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Challenges

for Christian Bioethics and Moral Theology,

in a pluralistic world

Edited by

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CONTENTS

Book Review

Editorial

Gabriel NOJE*

This special issue of the journal showcases the contributions of Orthodox theologians and researchers, both domestic and international, who are dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by advancements in the biomedical field and the current cultural context. As readers will discover, most of these studies focus on pressing bioethical issues related to the beginning and end of life, as well as ethical dilemmas that may arise during life, such as our relationship to the outcomes produced by artificial intelligence. We believe these studies will offer fresh and comprehensive Christian perspectives, fostering a better understanding of the moral and bioethical challenges we face.

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In his study, **Sorin Bute** starts by presenting the evolution of the Christian faith in the context of modernity and pluralism, emphasizing the impact of this change on universal values. The author argues that the disappearance of Christian universalism and the emergence of a diversified interpretation of reality have led to a pluralist ethic, which makes moral decision-making more difficult. He also proposes that Christian bioethics should define its meta-bioethical foundations and combine noetic and rational methods in order to properly address contemporary bioethical dilemmas. In this way, Sorin Bute analyzes the dual methodology of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, highlighting the link between charismatic and scientific theology, based on the distinction between the created and the uncreated. He emphasizes that this relationship is not separate, but interdependent, in which knowledge is realized through both reason and divine experience. Fr. Sorin Bute states that in Orthodox bioethics, the sanctity of life is the priority, seeking not only rational arguments, but a life in

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communion with God. Thus, Orthodox bioethics promotes a transformation of human nature and moral paradigms, through metanoia and asceticism, in order to allow the correct discernment of good and evil.

Petru Cernat's study examines the impact of modern reproductive technologies on human life and relationships, emphasizing the Orthodox Church's need for a pastoral response. Referring to the Orthodox Church of Greece's document on medically assisted reproduction, he notes that artificial fertilization techniques may offer hope to infertile couples but also raise ethical and spiritual concerns, potentially transforming a sacred act into a mechanical one. The Church acknowledges the desire to have children as natural and sacred but warns against the absolute pursuit of this desire, which may contradict divine will. The study shows that while the Church does not explicitly recommend assisted procreation, it seeks to offer compassionate guidance, supporting adoption and fertilization methods that respect human dignity and avoid the creation of surplus embryos. Father Petru Cernat also references recent documents from the Russian Orthodox Church, which permit in vitro fertilization (IVF) under specific conditions, excluding practices that produce surplus embryos or involve gamete donation, thus reinforcing traditional family values. The study further explores the moral dilemmas surrounding cryopreserved embryos, questioning the Church's stance on their potential adoption.

Magdalena Burlacu's study raises the question of the presence and use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the challenges it poses to human spiritual life. The author notes that the documents issued so far on the regulation and ethical standards for the use of AI in various domains have not considered the assessment of the potential effects that algorithm-based systems may have on the right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion. In addition, notes Magdalena Burlacu, the analysis of a European Union report on the link between artificial intelligence and human rights seems to confirm that attempts to regulate and validate the use of AI in spiritual life would be ineffective or at least delayed. In this regard, Magdalena Burlacu's article has the merit of raising the issue of the need to draft and adopt a set of recommendations and regulations on the use of artificial intelligence in the sphere of spiritual life. As the author points out, the formulation of basic ethical guidelines on the use of AI in religious life is even more urgent as the generation of a religious service by ChatGPT and the creation of a digital pastor accessible on ChatGPT Plus may lead to confusion in the understanding of such notions and realities as that of human consciousness. On the other hand, Magdalena Burlacu's study also answers other questions as to whether AI can be considered the image of God. The author's answer, based

on the principles of Christian anthropology, is negative and shows that AI does not have the capacities corresponding to direct human experience. AI has neither the experience of the soul nor of the body. In the last part, the study analyzes several ethical principles able to guide Christian communities regarding the use of artificial intelligence. The author argues that these principles must be clearly defined and responsibly applied.

Sorin Vulcănescu's article begins by highlighing the Christian perspective on death as a transition toward resurrection, rather than the end of existence, emphasizing that God created life, not death. The author goes on to discuss two primary approaches in confronting terminal illness: palliative care, intended to ease pain and support the patient, and assisted death. However, Father Vulcănescu argues that palliative care is a superior alternative, aligned with Christian values. His study presents palliative care as a real and dignified solution, contrasting it with euthanasia, which has strayed from Christian roots and become increasingly secularized. Palliative care is presented as an alternative that offers physical, psychological, social, and spiritual support to terminally ill patients and their families without hastening death. Its main purpose is to reduce suffering and facilitate a dignified death through a holistic approach that considers the patient's emotional and spiritual needs. This holistic model asserts that spiritual health positively impacts the patient's overall well-being, enhancing immune function, pain management, and quality of life. Palliative care integrates spirituality as an essential component of the support provided to terminal patients and their families, helping them find meaning in life and manage the existential stress associated with severe illness. The author points out that the Church plays an essential role through clergy who provide spiritual assistance, prepare patients to accept death, and support their families through mourning. He further notes that recent studies indicate that spiritual support brings benefits such as improved quality of life and reduced care costs, highlighting the importance of recognizing this type of support within medical institutions

