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Doctoral School of Theology

Doctoral field: THEOLOGY

**THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
ETIOLOGY OF HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

-PHD THESIS SUMMARY-

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# CONTENT

Content.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	3
1. SEXUALITY IN CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY .....	16
1.1. About the greatness and vocation of man .....	16
1.2. Original sin and the fall of man .....	17
1.3. Sexuality under the conditions of the fall .....	21
1.4. Carnal sin and how sinful desire is born in man .....	24
1.5. Homosexuality as a perversion of sexuality.....	27
1.6. Marriage: God's gift and blessing to man .....	30
2. HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY FATHERS.....	35
2.1. Homosexuality in The Old Testament.....	35
2.1.1. The destruction of the city of Sodom .....	35
2.1.2. Punishment of the inhabitants of Gibeah .....	41
2.1.3. The levitical law on homosexuality.....	42
2.2. Homosexuality in the New Testament .....	45
2.2.1. The attitude of Christ The Redeemer towards homosexuality .....	45
2.2.2. The Pauline references to homosexuality .....	47
2.2.3. The attitude of the contemporary Christian denominations towards homosexuality.....	56
3. SCIENTIFIC THEORIES REGARDING THE ROLE OF HEREDITY AND EDUCATION IN THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR .....	60
3.1. Introduction.....	60
3.2. Determinants of sexual orientation and attraction.....	60
3.3. The interaction of environmental and hereditary factors and its role in human developmental .....	64
3.4. Parental education and sexual and homosexual behavior.....	68
3.5. Homosexuality and religious beliefs.....	71
4. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR .....	74
4.1. Family environment and child development .....	74
4.2. The human brain and the influence of the child-rearing environment .....	76
4.3. Unfavourable family environment and effects on child growth .....	77
4.4. Feral children and their development.....	78
4.5. Family environment and the experience of the Holy Fathers.....	80
4.6. Family environment and sexual and homosexual behavior .....	81
4.7. Children raised in same-sex couples. Testimonies, findings and implications	85
4.8. The right of same-sex persons to adoption. Implications.....	93

4.9. The role and involvement of fathers .....	97
4.10. Instead of conclusion .....	99
5. THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR .....	101
5.1. Sexualization of society .....	101
5.2. Institutional educational environment and (homo)sexual behavior .....	106
6. ADEQUATE THERAPEUTIC METHODS IN CHANGING HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR .....	116
6.1. The plasticity of sexuality and the possibility of changing sexual orientation .....	116
6.2. Efforts to change sexual orientation.....	119
6.3. Banning conversion therapy for whose benefit? .....	127
6.4. Ex-gays testimonies.....	130
6.5. Conclusions .....	131
7. HOMOSEXUALITY: VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY SIN? .....	133
7.1. Voluntary and involuntary sin. The testimony of Scripture and Holy Fathers .....	133
7.2. Homosexuality: voluntary or involuntary sin?.....	136
7.3. Homosexuality as a personal choice .....	143
7.4. An authentic Christian attitude towards homosexuals .....	149
7.5. Towards genuine repentance .....	151
8. HOW TO RAISE OUR CHILDREN IN A HEALTHY WAY .....	152
8.1. Saint John Chrysostom`s theaching about the raising of the children .....	152
8.2. A possible model of appropriate institutional education .....	155
8.3. The parent-child relationship and (homo)sexual behavior .....	162
9. HOMOSEXUALS ARE ALSO CALLED TO REPENTANCE .....	170
9.1. Introduction.....	170
9.2. Medical science and human recovery.....	172
9.3. Repentance as a renewal of mind and life.....	176
9.4. Spiritual guidance .....	182
10. HOMOSEXUALITY AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELING .....	192
10.1. Introduction.....	192
10.2. Attitudes of contemporary spiritual fathers.....	194
10.3. Final details on the collected data.....	226
CONCLUSIONS .....	230
Bibliography.....	235
Annexes. Content.....	256
Appendix 1.....	257
Appendix 2.....	259
Appendix 3.....	261
Appendix 4.....	359

# INTRODUCTION



**Keywords:** homosexuality, sexuality, heredity, environmental factors, education, family environment, interaction, orientation, attraction, behavior, repentance, conversion therapy.

## *Research motivation*

I developed this doctoral thesis, after addressing the topic of homosexuality in my undergraduate thesis. Then I decided to continue the research on the topic after an incident that happened in 2001, when the full professor at the Universal Church History department invited an Anglican priest to the course to speak to the theological students. Shortly before this meeting took place, I had learned with astonishment that David Hope, Archbishop of York in the Anglican Church, had approved the publication of a catechism for homosexuals, in which homosexuality was presented as "a condition that can have positive qualities and willed by God"<sup>1</sup>. I asked that Anglican priest how he justifies such an approach and he replied that homosexuality is also present among the Orthodox clergy and especially in our monastic environment. I was a student at that time and I remember very well that I answered him: "I do not know of such cases, but even if they did exist, homosexuality is not accepted in any way by the Orthodox Church, while in your catechisms, this already appears as something natural". Time has proven that the Anglican Church has accepted the ordination of ministers - priests and bishops - openly declared to be homosexual or transsexual, also speaking in favor of granting the blessing to couples formed by people of the same sex.

It is not at all comfortable to broach such a subject these days, and I admit that I have faced the temptation of giving up. I remember that in my efforts to conduct interviews with contemporary spiritual fathers, several doors were closed in my face, and this despite the fact that I offered assurances that I had the best intentions, presenting them with what I had published up to that date. I emphasize the fact that I did not approach any clergyman before publishing my first study entitled *The role of heredity and education in the emergence and development of (homo)sexual behavior*<sup>2</sup>, a study contained in its entirety in this work.

