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regarding homosexual identity in Cyprus

A Personal View from Petros Ioannou

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Although few studies deal with its causes, homosexuality is a phenomenon that seems to have existed from the earliest stages of human civilization. Many anthropologists and historians who have studied the subject have found that homosexuality is perceived differently in different societies. The perception of the homosexual in ancient Athens, for example, was not the same as that of the homosexual in today's “modern” society. It was, more accepted and some argue that it was embedded in the normal relationships of free men. In some other societies homosexuality had a very important role in their survival as organized social groups. In societies where the woman was the main provider of fruit and other food and men had only a secondary role - that of reproduction and defence from any enemy - there was a suitable 'ground' for the free expression of homosexual tendencies. In some ancient patriarchal cultures, war for men meant months if not years away from home. This led to prostitution in many instances of expeditions and also to homosexuality during periods of continuous warfare.

For “Western” culture, homosexuality was not taboo until the Middle Ages, when the Catholic Church persecuted it as a “sin of the flesh”. Today's “modern” society is still plagued by the remnants of this taboo. In the last 30 years, following the strong demands of the homosexual movement, a spirit of greater tolerance and positive acceptance of homosexuality has emerged, at least in the more liberal circles of Western societies. These struggles for the free expression of homosexual desire are based to a large extent on the sense of self-confidence of homosexuals themselves. Although in Cyprus there has not been a mass assertion of homosexual rights by the homosexuals themselves, the classic problems of homosexual identity and expression that exist in Western countries have nevertheless begun to arise here as well. I believe that there are three stages in this area: 'correct perception', 'identity' and 'correct formation of social relations'.

It is very crucial to understand correctly that one is homosexual. This of course implies some social acceptance and positive attitude but with a little logic and effort one can achieve this in today's society. Next comes the most basic stage in a homosexual. The stage in which he/she accepts his/her sexual identity. It is a very important stage because it is at this stage that his/her self-confidence is “built” on a solid foundation that will later help him/her to face life and above all to face the anti-homosexual prejudices of the society.

In Cyprus, where society is following developments regressively, homosexuality is still perceived with a lot of prejudice. In most cases homosexuality is seen as something “bad”. Due to the economic factor (i.e. the need to find a professional employment) or even their upbringing as individuals/“personalities” within a conservative society, homosexual people cannot think “properly”, and get involved in dehumanizing situations. This has an unimaginable effect on their psychological state and in the long run causes a 'sadness' thus affecting all areas of the homosexual's life - such as

their professional, social and even family relationships.

Arranged marriages/relationships with heterosexual people (which is common in Cyprus) is one of the cases in which the homosexual person has not clarified the role and importance of his/her sexual identity.

These relationships, which are of course not made in a “mutual understanding”, create an illusion first for the homosexual persons themselves and second for their fellow humans. Such situations can only diminish the concept of homosexuality as an emotional-sexual factor and, secondly, “deceive” the individual himself about his role and that of his partners. They “deceive” because these fake relationships/marriages do not benefit anything but only further confusion of sexual as well as human roles in society as well as increasing sadness and unsatisfying lives of these people. These individuals remain unsatisfied despite believing that they have “everything”, money, sex and “ emotion”, because they are unaware of their deepest desires. In many cases they also go on to create a family which creates more insecure individuals in society. In part though, the problem lies not only in the homosexual individuals but also in the environment they have been raised, which is mainly their families. This of course does not completely excuse them for all the decisions they make in their lives, but it is a contributing factor in the whole situation.

Part of the general confusion around homosexual identity is the one-dimensional identification of homosexuals with the effeminate, or the transvestites. This tendency is more pronounced among oppressed homosexual groups - perhaps because of reaction, perhaps because of stereotypes imposed by heterosexuals. There is also a dimension of homosexuality that can be seen as an extension of male identity. On another level, the identification of homosexuals with the concept of the “pervert” etc. is also misleading. Homosexuality can express a tendency that promotes a relationship between the individual and the social environment within the contexts of life, creativity and contribution to the whole.

Regardless of the causes (biological, social, psychological or existential) that create this phenomenon and the different scientific and other views on the subject, homosexuality has been and still remains a constant component of human society. Perhaps one would have to look to third world civilisations/cultures where this phenomenon is understood very differently from the way it was imposed on us by patriarchal, oligarchic Europe to see other forms of social functioning and expression of this phenomenon.

Whether it comes from birth or from other socio-environmental factors, the bottom line is that homosexual sex involves sexual attraction and not something that is forced upon the person, as is for example s an illness. Homosexual sex celebrates emotion and that indicates a healthy human being.

Needs Turkish Translation, Train in the City - Issue 10, Decade 1990-1999, 1993, Limassol, LGBT

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