



## The Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East issued a statement concerning Christian marriage



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The Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East adopted a document dedicated to issues of family ethics - **'Synodical Statement Concerning Christian Marriage and Issues of Human Sexuality'**. According to Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III in a letter addressed to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', 'issues of moral and spiritual nature are of growing concern to our Holy Synod, so we have deemed it appropriate to address such a statement to the fullness of the Church in order to instruct the faithful on the right path of moral Christian living.'

The Statement affirms the traditional teaching of the Assyrian Church of the East on marriage as 'the unbreakable union of one man and one woman who join their lives for the sake of bearing children, motivated by a common holy desire to live in perfection, in the light and love of Jesus Christ.' It is stated that 'there are only two life paths for a Christian to follow in order to attain salvation and sanctification in

Christ: "...either perfect holiness [consecrated celibacy] or lawful marriage adorned with the purity of childbearing.”

Those who wish to marry must be Christians and have no canonical impediments to their marriage (intimate ties, vows of celibacy or other marriage). They must be prepared ‘that the fruit of their life together may be posterity’ and for the ‘indissolubility’ of the union. Emphasising the indissolubility of marriage, the Synod points out that ‘the only exceptions are when one of the spouses dies or commits adultery’.

According to the teaching of the Assyrian Church of the East, ‘without the desire to have children, there can be no truly serious attitude towards Christian marriage.’ At the same time, ‘in a situation where physical conception is impossible due to physical pathology of one or both of the spouses, the will of God should be apprehended in prayer and fasting,’ and such a union is also seen as ‘gracious’ and ‘indestructible.’ Such families are encouraged to ‘find the manifestation of their parental dedication in great acts of charity and service and in raising children who deserve good parents.’ At the same time, the Synod considers it inadmissible to ‘seek the help of external partners to conceive or to use extracorporeal methods of conception’ but authorises ‘treatment’ which ‘should be limited to improving the internal reproductive capacity of the body’.

As a consequence, the Statement affirms that ‘under no circumstances can the Church of Christ bless or accept a “union” between two people of the same sex who do not have the natural, God-given physical capacity to procreate.’ Along with homosexuality, ‘premarital and extramarital relationships’ are condemned, which ‘constitute a serious sin, go against the design of the Creator from whom we have received the gift of sexuality, and mark a break with the Body of Christ, the Church.’

The Assyrian Church of the East especially insists on the need for the Church's blessing of marriage: ‘According to our canonical tradition, a man and woman who live together, but who do not accept the priest's blessing, the cup of blessing and the holy Cross in the presence of the baptised faithful, not only place themselves outside the Church's communion and community, but also deprive themselves of the rich graces bestowed in matrimony by Christ himself... Such unions, not blessed by the Church and outside the boundaries established by the Divine Word, need to be corrected for the salvation of those who are in them.’

Couples whose relationships are ‘outside the bounds of legitimate pious Christian practice’ are urged to

'turn to their priest and prepare to reform their lives and return to the path of life befitting those who in chastity and repentance receive Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ.' In doing so, 'the priest chooses the appropriate spiritual means and path of correction, whether it be by entering into a lawful marriage or by dissolving the union of the flesh.'

Failure to agree with these provisions, according to the decision of the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East, will result in the banning of clerics from clerical ministry and, in the absence of repentance, in expulsion from the ministry, and for the laity - excommunication from the Church.

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