The good Lord helped me not to give up, being convinced that such an approach is really necessary. In general, but also among Christians who belong to the Orthodox Church and

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<sup>1</sup> Un "Gaio" Catechismo, in *Jesus*, No. 7, July 2001, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Before defending my doctoral thesis, I published several studies in specialty journals, two of which also appeared online. It is about: *The role of heredity and education in the emergence and development of homosexual behavior* and *Appropriate methods in changing homosexual behavior*. Both studies have been included as chapters in this thesis, the first (in order of publication) having a slightly different title: *Scientific theories regarding the role of heredity and education in the emergence and development of homosexual behavior*.

various Christian denominations, there are families who encounter great difficulties in this regard. Whether we're talking about husbands who show homoerotic tendencies, or parents who discover with deep sorrow that their children are homosexual and don't know how to react<sup>3</sup>, or even clergy<sup>4</sup> who are consumed by this passion, approaching such a theme can only be beneficial.

The concern to have as clear an overview as possible regarding the etiology of homosexuality can be beneficial not only to people who are gripped by this passion, which they feel as a great pain, wanting to free themselves from its chains, but also to the dialogue between the theological and scientific communities. Working with revealed truths, theology does not need scientific substantiation regarding homosexuality, but knowledge of scientific truth regarding the causes of homosexuality - and we mean scientific truth that is not ideologically or politically subjugated - can strengthen and support theological proclamations about homosexuality, so that such theological proclamations may be accepted more easily in today's secularized society.

#### *Research objectives*

*What is the contribution of the etiological factor in the emergence of homosexual behavior and what moral significance does it have in an evaluation by Orthodox theology?* is the general question of this thesis and to answer it I have the following objectives:

-to research the biblical and patristic tradition regarding the role that sexuality has in human life and in its relation to God;

-to inventory and present the main points of view exposed by scientific research regarding the influence that biological and environmental factors exert on human development in general and on homosexual orientation, attraction and behavior in particular, and to analyze the interaction between them;

-to present various types of sexual conversion therapies and to analyze the results obtained;

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<sup>3</sup> There are cases where, when the parents discovered that their child has homoerotic tendencies, they did not know how to adequately manage such a situation, they put too much pressure on him, he did not resist and, unfortunately, resorted to suicidal. See: *Distrus că familia nu îi acceptă orientarea sexuală, Rafael s-a aruncat de la etajul 20. Cui i-a lăsat un ultim mesaj*, (Devastated that his family does not accept his sexual orientation, Rafael threw himself from the 20th floor. To whom did he leave a last message), available at: <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/distrus-ca-familia-nu-ii-accepta-orientarea-sexuala-rafael-s-a-aruncat-de-la-etajul-20-cui-i-a-lasat-un-ultim-mesaj.html> (accessed on 21.05.2023).

<sup>4</sup> See the case of former bishop Corneliu Bârlădeanu from Huși, filmed in indecent poses with people of the same sex, or the case of former priest Cristian Pomohaci, minister in the Moșuni parish in Mureș county, who was recorded making sexual advances to a minor, as well as the case of Hierodeacon Chiriac Băraian from the monastery in Florești, Cluj county, who in the year 2023, during Holy Week, filmed himself in indecent poses appearing later on an application hosted by gays.

-to expose various aspects that accompany conversion therapy and to present the implications of banning various programs aimed at efforts to change sexual orientation;

-to present the testimonies and arguments of those who advocate that faith therapy helped them overcome homoerotic urges;

-to expose the implications that various sex education programs that promote homosexuality as natural sexual behavior have on children's development and to analyze to what extent homosexual behavior can be learned through such programs;

-to identify educational programs favorable to a sustainable and healthy development of children;

-to make known the point of view of the people raised in same-sex couples or in other homosexual environments and to analyze to what extent that climate was a favorable factor in the development of homosexual behavior;

-to identify possible causative factors of homosexuality that can be invoked as a mitigating circumstance in the appearance of homoerotic attraction and the manifestation of homosexual behavior and to analyze to what extent the knowledge and awareness of the respective causes can lead people who manifest unnatural bodily urges to take up the spiritual struggle;

-to consult the opinions of contemporary spiritual fathers regarding the causes of homosexual behavior and to identify the spiritual means by which man can free himself from the passion of homosexuality.

### *Research methodology*

Of real use in achieving the proposed objectives and in shaping an overall picture regarding the etiology of homosexuality were the multitude of scientific studies consulted. Conducted on varied samples of subjects followed at different ages and for shorter or longer periods of time, as long as they were not ideologically or dishonestly ordered, these studies provide extremely valuable information. For example, the researches that have focused on the study of biological determinism in the case of homosexuality have in common the fact that no specific gene has been identified to be responsible for the homosexual orientation and behavior, the genetic contribution in determining sexual behavior in general not being a major one.

The results of such researches are contradicted by others, their authors disputing the methodology used, the samples of subjects recruited, etc. However, when they are carried out objectively and impartially, they bring important clarifications, being of real use, both to scientific research itself and to the dialogue between science and the different fields of research, in the present case, the theological one.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, I tried to be equidistant and as impartial as possible in the exposition of the various scientific hypotheses. For example, I have presented, on the one hand, the point of view of those who support bio-genetic determinism regarding the causality of homosexuality, and on the other hand, the point of view of those who categorically speak against it. Then I have argued through studies that there cannot be a significant genetic contribution that determines homoerotic attraction, homosexual orientation or behavior. Also in this sense, I have shown that established organizations, with a strong influence in society, have changed their position over time regarding the causes of homosexuality. For example, if during the 90s, the American Psychiatric Association spoke in favor of a biological determination of homosexuality, after 2008, it nuanced its position, stating that a variety of interacting factors contribute to the appearance of homosexuality, the phenomenon being a very complex one.

Regarding conversion therapies and various programs aimed at sexual orientation change efforts, I sought to present the main therapies used over time and the results obtained, making visible the points of view for and against legislative proposals to ban them.