In the first study of the *Varia* section, **Dejan Donev** focuses on the personality of Fritz Jahr, highlighting his contribution to the field of Bioethics. The author argues that Jahr can be called the "father of bioethics" as he was the first to propose the term "bioethics". Thus, in a 1926 study reflecting on the life sciences and the teaching of ethics, Fritz Jahr put forward the thesis that humans would extend their moral duties from their fellow humans to animals and plants. Jahr formulates the bioethical imperative and argues in support of it, citing St. Francis

of Assisi, Richard Wagner and Eduard von Hartmann, among many others. Dejan Donev emphasizes that the bioethical imperative is a transformation and extension of the Kantian categorical imperative. If for Kant, the foundation of the categorical imperative was the sacredness of the moral law, for Jahr, the bioethical imperative is based on the principle of the sacredness of life, in the sense of compassion towards all forms of life. The author also points out that the source of the bioethical imperative is to be found not only in Kantian moral philosophy, but also in the Bible, as an addition to the fifth commandment, which forbids killing. Dejan Donev also notes that although Jahr's vision of bioethics did not enjoy real success in his time, it is nevertheless much broader than Potter's, including human environments and the human biotope, for example communities and teams in factories and offices.

Claudiu Boia's study analyzes the Nazi occupation of Greece and its impact on Mount Athos, highlighting the monks' request for protection addressed to Adolf Hitler. The author emphasizes that the Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian monks demanded German intervention to restore their historical rights, in the context of the injustices suffered by non-Greek communities. Although Hitler refused to change the status of Mount Athos, many monks continued to believe that it would ensure their protection. The study also explores the logistical difficulties faced by monasteries during the occupation. An important part is devoted to an examination of the 1941 Nazi expedition to Mount Athos by Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), which aimed to appropriate cultural property in occupied territories. Coordinated by Professor Franz Dögler, the expedition included specialists from various fields who documented manuscripts and relics from Athonite monasteries. Despite their intentions of inventory, the monks received the delegation with hospitality, even asking for a portrait of Hitler. The result of this mission was the publication of Mönchsland Athos, which reflects both the scholarly value and Nazi propaganda.

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My thanks and gratitudine go to the contributors who responded positively to the invitation to submit an article for this thematic issue. I wish them continued success in their research. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Fr. Prof. Univ. Cristian Sonea, Executive Editor of this Journal, for the opportunity to propose and coordinate this special issue of *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai. Theologia Orthodoxa.*

Studies

Defining Christian Bioethics:
Foundations for Moral Decision-Making
in a Pluralistic World

Sorin BUTE[*]

ABSTRACT. This article examines the challenges faced by Christian bioethics in a pluralistic world. It explores the methodology of bioethics within the context of Christian theology, particularly Orthodox theology. It delineates a triangular research method encompassing biomedical facts, anthropological insights, and ethical principles. Moreover, it discusses the dual methodology of Orthodox Church Fathers, emphasising the interplay between reason and faith. The article argues for a holistic approach to moral decision-making, integrating experiential encounter with divine truth alongside rational analysis. It underscores the significanceof conversion, asceticism, and liturgical experience in guiding ethical discernment, ultimately advocating for a shift from being-for-death to being-for-life as the foundation for moral clarity inbioethics.

Keywords: bioethics, pluralism, methodology, Christian theology, moral decision-making

Introduction

Faith in a personal God who created man in His own image, and faith that God himself became man in Jesus Christ, led to the birth of faith in an absolute and universal Truth, both of created reality and of man. Jesus Christ, the one who said of Himself that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, is for Christians the Archetype, the model after which man was created, the goal towards which he is directed, and the One in relation to whom man can attain

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the goal of his perfection, of his deification in Christ. "You are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:28), and "I am living no longer I, but Christ is living in me" (Gal. 2:20), said St Paul. Thus, the concept of progress means for Christians transfiguration according to the divine model, whose seal they bear through creation, and who stands by them and helps them in this progress. *Imitatio Christi* and *life in Christ* at the same time. A single absolute Truth, transcendent but also immanent through incarnation, determines both the moral life of christians and their interpretation of reality and the world. Thus, Christian universalism came into being.

Modernity, through the repudiation of Christianity, through the so-called "disenchantment of the world" and the "death of God", has slowly led to the disappearance of Christian universalism, the disappearance of faith in an absolute Truth and the emergence of a pluralistic interpretation of reality and man. If during the Enlightenment, man still had faith in a universal truth discovered by reason and in a common human nature, the recent postmodern man no longer recognizes any universal value, any common truth, denying human nature itself. Jean Francois Lyotard's definition of postmodernism is famous in this sense: "incredulity towards metanarratives", where metanarratives are understood as totalizing stories about history and the goals of the human race that ground and legitimise knowledges and cultural practises[1]. Thus, our world is becoming more and more pluralistic, although it preserves, as in a palimpsest, traces of universal Christian values, still present in social structures and in the collective mind of the heirs of the old European Christendom.

