments that the state has the right to forbid marriages between people of different races.⁵¹ After decriminalizing marriage between people of different races, the flood did not destroy the state of Missouri even though it had been announced by the supporters of the “slippery slope” rhetoric. They too, without doubt, experienced authentic feelings of disgust at the very thought of marriage between a “white” woman and a “black” man.

Another possible strategy is exposing the arguments where disgust functions as a reason for illegality, as done by Martha Nussbaum regarding the arguments for criminalizing “obscenity” and homosexual relationships between adults.⁵² Also, the rhetorical use of “authentic feelings of disgust” in argumentative purposes can be challenged. Undoubtedly it is easy to evoke many historical examples of authentic feelings of disgust at the very thought of “sodomy.” Have these unquestionably authentic feelings of disgust at the very thought of masturbation and oral sex (as forms of “sodomy”) triggered professor Muhic to morally condemn masturbation and oral sex today, or even call for their re-criminalization?

In addition, those who insist on associating homosexuality with “disgusting” incest often ignore a very important difference. The acts of incest are a criminal offence, whereas homosexual acts in most parts of the world have been decriminalized. The results of the com-

parative analysis on different legal regulations of incest sufficiently illustrate the fact that we have an ambiguous concept of “disgusting” incest. For instance, are non-genital penetration and oral sex under the definition of “incest?”⁵³ Also, would the ban over incest apply only to blood relations or also to members of the family that are not related by blood?⁵⁴

The “arguments” that “disgusting” incest will sneak out of Pandora’s box if we do not tolerate the equally “disgusting” homosexuality, assume that incest is an unproblematic concept with clearly set boundaries. However, incest is not only problematic as a legal category, but also as a psychoanalytical concept. Truly, what is incest – is it a disavowed fantasy, or a performed act; is it a memory, event, or desire?⁵⁵ If Judith Butler doubts our perception of incest, she has no doubts over the incest taboo as an instrument of excluding homosexual love:

“For if the incest taboo is also what is supposed to install the subject in heterosexual normativity, and if, as some argue, this installation is the condition of possibility for a symbolically or culturally intelligible life, then homosexual love emerges as the unintelligible within the intelligible: a love that has no place in the name of love, a position within kinship that is no position.”⁵⁶

The possible conclusion that homosexual love is symbolically and culturally an unintelligible form of life is

a result of the dubious psychoanalytic premises that the incest taboo “installs the subject in heterosexual normativity” and that such installment is “a condition of possibility for a symbolically or culturally intelligible life.” It is precisely for this reason that Butler supports the reviewing and reconsidering of the role played by the prohibition of incest in the psychoanalysis. Hence, she reconsiders the ban over incest both as protection from abuse (exploitation of the love of the child) and as an instrument of abuse (excluding homosexual love from the heterosexual-normative sphere accepted as the matrix of intelligibility).

Butler’s strategy is radically subversive: in opposition to the tendentious “arguments” that the destruction of a taboo (homosexuality) leads to the destruction of other taboos (incest), she hopes that demystifying a psychoanalytical myth (about the formative role of the incest taboo) will enable the taboo of homosexual love to be lifted. Butler’s strategy is directed against the instrumentation of the incest taboo in providing support for the attempts for cultural devaluation of homosexual love. The demystification of incest (as a phenomenon whose mention is sufficient reason to elicit disgust in a large number of conservatives) is necessary for “transgressing the boundaries” of heterosexual normativity and creating a symbolical and cultural space for homosexual love as a legitimate and culturally intelligible form of respectable life.

Translated from Macedonian by Rumena Bužarovska

Notes:

1. *The Boundaries of Freedom and Choice: Homosexuality in the Republic of Macedonia* (Skopje: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia and Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, 2002).
 2. The survey was carried out with 1600 surveyed individuals (the smallest representative sample for the population of the Republic of Macedonia), representatives of the four largest ethnic communities in the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Roma), with an approximately equal number of men and women and equal distribution of the four adult groups (18-25, 26-37, 38-50 and over 50).
 3. According to the analysis “This is the opinion of 24.6% of the surveyed with higher education, as opposed to the 68% who have not completed their elementary education. The difference is large with members of different ethnic groups (12.30% Macedonians as opposed to 45% Albanians).”
 4. Even though only 48.1% of the participants did not agree that “Sex and sexual orientation should not be discussed [at all].”
 5. Cf. Anthony Giddens. *Runaway World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 70.
 6. Mainly, the problem of discrimination based on sexual orientation and the continuous threat of social exclusion in all realms of life. (According to the results of the survey, 46% of the surveyed believe that homosexuals in Macedonia are discriminated against.)
 7. What is common about the authors of the analyzed arguments in this text is that they are highly qualified educators directly involved in the education of the youth.
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8. Солунчев, Ристо, „Кој е овде, впрочем, хомосексуалец?“, *Форум* 146. (2004). (Risto Solunchev, “Who here, is in fact, a homosexual?,” *Forum* 146, 3 March, 2004.)
9. Even in folk tales where same-sex intercourse is mentioned, “it is certain that they are accepted by other nations.” (Paraphrase of Kiril Penushliski).
10. What keeps Macedonians from not falling so low, according to the author, is that “we are still conscious of the low fall of the human eros.”
11. According to these results, 44.3% of the surveyed (55.6 % in the age span 18-25) replied positively to the question “Have you ever met a homosexual?”
12. “The Macedonian today is at a crossroad, facing the danger of exiting the being and missing the eros... Anti-vitalism is a wrong aspect for a people full of the juices of life, a people that has only now begun to face prospects for exhibiting creativity. This people has the right to its own discourse which sees homosexuality and all other decadent phenomena as toppled eros and as illness of the soul [...]”
13. “[...] it is clear that the individual cannot be greater than its nation [...]”
14. “It is quite clear that homosexuality is a biological cul-de-sac, since two people from the same sex cannot create life – simply because nature does not play in that way.”
15. Have we forgotten so soon who employed such “genetic” arguments?
16. The author again fails to make a distinction between a symptom and a disorder, at moments between psychology and psychiatry, as well.