Also from a methodological point of view, an important step in approaching the subject of this thesis was conducting interviews with a number of twelve Orthodox spiritual priests from the country (nine) and outside the country's borders (three). I am grateful to all of them. The openness shown by them for such research and the courage of their confession must be appreciated, as it can be of real use for a better understanding of the subject, but also for the identification of pastoral-spiritual solutions that respond to the multiple and varied specific needs of people who manifest homoerotic impulses.

Among the clergy who showed openness to such a topic, having the kindness and courage to respond to my approach, eight of them are married priests, and four are monk priests. Also, of those interviewed, six also have the quality of teaching staff, having scientific works specific to their field of activity, and two are also active psychotherapists. I also recall the fact that out of all the twelve priests, nine are Romanian-speaking priests under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and three are English-speaking priests, two of them under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Church, and one under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the whole East.

*Summary presentation of the chapters*



The present work has 10 chapters and focused exclusively on male homosexuality and the research of its causes. In the first two chapters, I sought to present the Eastern theology's conception of sexuality, showing that God created both male and female human beings. Excluding various pathologies, from a biological point of view, each person is born either male or female, the difference between the sexes being part of the divine plan.

The fact that we are so biologically different shows that man and woman were created to co-exist in a relationship of complementarity, being called to complement each other so that they can survive as a species. Of course, the relationship of complementarity to which man and woman are called is not only important in terms of the reproductive aspect and the social good. From a Christian point of view, the union of the two has a higher purpose which consists in "the unity of love and the sanctity of married life"<sup>5</sup>, the husband and wife being called to help each other to acquire the Kingdom of God.

The union of man and woman in the Sacrament of Marriage is willed by God, the monogamous heterosexual relationship being blessed by Him. It is true that the selfishness unleashed after the fall of Adam weakened and disfigured in many ways the natural bond between man and woman. However, since human nature was not completely destroyed, nor was the connection between them abolished, and together with the Incarnation of the Word of God, it is strengthened and elevated by Him "from the order of nature to the order of grace"<sup>6</sup>. With the Incarnation of the Word, the relationship between man and woman becomes, according to the Apostle Paul, "a great mystery" (Eph. 5, 32).

The lives of married saints are living proof that man can truly fulfill himself in family life, overcoming nature through grace is also possible in marriage. The fact that some vehemently challenge Christian marriage and the traditional family by proposing to overcome nature through technology and the creative powers of man, the fact that a certain part of society no longer esteems family and its values, often accepting, very easily, the offers of those who propose the creation of a new world, in which Christian values are considered outdated and in which man no longer allows himself to be shaped by the grace of the Holy Spirit, trusting fully in technology - these and others like them -, have led to the relativization of Christian marriage and traditional family values.

Following the teachings of Holy Scripture, the Eastern theological tradition considers it to be an abnormality not only the expression of sexuality outside the monogamous heterosexual relationship, but any form of manifestation of sexuality that excludes procreation. Divine

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<sup>5</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life* (Despre căsătorie și viața de familie), trad. în limba engleză de Catharine Roth și David Anderson, Crestwood, N.Y., St. Vladimir s Seminary Press, 1986, p. 22, apud David C. Ford, *Bărbatul și femeia în viziunea Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, translated by Luminița Irina Niculescu, Ed. Sophia, București, 2004, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. III, EIBMBOR, București, 1978, p. 183.

revelation reveals that sexual practices such as fornication, adultery, masturbation, incest, sodomy, zoophilia, necrophilia and other forms of sexual deviance are contrary to the human nature created by God. So, speaking of the manifestation of sexuality, it is only sincere love, within the monogamous heterosexual relationship blessed by God in the Mystery of Marriage, that is able to really fulfil man, bringing him closer to God, through a life lived in sacrificial love.

When binary sexuality is resisted and its manifestation exceeds the boundaries of nature by excluding procreation, man is caught in the nets of pleasure. He becomes its slave, the soul is no longer nourished by the relationship with God, and the body abandons itself to disgraceful passions and abominable practices of which the Holy Apostle Paul says that "it is a shame even to speak of those things" (Eph 5, 12).

Following the fall of the protoparents, we witness the establishment of a new reality in which everything is distorted, unnatural and lacking in normality. In this new reality, which has nothing to do with order, but rather with disorder, homosexuality has also become "a tragic manifestation of the «thorn in the flesh» that torments everyone in different ways"<sup>7</sup>.

Homosexuality falls into the category of bodily sins of sexual nature by which man distances himself from God, his Creator. The impossibility of fulfillment in a pure and fruitful love shows homosexuality to be a perversion of sexuality, being part of the category of sexual perversions.

The Holy Fathers call fornication "the worst disease" that defiles the mind, soul and body of man, that can make him lose his mind while seeking to fulfill the evil desire of his heart. So, homosexuality is perceived as "a fall from the human standard"<sup>8</sup>, as opposing the law of carnal union permitted by God following the fall of the protoparents, implicitly appearing as a sin against the fallen nature.

Homosexuality is both a moral and a theological problem. It is a moral issue as it opposes procreation and the natural role of sexuality, being against nature. Opposing the natural manifestation of sexuality, homosexuality despises and disregards both sexual difference, deepening the division between created and uncreated, and God who generated the sexual binary and gave man the mission to achieve the unification of all the distinctions of creation, in order to unite them all with Himself. And since it defies creation and the Creator, being anti-

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Дневники, 1973–1983* [Diaries, 1973–1983] (Moscow, 2005), p. 391-395, apud Volodymyr Bureba, *Attitudes to Homosexuality in Christianity*, în Misha Cherniak, Olga Gerassimenko, Michael Brinkschröder (Editors) *"For I Am Wonderfully Made". Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion*, Esuberanza, 2017, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> Sorin Dumitrescu, *Interviu cu Părintele Galeriu despre homosexualitate*, în *România Liberă*, No. 1127, 11 decembrie 1993, apud Sorin M. Rădulescu, *Sociologia și istoria comportamentului sexual "deviant"*, Ed. Nemira, 1996, p. 195-196.

creational, homosexuality becomes a theological problem. Those who allow themselves to be enslaved by this passion do not really know God, they do not really understand God.

