

Dating and Morals

Valentina Charlap, John Comas, Anthony Durniak,

Denise Melligon, Serge Meyendorff

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Civil morality is necessary for the preservation and order of the state (which eventually falls anyway); Christian morality is necessary for bringing men into the presence of God, and that is eternally significant.

One may well be in harmony with one's neighbor, having traveled the Christian moral path, but it is not necessarily so. Suppose your neighbor is a habitual murderer or gangster. Or suppose you live in a state officially anti-Christian, a state which actively persecutes Christians. It is your calling then to heap burning coals of meekness and kindness, but not to give in to or join your enemy for the sake of civil harmony.

To summarize, the most simple way of understanding just what Christian morality is, distinct from all purely human moral laws, is to see that human moral laws have their origin in men and their end is never beyond humanity. The Christian moral life has its origin in God and leads men into peace and unity with Him. Its end is divine life. Now we may understand why the teachings of Jesus Christ were so revolutionary and so unlike anything produced by any other man. Christ was God and His words were from above.

An excerpt below from a dialogue on dating and morals with members of the New York Area TEEN Board and Fr. Eugene Pappas, Presbyter of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral, New York City.

Fr. Eugene: I do not claim to be an authority on dating and marriage. I do, however, have a background in psychological studies, and with my pastoral ministry I believe that I speak with a certain degree of professionalism from my particular parish on the East Side of New York – the jet-set capital of the world.

Question: Do you think that pre-marital sex is wrong, and if so, why?

Fr. Eugene: Essentially sex is a universal encounter among all civilizations, whether they are primitive or as sophisticated as ours. Sex was (and is) a sincere, supreme, and sacred act --- one which united a man and a woman for a particular purpose. Outside the sacrament of marriage, an extra-marital relationship is a denial of the sanctity of the body. The body is the temple of the soul, the living chalice, into which is poured the Body and Blood of Christ, through the Eucharist.

Question: But Father – show me where in the Bible it condemns pre-marital sex? Where does it state that it is prohibited?

Fr. Eugene: The question is not to look into Scripture. It's a natural law. When a man and a woman unite in a conjugal act of love, it should be for their spiritual satisfaction and a spiritual companionship to aid one another in striving toward salvation. God

created woman not primarily to propagate the race, but more so that man should have a help-mate to attain salvation.

Secondarily, as an effect of this beautiful act, God has attached a physical satisfaction so that it has not become repugnant to man. Out of this satisfaction comes the greatest fruit of all – the propagation of a new life, through the birth of children. Pre-marital sex denies the reward of marriage, which is a conjugal relationship of purity and wholesome innocence.

Question: How does the Church teach us to moderate ourselves, to the area of drinking, sex, etc.?

Fr. Eugene: The Church can only preach moderation in all things which are not in direct opposition to our personal salvation. For example, the Church has not spoken out against drinking or against smoking, in itself. If smoking is dangerous to our health, however, it is contrary to our human dignity and endangers our life. It destroys the sanctity of the body. We have not told you that you cannot smoke because you are an Orthodox Christian. But we do advocate everything in moderation that is not directly harmful to our spiritual and physical well being.

Question: Suppose someone within the church community becomes involved, let's say in a sexual crime and even kills someone. What does the Church do or say then? And suppose it was someone with a good reputation. Are we going to be someone who condemns and says we're better than that other person?

Fr. Eugene: No. Definitely not. Jesus Himself emphatically said: “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” And in the case of the adulteress who was about to be stoned by her neighbors, Our Lord said: “Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone.”

Consequently all the hypocrites dropped their stones immediately realizing their own unworthiness. No one stands blameless before God. Likewise, it is a very dangerous thing for us to think ill of someone who seems to be getting away with something, or to think ill of someone with a bad reputation – because this can develop within us a false sense of self-righteousness. I think, however, that it is possible to go to this person – in the spirit of Christian love – and explain to him how he is endangering not only himself but also those who share his name and/or his friendship, and how he is endangering his own salvation.

Question: But society so often condemns...

Fr. Eugene: Society as the protector of the law condemns, but not as individuals. A judge acts as the voice of the people. The priest acts as the voice of God. But if we sit as individuals in condemnation of the sins that others have committed, then we are endangering ourselves through the pride of our own innocence and shallow self-righteousness.