17. "The brochure parades with the phrase 'autonomy over one's own body' suggesting we should be allowed to do whatever we desire with it."
 18. Nevertheless, the question remains unanswered: what do the men who became homosexuals due to erectile dysfunction do in bed?
 19. Whatever that means. Clearly, this case does not suggest another philosophical "ism."
 20. Contemporary "European" civilization is based on the ethics of human rights and the prohibition of all types of discrimination – including the discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
 21. Surely, Alexander the Great's empire ("Greek" or not – it makes no difference here) began to fall apart when Alexander and his lover Hephaestion (following Achilles and Patroclus' example) set out on the historical expedition to conquer the yet unknown world.
 22. There was always room in the "Kingdom of Heaven" for all those who waged war in the name of the Christian God as well as for those who waged war in the name of the Islamic God.
 23. Where the author of this text was educated and currently educates students himself as an assistant professor in History of Philosophy.
 24. This is another opportunity to practice the Marxist theory of alienation so popular at the Department where the author teaches.
 25. Ристо Солунчев, „Тешкото, Хајдегер и Хегел (Харемот Македонија)“ *Форум* 152, 2 септември, 2004. [Risto Solunchev, "The Heavy One, Heidegger and Hegel (Haarem Macedonia), *Forum* 152, September 2, 2004]
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26. Kerri Houston, "Diplomatic Missteps: The State Department works for the American Left in Macedonia," January 6, 2004. <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/houston200401060853.asp>

27. Although the word "conservative" in everyday speech is primarily used pejoratively.

28. Daniel Doncev, "Face the difference!," *Utrinski Vesnik*, No. 1317, November 8, 2003. (Даниел Дончев, „Соочи се со различноста!“, *Утрински Весник*, бр. 1317, 8 ноември 2003.): "It is wrong for the US Embassy to sponsor billboards promoting a homosexual way of life, it is wrong to do this in a country cherishing more conservative values and it is wrong because there are an enormous number of other, more important economic and social problems."

29. "In Macedonia it is even normal that the Helsinki Committee can terrorize us with the rights of homosexuals, but at the same time act as if the problem of 40% unemployed without the rights of work and bread is not so essential" (Risto Soluncev, "The Heavy One, Heidegger and Hegel (Haarem Macedoni)," *Forum* 152, 2 September, 2004). Of course, the author of this argument does not explain why he himself decided to write a lengthy text in which he will "terrorize" us with not so essential problems, instead of writing an "essential text" about solving the problem of the 40% unemployed.

30. Владика Методиј Златанов, „Не прифаќам различности, туку личности,“ *Неделно време*, 11 декември, 2005, 20-21. (Bishop Metodij Zlatanov "I Do Not Accept Differences, But Personalities" *Nedelno Vreme*, December 11, 2005, 20-21).

31. "Identification of LGBT population in the Republic of Macedonia - 2004/2005 (results from a survey taken)," (Skopje: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia & MASSO, 2005). According to the

results of the survey, 151 out of 1573 surveyed replied positively to the question “Do you still have sexual relations with a person from the same sex?” Out of these 43 defined their sexual orientation as “exclusively homosexual,” 25 as “primarily homosexual, and 70 as “bisexual.”