By making use of the data provided by scientific research, in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, I tried to diagnose homosexuality, identifying the main factors involved in the emergence of homoerotic orientation and attraction as well as the manifestation of homosexual behavior. In his development and becoming, man is influenced by a lot of factors such as heredity, family environment, education, entourage, experiences he has, various socio-cultural factors, etc. It is now known that hereditary and external factors, genes and the environment interact and influence each other, certain human traits can no longer be explained by referring only to biology or only to experience, but the answer lies in the interaction between biology and the environment.

The interaction of environmental and hereditary factors is very important in becoming human, what we are is both the result of the manifestation of genes themselves, and the way in which genes manifest themselves under the influence of education and various social factors. The reality shows that certain environmental factors can strongly influence the way our genes are expressed, or in other words, our phenotype is affected by the different experiences we have. Therefore, while high natural endowments can be affected by defective elements of environment, experience, culture, at the same time a healthy development can overcome the bad tendencies and negative dispositions of a sick organism.

Throughout life, man is influenced in his thoughts and manifestations by everything that surrounds him, by various early experiences - favorable or unfavorable - and even from the intrauterine period, by cultural productions, advertisements, education, different social environments, etc. All these leave their mark on the formation and development of man.

The role that the environment has in the development of man is extremely important, his formation being consistent with the quality of the human development environment. Scientific research has found that although there may be certain genetic predispositions for certain maladies that some children may have, by growing them up in a family environment full of affection would make the negative effects not visible (the case of children with ADHD). On the contrary, when deprived of proper care and affection, negative experiences will activate these recessive genes (pregnant mothers in Holland, starved during the German occupation of May 1940 gave birth to children prone to heart and other diseases). Therefore, unfortunate experiences and an unfavorable development environment can over time have significant and sometimes even insurmountable negative effects on health (the case of feral children - raised in the wild, in isolation from human contact from an early age).

Regarding homosexuality, research has not found any significant biological contribution to the emergence of homosexuality. No specific gene has been identified that is responsible for homosexual orientation and behavior, the theory of a biological determinism no longer having many supporters at the level of the scientific community. According to Andrea Ganna, a geneticist at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts (SUA), lead author of the largest study ever conducted on the role of genes in homosexual behavior<sup>9</sup>, published in 2019, there is no such thing as a gay gene, and even if sexual preferences have a genetic component, "no single gene has a major effect on sexual behaviors"<sup>10</sup>. Even the *American Psychiatric Association* (APA), which for a certain period of time supported the idea of a major biological contribution in the case of homosexuality, since 2008 has nuanced its position, arguing that homosexuality has much more complex causes, being the result of the interaction between multiple and extremely varied factors.

Therefore, while much of the scientific community recognizes that no substantial biological contribution to the emergence of homosexuality can be demonstrated, at least part of it agrees that certain aspects, such as a family and institutional upbringing that presents homosexuality as a natural alternative to heterosexuality, raising children in same-sex couples and accustoming them to the environment and universe specific to homosexuals, unfavorable relationships between parents and children, abusive sexual experiences, early homosexual experiences, child molestation, pornography consumption, etc., represent factors that can contribute to the emergence of homoerotic attraction and the crystallization of homosexual orientation.

For example, the introduction in several countries of various sex education programs that campaign for the deconstruction of sexual polarity, affirming the gender ideology, according to which sexuality is seen as fluid and having multiple forms of manifestation, does nothing but cause confusion in the minds of children with regard to their sexual orientation and identity, getting them used to the idea that homosexuality is a normal sexual behavior and thus to be learned and accepted quite easily.

Children raised in an unfavorable family environment, where they have poor emotional interactions and unfortunate experiences - mental and physical molestation, absence of one of the parents, sexual abuse, etc. - or raised in same-sex couples, being exposed early to

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<sup>9</sup> Andrea Ganna, Karin J. H. Verweij, Michel G. Nivard, Robert Maier, Robbee Wedow, Alexander S. Busch, Abdel Abdellaoui, Shengru Guo, J. Fah Sathirapongsasuti, 23andMe Research Team, Paul Lichtenstein, Sebastian Lundström, Niklas Långström, Adam Auton, Kathleen Mullan Harris, Gary W. Beecham, Eden R. Martin, Alan R. Sanders, John R. B. Perry, Benjamin M. Neale, Brendan P. Zietsch, *Large-scale GWAS reveals insights into the genetic architecture of same-sex sexual behavior*, in *Science*, Vol. 365, No. 6456, 2019, available at: <https://geneticsexbehavior.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ganna190830.pdf> (accessed on 28.09.2019).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Lambert, *No 'gay gene': Massive study homes in on genetic basis of human sexuality*, available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02585-6> (accessed on 25.09.2019).

inappropriate things and having access to gay environment and "culture", they may tend towards a homosexual lifestyle as adults. Thus, if 90% of children raised by heterosexuals develop heterosexual relationships as adults, only 61% of children raised in gay couples become heterosexual as adults<sup>11</sup>.

For a child's healthy mental, physical and emotional development, it is very important for him to notice in the family environment the model of masculinity and femininity and to familiarize himself with the authentic heterosexual relationship. In the absence of these models, the masculinity of boys and the femininity of girls are not validated, but on the contrary are suppressed, the children of gay couples being deprived of this right, which, at a given moment, they feel as a great lack, as something they have been dispossessed and which they want to recover in a certain way.

