



When Brothers Dwell in Unity: Byzantine Christianity and Homosexuality

Stephen Morris

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Bankers? They were to be forbidden communion, socially shunned, denied church funerals, and not commemorated during prayers for the dead. Men and women who committed fornication or adultery? They were forbidden communion for years. Men and women who remarried after divorce or widowhood? They were to be forbidden communion for years and then only allowed communion on a few holy days and even then only after weeks of sexual abstinence. Men who had sex with other men? They were to be denied communion for either 7 or 80 days.

Penances traditionally attached to heterosexual sins--including remarriage after divorce or widowhood--have always been much more severe than those for a variety of homosexual acts or relationships. Just as Byzantine churches have found ways to accommodate sequential marriages and other behavior once stridently condemned, this book argues, it is possible for Byzantine Christianity to make pastoral accommodations for gay relationships and same-sex marriage.

What most disturbed monastic leaders was adolescent males being accepted as novices; adult men were considered unable to control their sexual desires for these "beautiful boys." John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople (397-407), virulently denounced homosexuality, but was virtually the only Byzantine cleric to do so and may have only done so because of unresolved guilt following probable sexual abuse as a student.

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