32. During the debate show “Chumu” on A1 Television.
 33. Another advance in comparison with the previously analyzed text is that the ‘speculations’ of Bishop Metodij do not deny the existence of homosexuals in the Republic of Macedonia: “I am acquainted with people that I know are homosexuals. What do I think of them? Would I condemn them to death? Are they guilty for being born as homosexuals? Would I punish them? Would I force them to corrective heterosexual behavior? Would I imprison them in homosexual ghettos or concentration camps? Would I pretend I don’t know they are different? Are they homosexuals because they feel such inclinations or because they have realized their orientation? Would I be afraid of contracting a fag virus or something? Would I be afraid I’d look like an idiot if I say they are freaks? Would I try not to sound like a latent homo if I try to justify them? Would I try to understand instead of justify them? Is the coolest thing to blindly accept them? Would I let down all my principles if I did this?”
 34. “According to Christian asceticism, we are all called upon to transform our own eros [...]”
 35. “What makes us like or unlike our nature is sin.”
 36. Even though the CCHR campaign only suggested *facing* differences.
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37. "Human memory abounds with a great range of differences. Are there criteria to determine where to set the limits of compromise?"
38. "Every orientation and preoccupation is too personal and too precious to wave around like a flag."
39. "Some bad arguments never die." John Corvino, "No Slippery Slope," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Vol. 7, Issue 3 (Summer 2000).
40. Cf. Donald J. West and Richard Green, *Sociolegal Control of Homosexuality: A Multi-nation Comparison* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002): 6.
41. Cf. Federico Garza Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003): 2.
42. The argument is ascribed to Dr. Laura. Quoted in John Corvino, "No Slippery Slope," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Vol. 7, Issue 3 (Summer 2000).
43. Ferid Muhić, "Brda legla, doline se digle", *Crnogorski Monitor*, 781, 2005. (http://www.monitor.cg.yu/arhiva/a_781_14.html)
44. "Sen. Rick Santorum's Comments on Homosexuality in an AP Interview." *The Associated Press*, April 22, 2003, <http://www.sodomylaws.org/santorum/snnews006.htm>:

"If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual [gay] sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything."
45. "The argument" loses its value if non-incestuousness is added as a restricting condition for sexual relationships

(both heterosexual and homosexual). For instance, as pointed out by Corvino: “[...] we homosexuals are not asking to engage in polygamy, incest, or bestiality. We are simply asking to engage in monogamous, non-incestuous relationships with people we love — just like heterosexuals do.” John Corvino, “First Gays, Then Polygamists?” (<http://www.indegayforum.org/authors/corvino/corvino59.html>). Here, in the manner of the professor (nit-picking), we could remark: what if the relationship is not consensual and not binary? Instead of replying, Corvino would add the restricting conditions that apply to heterosexual relationships, as well.

46. Thus, if the professor agrees incestuous relationships are normal, it will be amusing to follow his attempt to promote his own incestuousness into a normal relationship. If he does not defend the thesis that incestuous relationships are a normal thing, then he has to state the difference on which he bases his refusal to associate these relationships with his support of the normality of heterosexuality!
 47. Corvino claims the exact opposite: “[...] there is far more heterosexual incest than homosexual incest.” (John Corvino, “Homosexuality and Morality, Part V: Retaining the Moral High Ground,” <http://www.indegayforum.org/authors/corvino/corvino3e.html>).
 48. Cf. Stanley Kurtz, “The Libertarian Question: Incest, homosexuality, and adultery,” *National Review*, April 30, 2003. <http://www.nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz043003.asp>. According to Kurtz, just as the taboo against incest protects children from the sexual abuse of other members of the family, the taboo against homosexuality has a useful function – it protects marriage. According to him, the erosion of a taboo can lead to the erosion of other socially useful taboos.
 49. Courtney Megan Cahill, “Same-Sex Marriage, Slippery Slope Rhetorical, and the Politics of Disgust: A Critical
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Perspective on Contemporary Family Discourse and the Incest Taboo," *Northwestern University Law Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (2005): 1561

50. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1581.
51. The Supreme Court of Missouri, for instance, in the explication of its verdict *State vs. Jackson* (1883) claims that "the State has the same right to regulate marriage in this respect that it has to forbid the intermarriage of cousins and other blood relations." (Cf. *Ibid.*, 1556).
52. Martha C. Nussbaum. "Danger to Human Dignity: the Revival of Disgust and Shame in the Law." *Chronicle of Higher Education*; June 8, Vol. 50 Issue 48 (2004): "Such acts should be illegal, it has often been said, because the 'average man' feels disgust when he thinks about them."
53. For example, Cahill mentions court verdicts in which incest is regarded only as a penis-vagina penetration (Cf. Cahill, 1560). The legal regulations against incest in the Republic of Macedonia refers to genital penetration, whereas incest with a child (below the age of 14) refers to "other sexual action" as well.
54. Should the prohibition of incest refer to the stepfather and stepmother, the half-brother and half-sister? What about divorced stepfathers, such as in Woody Allen's case? Depending on legal norms, what one country may consider incestuous, may not be under the definition of incest in another country.
55. Cf. Judith Butler, "Quandaries of the Incest Taboo" in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Taylor & Francis Routledge, 2004):153.
56. *Ibid.*, 160.