There are voices from those who grew up in same-sex couples who claim that those children who grew up in such an environment are naturally more curious to pursue a homosexual experience. Robert Oscar Lopez, raised by his mother who was a lesbian, is one of those voices who argues: "I suppose that children raised by same-sex couples are naturally more curious about having a homosexual experience without being necessarily free of any attraction to the opposite sex. Therefore, they will more likely fall into the category of bisexuals, just like me..."<sup>12</sup>. Lee Taylor, raised by his father who was gay, is another voice who argues that although they do not intend to harm children, through their lifestyles and the way they relate to children, people of the same-sex who have children in their care can end up to turn their world "into a living hell".

In Chapter 6 it was shown that throughout life, most people show stability in their sexual attraction, orientation and identity, and only a minority fluctuate, with sexual plasticity being more visible among gays and lesbians.

Of course, in regard to homosexuality, as in the case of other human behaviors, it is possible to get into a bad habit, but it is also possible to break off that bad habit. The scientific research that is not ideologically regimented has shown that abstaining from homoerotic relationships and even assuming a monogamous heterosexual relationship is really possible in the case of those who resorted to different methods and therapeutic means. Likewise, the testimonies of those who had homoerotic impulses, getting involved in relationships with people of the same sex, but which they managed to overcome by making use of faith therapy,

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Regnerus, *How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study*, in *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2012, p. 762.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Oscar Lopez, *Growing Up With Two Moms: The Untold Children's View*, Public Discourse (6.08.2012), available at: <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2012/08/6065/> (accessed on 2.02. 2023).

are confirmed by scientific data that show a success rate of up to 38%”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the participants in the Freedom March<sup>14</sup>, in which ex-LGBT people take part, are living testimonies that through the power of the Holy Spirit, liberation from sexual sins and wounds of all kinds is truly possible. Luis Javier Ruiz, one of the participants of the 2018 march in Los Angeles, stated: "...this transformation is not about going from gay to straight, but from lost to the situation of a saved person, thereby expressing that the qualitative transformation is much greater"<sup>15</sup>.

The chapter *Homosexuality as a voluntary or involuntary sin* is a transitional chapter, in which it was shown that there can be multiple situations and circumstances as a result of which one can come, in a more or less voluntary way, to manifest homoerotic impulses and engage in same-sex relationships.

After making the diagnosis by identifying the disease and its possible causes, towards the end of the paper, I also addressed the issue of therapeutic intervention, showing that in order to avoid the appearance of homoerotic attraction and the manifestation of homosexual behavior, prophylaxis is needed, manifested through a Christian education carried out both in the family and church environment, as well as in a healthy educational system focused on the cultivation of virtues, which promotes the culture of life and goodness.

In the situation where, for various reasons, homosexuality still ends up manifesting itself, affecting even the lives of Christians, they should know that they have at hand The Holy Confession (Penance, Reconciliation), repentance, which when manifested authentically produces the change and renewal of life. The lives of the saints who, before returning to God, lived a life serving sin, are evidence that people can reconsider their position, that God's Spirit works in the world and that access to holiness is open to everyone. The testimonies of ex-homosexuals who gave up the manifestation of homoerotic behavior, some of them marrying people of the opposite sex and even having children, are proof that homosexuality is a bad habit that man can get rid of, and the one who responsibly undertakes the spiritual battle with this passion will succeed, with the help and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in overcoming it.

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<sup>13</sup> Ciprian Toroczka, *Homosexuality from a Contemporary Orthodox Perspective*, Review of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2016, p. 404.

<sup>14</sup> In 2019, the Freedom March took place in Washington D.C. on May 25, being the second of its kind. The first was held in Los Angeles in the fall of 2018, with two others scheduled to take place in St. Paul (Minnesota), on June 23, respectively Orlando, for September 14.

<sup>15</sup> Brandon Showalter, *Ex-LGBT men, women to share stories of transformation at 2nd Freedom March in Washington, DC*, available at: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/ex-lgbt-men-women-to-share-stories-of-transformation-at-2nd-freedom-march-in-washington-dc.html> (accessed on 25.05.2019), apud Pr. Prof. Ion Ciungu, *Iisus în centrul cunoaşterii...*, available at: <https://doisautreiinnumeleluiiisus.blogspot.com/2019/05/iisus-in-centrul-cunoasterii-ii-poate.html> (accessed on 25.05.2019).

Of real use in approaching the theme were the interventions of the contemporary clergymen whom I consulted and who, in the interviews given, based on the experience gained from the relationship with their spiritual sons who manifested homoerotic impulses, were able to identify both the causes of the emergence and development of homosexuality, as well as and the most effective spiritual means needed in spiritual warfare with this terrible passion.

#### *Status quaestionis*

Until the moment of the elaboration of this paper, the subject of the etiology of homosexuality was treated in several scientific and theological studies and works, which I also consulted in order to achieve the proposed objectives. Among these works I mention:

*Fața nevăzută a homosexualității (The Unseen Face of Homosexuality)*<sup>16</sup> is a valuable work through the multitude of scientific studies - marginalized for a long time - that are made available to the readers. These studies present homosexuality from a perspective that is free of ideological regimentation and they emphasize the fact that biological factors are by no means the primary cause of homosexuality. For a very long time, *The American Psychiatric Association* claimed that homosexuality had exclusively biological causes. But, contrary to this view, conversion therapy and various efforts to change homosexual behavior have had in many situations satisfactory results. The book of Virgiliu Gheorghe and Andrei Dîrlău is also important for the theological field, the scientific data presented can contribute to the harmonization of the revealed truth with the scientific field, they can be exploited in the theological-pastoral field.

The study *Science and theology in human sexuality*<sup>17</sup> is authored by Christopher Cook - theologian and Anglican priest - and presents some opinions from the scientific field regarding the etiology of homosexuality, showing that, from a scientific point of view, homosexuality is a natural sexual behavior. According to a part of scientific research, people do not choose to be homosexual or heterosexual, sexual orientation being a "given", it cannot be changed by therapeutic means. Asking how knowledge of the causes of homosexuality can be important in theological, ethical, social or even political disputes, Cook admits that in a certain way, it could be beneficial to the dialogue between the scientific and theological communities.

*Homosexuality: An Orthodox Approach*<sup>18</sup> represents an important pastoral landmark in the spiritual counseling of people with homoerotic tendencies, offering people who undertake the struggle with this passion valuable information about how an adequate spiritual life will

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<sup>16</sup> Virgiliu Gheorghe, Andrei Dîrlău, *Fața nevăzută a homosexualității*, Ed. Christiana, București, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher C. H. Cook, *Science and theology in human sexuality*, in *Theology & Sexuality*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Hopko, *Homosexualitatea: o abordare ortodoxă*, translated by Marian Rădulescu, Ed. Theosis, Oradea, 2009.

help them in their effort of liberation and closeness to God. Fr. Thomas Hopko, the author of this work, former dean of the Institute of St. Vladimir of Crestwood, NY, makes Christians aware that only by manifesting an authentic Christian life full of kindness and understanding can we attract people with homoerotic tendencies to a higher way of life, embracing them in our love modeled after God's love.

*Devalorizarea căsătoriei și justificarea homosexualității: o consecință logică a ideologiei mitropolitului Ioannis Zizioulas (The devaluation of marriage and the justification of homosexuality: a logical consequence of the ideology of Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas)*<sup>19</sup>. Starting from the personalist theory of Metropolitan Zizioulas, which confuses "proper human nature" and the "disfigured state of nature"<sup>20</sup>, Jean-Claude Larchet - the author of this study - presents how this confusion led some to support unions between persons of the same sex, disregarding Christian marriage, as a monogamous heterosexual relationship willed and blessed by God.

The work *Sexual orientation and gender identity: answers and...people*<sup>21</sup> is authored by Vasileios Thermos, psychotherapist, priest and professor of pastoral psychology at the Theological Academy in Athens. Written in English, the book is the synthesis of a much larger work written in Greek: Έλξη και πάθος: μια διεπιστημονική προστασία της ομοφυλοφιλίας (Attraction and Passion: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Homosexuality).

By making use of scientific research, Fr. Thermos recalls that scientific research claims that both bio-genetic and family and environmental causes participate in varying degrees in the emergence of homosexual attraction, a climate favorable to homosexuality can trigger homoerotic attractions. According to the author, there is no homosexuality gene and there will never be, but he admits that homosexuality carries a genetic imprint, with a group of genes that interact in a complex manner involved in its emergence.

In Thermos's opinion, reducing homosexuality to causes related only to the family environment can lead to "a severe criminalization of parents"<sup>22</sup>, while reducing it to causes of a biological nature only, can lead to the practice of homosexuality without observing the complexity of the phenomenon and without noticing the multitude of factors that can intervene in its emergence and development.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, *Devalorizarea căsătoriei și justificarea homosexualității: o consecință logică a ideologiei mitropolitului Ioannis Zizioulas* in *Teologie și Viață*, No. 9-12, Iași, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Diac. Asist. Ioan I. Ică jr. *Persoană sau/și ontologie în gândirea ortodoxă contemporană*, în volumul *Persoană și comuniune. Prinos de cinstitie Părintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani*, Sibiu, 1993, p. 377.

<sup>21</sup> Rev. Vasileios Thermos, *Sexual orientation and gender iddentity: answers and...people*, translated from the Greek by Vasileios Tsangalos, EN PLO Editions, Athens, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.



Fr. Thermos is also the author of the article *The Orthodox Church, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity: From Embarrassment to Vocation*<sup>23</sup>, published in *The Wheel* magazine. In the foreword to this volume, Metropolitan Kalistos Ware distinguishes between homosexual persons engaged in a stable monogamous relationship based on trust and homosexuals who engage in casual relationships, practicing sexual promiscuity and who are not interested in fulfillment through love. According to Metropolitan Kalistos, unlike heterosexuals who can fulfill their sexual desires with the blessing of the Church in the Holy Sacrament of Marriage, homosexuals do not have this possibility, it being unfair to impose celibacy on them without their feeling a vocation in this direction.

*Teologia sexualității. Heterosexualitatea și homosexualitatea din perspectivă creștină (Theology of sexuality. Heterosexuality and homosexuality from a Christian perspective)*<sup>24</sup>. The author, Pr. Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, emphasizes that the monogamous heterosexual relationship is willed and blessed by God, the search for communion between man and woman being "the image of the search between God and man"<sup>25</sup>. The author shows that homosexual acts are not compatible with the condition of a baptized Christian and they prevent the human being from participating in the life of grace. The two ways of sanctification that man has at his disposal to transfigure and overcome sexuality are marriage and monasticism. Rev. Marc-Antoine emphasizes the therapeutic role of the Church, those who manifest homoerotic tendencies being called to repentance by assuming the spiritual war, as in the case of other passions.

*Homosexuality from a Contemporary Orthodox Perspective*<sup>26</sup>. The article is authored by Prof. Ciprian Toroczkai and gives a brief presentation of the works written on the subject of homosexuality by Fr. Thomas Hopko, Fr. Savatie Baștovoi, Virgiliu Gheorghe and Andrei Dîrlău, with a view to exposing the theological conception of homosexuality and to identifying the pastoral means by which the members of a Christian community can relate in a constructive manner to people who manifest homoerotic tendencies.

The volume *"For I Am Wonderfully Made". Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion*<sup>27</sup> edited by Misha Cherniak, Olga Gerassimenko and Michael Brinkschröder comprises several studies on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion aiming at a reformatory direction in contemporary theology and addressing topics such as: the Church and LGBTIQ

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<sup>23</sup> Rev. Vasileios Thermos, *The Orthodox Church, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity: From Embarrassment to Vocation*, în *The Wheel*, No. 13/14, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Pr. Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *Teologia sexualității. Heterosexualitatea și homosexualitatea din perspectivă creștină*, Ed. Christiana, București, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ciprian Toroczkai, *art. cit.*.

<sup>27</sup> Misha Cherniak, Olga Gerassimenko, Michael Brinkschröder (Editors) *"For I Am Wonderfully Made". Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion*, Esuberanza, 2017.

issues; sexual orientation and gender identity in the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church and anthropological challenges; pastoral care and the needs of LGBTIQ individuals or families; Christianity's attitudes towards homosexuality; new perspectives on the Orthodox Tradition as sources for an affirmative pro-LGBTIQ Theology; etc.

Other volumes and official statements of the Church that I consulted were:

-*Orthodox Christianity, Sexual Diversity & Public Policy: Final Report of the University of Exeter & Fordham University British Council Bridging Voices Project, 2017–2020*<sup>28</sup>.

-several official statements of the Orthodox Church in America: *Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life*<sup>29</sup>; *Statement of the Holy Synod of the OCA on Sincerely Held Religious Beliefs Regarding Marriage*<sup>30</sup>; *Houston Orthodox Clergy Issue Statement about City's Gay Ordinance*<sup>31</sup>; *Statement on same-sex relationships and sexual identity*<sup>32</sup>, etc.

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<sup>28</sup> Gregory Tucker, Brandon Gallaher, *Orthodox Christianity, Sexual Diversity & Public Policy: Final Report of the University of Exeter & Fordham University British Council Bridging Voices Project, 2017–2020*, Washington, DC: British Council USA, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Orthodox Church in America, *Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life*, Miami, Florida, July, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Declarația a fost aprobată de Sfântul Sinod al Episcopilor Bisericii Ortodoxe din America în cadrul unei sesiuni a Sfântului Sinod din 16 iunie 2016 la Mănăstirea Adormirea Maicii Domnului din Rives Junction, MI.

<sup>31</sup> Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *Houston Orthodox Clergy Issue Statement about City's Gay Ordinance*, available at: [https://www.goarch.org/ro/society/civil-rights/-/asset\\_publisher/XptdT1BfyjZK/content/houston-orthodox-clergy-issue-statement-about-city-s-gay-ordinance](https://www.goarch.org/ro/society/civil-rights/-/asset_publisher/XptdT1BfyjZK/content/houston-orthodox-clergy-issue-statement-about-city-s-gay-ordinance) .

<sup>32</sup> The statement was issued following the 4th plenary session of the 20th All-American Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, held on July 21, 2022 in Baltimore available at: <https://www.oca.org/holy-synod/statements/holy-synod/holy-synod-issues-statement-on-same-sex-relationships-and-sexual-identity> .



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

In the formation of human behaviors and the main psycho-somatic traits, man is influenced by both biological and environmental and socio-cultural factors, genes and various experiences actively contributing to the formation of man. If in outlining physical features - the color of eyes, hair, skin, determining height - the major contribution comes from genes, in establishing personality traits and in shaping behaviors, environmental factors and especially education play a decisive role. Becoming human is not only the result of biology or certain environmental factors acting in isolation, but the result of complex and multiple interactions between all these factors.

Regarding the etiology of homosexuality, for a certain period of time, one of the main arguments of homosexuals and activists of the pro-homosexuality movement was that of the "gay gene" and even the "gay brain", that is, of a strong biological determinism, claiming that people with homoerotic inclinations are born with this sexual orientation and therefore the development of attraction towards people of the same sex and the manifestation of homosexual behavior are a given that you cannot resist, having bio-genetic causes.

However, scientific research shows that no particular gene responsible for homosexual behavior has been identified, therefore, one of the major conclusions of this thesis is that the theory of a significant biological contribution to the emergence of homoerotic attraction and the development of homosexual behavior has no true scientific support. This is a very important aspect to consider: given the fact that homosexual orientation and homoerotic attraction are not dictated in an overwhelming proportion by biology, it means that other factors are involved in their emergence and development. So, the origin of homosexuality depends on one's relationship to/with those other factors.

The fact that there cannot be a significant biological contribution to homosexuality highlights several aspects, namely:

- a. Lacking a major biological component, homosexuality appears as a condition caused by other factors rather than heredity.
- b. The fact that homosexuality is not genetically caused shows that proper upbringing and education, and a healthy environment can prevent the emergence of homoerotic attraction and homosexual behavior.

- c. When it is caused by unfavorable factors, such as emotional interactions and defective relationships in the family, abusive sexual experiences suffered especially in childhood, the environment and familiarization with the environment specific to people of the same sex, living the first sexual experience as homoerotic in nature, education gender, sexual addiction, a poorly developed masculinity, homosexual propaganda, etc., as in the case of other addictions, homosexuality can be treated therapeutically, the person being able to restrain himself from homoerotic impulses and manifestations. Scientific research to date shows that among people who have undergone conversion therapy, some have changed somewhat, but not much; others - especially among the highly motivated - have changed a lot; some did not change at all, even if they wanted to, and others - among those who considered themselves to be gay - did not change at all, having no interest in doing so. Although not everyone who undergoes conversion therapy changes, some of those involved register some degree of progress, and in the case of the highly motivated, the change to heterosexuality is a significant one. Also, the testimonies of ex-homosexuals are living proof that liberation from this sin against nature is really possible.
- d. Both the testimonies of ex-gays and the scientific data, which indicate that some people even resort to changing their sexual orientation several times, show that it is completely wrong and unacceptable to ban conversion therapies and various programs of changing their sexual orientation.
- e. In the case of people who claim to feel or have always known themselves to be homosexual, things must be taken with a large dose of reserve, as homosexuality can only be a transitory state, due to immaturity or confusion about one's own sexuality. Scientific data confirms that at least some teenagers who think they might be attracted to people of the same sex reconsider their position in adulthood, and thus the decision in adolescence represented only a passing, momentary wandering that did not define them.

The theory of biological determinism as to the origin of homosexuality is largely abandoned and the increasingly circulated idea is that homosexuality has much more complex causes, with a variety of factors involved that contribute to its emergence and development. These factors do not manifest themselves in the same way in all cases, they can contribute to the emergence of homoerotic attraction and the manifestation of homosexual behavior either acting separately or through multiple interactions, from case to case. Some people may end up exhibiting homoerotic urges because they were raised in same-sex couples and have become familiar with their specific "culture" and climate, the world and heterosexual relationships

appearing completely foreign to them. Others, in the absence of the father, have been deprived of an authentic model of masculinity which they perceive as a right they have been deprived of and which they wish to reclaim by engaging in same-sex relationships. In other situations, the manifestation of homosexuality can be reached as a result of sexual abuse that produces blockage and trauma; or due to curiosity and involvement in first sexual experiences of a homoerotic type; or due to gender education that presents homosexuality as a natural sexual behavior, adapting human mentalities and behaviors to its acceptance. All these factors as well as others mentioned in the paper can act both individually and together, being able to activate same-sex attraction and the manifestation of homosexual behavior.

From the interviews conducted with contemporary spiritual fathers, having in their care spiritual sons who face homoerotic tendencies and manifestations, some important conclusions for this research emerge, namely:

- a. Most of the spiritual fathers interviewed claim that homosexuality is not innate and that people end up manifesting homoerotic tendencies at a certain point in their lives, with various factors contributing to this. However, three of the spiritual fathers I interviewed believe that some people may be born with a certain inclination towards homoerotic impulses. Of the three, one makes use of a scientific hypothesis, invoking factors of a hormonal nature from the intrauterine period, while the other two speak of certain genetic predispositions towards homosexuality caused by a certain hereditary influence on the part of parents involved in various sexual experiences. Those genetic predispositions become active in certain favorable circumstances, such as an encouraging cultural climate, favorable family conditions, socialization with homosexual people, etc.
- b. The spiritual fathers consider homosexuality to be an extremely complex phenomenon and claim that its emergence can be caused by a variety of factors, including: environment, curiosity, family problems (a defective relationship with parents, lack of affection in childhood and adolescence or a poorly developed masculinity of the child due to the absence of the father, poor emotional interactions, the failure of the parents' marriage, etc.), abusive sexual experiences, sexual addiction, gender education, homosexual propaganda, unfavorable cultural influences, the alienation of man from God that opens the way for the work of demons to mock man subject to various vices, early sexual experiences with same-sex partners, curiosity (especially in the case of teenagers), pornography, etc.
- c. The spiritual fathers agree that there is no gene that determines the appearance of homoerotic attraction and the manifestation of homosexual behavior, believing that

God did not make man homosexual and with homosexual characteristics, but on the contrary, God made woman as a helper to man and blessed the monogamous heterosexual relationship.

- d. According to the spiritual fathers, homosexuality has primarily spiritual causes. A life lived without taking into account the will of God and the rationality of the divine creation, a life in which man is concerned only with the satisfaction of sinful desires and selfish pleasures, such a life leaves him defenseless against the onslaught of passions. Instead, an education centered on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, on His boundless love for man, represents, on the one hand, genuine support to prevent falling into the passion of homosexuality, and on the other hand, in the event that it has taken place due to man's recklessness and carelessness, a certainty that upliftment and healing are possible.
- e. From the accounts of the spiritual fathers it is obvious that people who declare war on homoerotic impulses and who strive to live a spiritual life using the spiritual weapons specific to Orthodoxy, manage to keep these impulses under control and even marry a person of the opposite sex. It is true that along the way, some of them experience falls, but others remain faithful to the person of the opposite sex they married or, if they remained unmarried, curb their homoerotic impulses. Regardless of the nature of the causes of homosexuality, as in the case of the other passions that man has, it is very important that he remains open to the work of the Holy Spirit, undertakes the fight against the irrational impulses of the senses and submits his own will and reason to the will of God. When man opens himself to the presence and work of God, even if he will not fully free himself from the impulses of the irrational will of the senses, if he takes on spiritual warfare, he will come to detest and disapprove of the passion that dominates him.

I believe that the data and conclusions presented in this doctoral thesis can be useful both to those who face homoerotic impulses and want to take on the spiritual struggle with the passion of homosexuality, as well as to members of clergy who care for spiritual children with such carnal impulses and who can find here possible answers to the doubts they have and landmarks in giving the necessary spiritual guidance. I say this because, on the occasion of the collected interviews, I noticed that some of the spiritual fathers were very well informed, mastering the subject, while others showed themselves to be open to aspects that they had not considered until then, because, until currently, they have not made their presence felt very much in our country. If I were to mention a concrete aspect, I would recall that some spiritual fathers were very categorical about the fact that homosexuality cannot be an involuntary sin except in

the case of homosexual abuse or rape, but speaking to them about children raised in couples formed by persons of same sex or about the different sex education programs in other countries that accustom children from an early age to the idea that homosexuality is a normal sexual behavior, I noticed that other perspectives opened up for them.

I by no means claim to have been able to comprehensively present the many and varied aspects that homosexuality raises. Nor did I set out to do this, seeking to focus only on the question of the etiology of homosexuality.

As a recommendation, I consider that an aspect that is worth taking into account by those interested in the subject of the etiology of homosexuality would be to consult people who manifest homoerotic tendencies, from Romania and beyond, to observe their perspective on the causality of homosexuality. In the elaboration of this work, I chose to use the testimonies existing up to this date in the specialized literature and the experience accumulated by the spiritual fathers following the relationship they had with their spiritual children.