This pluralism has led to what H. T. Engelhardt calls "moral strangers", people from different cultural groups who may share no ethical presuppositions in common. This ethical pluralism has also led to the emergence of bioethics that are alien to each other, which, starting from different ethical and anthropological presuppositions, sometimes even diametrically opposed, lead to different or even antagonistic bioethical conclusions. In this pluralistic framework, Christian bioethics, founded precisely on faith in an absolute and universal Truth, is often considered fundamentalist and anachronistic. However, in a pluralistic world, even those who do not believe in relativistic pluralism must have a voice.

Beyond the interpretation of concrete bioethical cases, I think that what Christian bioethics must do in the first place in this pluralistic context is to define its meta-bioethical foundations: the methods of interpretation and decision-making in concrete bioethical cases. This is why in this article I aim to clarify two things. First, to define the method of research in bioethics, a method that corresponds to the orthodox conception of knowledge, and then to analyse the

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard, *Condiția postmodernă. Raport asupra cunoașterii*, translated by Ciprian Mihaly (Cluj-Napoca: Idea, ²2003).

problem of the method of moral decision-making in bioethics, the way, that is, of moving from *being* to *ought-to-be*, from the concrete data of anthropology and medicine, to moral decisions in bioethics.

The research method in bioethics

Christian Truth is a self-revealing personal Truth. Consequently, it reveals itself to men. Truth is not deciphered by the pursuits of human reason alone, and then conceptualised by logical abstraction. That would be a reductionist attitude to truth. Revealing itself through love, in a movement from God to man and not vice versa, Truth only allows itself to be discovered in love. This kind of knowledge goes beyond the sphere of intellectual curiosity justifiable through objectivity.

Not in objectivity can truth be known, but in subjective participation, through *koinonia*, in communion, in truth. Consequently, truth becomes life, that is, a life event. Truth understood as God's gift to man, participates in the transfiguration of the life of the one who is in search of truth and wishes to become the *you* of the loving communication of the divine *I.*

As far as the scientific research method of bioethics is concerned, without prejudice to the distinction of the planes of knowledge into created and uncreated, to which correspond two different but complementary instruments, reason and faith, Christian bioethics of orthodox foundation can adopt the so-called triangular method, determined by three connecting points. The first is the "exposition of the biomedical fact" [2] the second "the anthropological meaning", and the third "the principles and rules of conduct"; biology-anthropology-ethics.

The method of moral decision-making in bioethics

The peculiarity of Christian bioethics interpreted within the horizon of meaning of orthodox anthropology, regarding the method of moral decision-making, is based on the on the profile of orthodox ethics. Since man's current nature is a fallen nature, clothed in the robes of skin as the natural consequences of sin that determine the condition of human existence as being-for-death, the bioethical method cannot simply follow the transition from such a being to moral ought-to-be. *Being* in the condition of being-for-death cannot justly

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[2] Ellio Sgreccia, *Manuale di bioetica,* vol. 1 (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, [3]1999), 63.

ground *ought-to-be* through reason alone. This does not mean that orthodox theology totally distrusts human reason in the exercise of moral decision-making, but that this reason belonging to being-for-death must first be purified and united with divine Reason, to be able to rightly decide what is good and what is evil from the height reached in contemplating Truth itself.

Accordingly:

> "We are brought to a fundamental contrast between secular and traditional Christian moral reflection. (...) The first involves a discursive rationality, which is forever bound within the sphere of immanence. The second is noetic and claims on experiential encounter with the Truth, who is personal. The first in being secular engages no transcendent faith. The second claims form of knowledge that breaks through the horizon of immanence. Again, this is not to discount the place and importance of discursive rationality. Discursive rationality brings analytic clarity. It establishes lines of valid argument. It elaborates, explicates, and organizes. Yet, by itself it cannot disclose the substance of truth. In particular, it cannot establish a content-full, moral vision".[3]

Consequently, Christian bioethics, based on orthodox theology, states that the method of moving from *being* to *ought-to-be* is not exclusively a rational method. It must be combined with the method of moving from *being-for-death* to *being-in-life*. The dual methodology of the Eastern Fathers theorized in the field of theology will in this case be assumed as the method of Christian bioethics. Consequently, the bioethical method of moral decision-making is based on two complementary methods: the noetic and the rational. The former helps man to move from *being- for-death* to *being-in-life,* and the latter helps him to process, explain and organize the participatory knowledge acquired, with a view to moral decisions in concrete bioethical cases.

The dual methodology of the Fathers

A pertinent analysis of the dual theological methodology of the Orthodox Church Fathers is provided by Nikos Matsoukas in the first volume of his Dogmatic and Symbolic Orthodox Theology.[4]

> "This methodology of the orthodox fathers comprises two lines, functionally interconnected, that point the way to truth. These two lines are charismatic theology and scientific theology. They find their foundation in the distinction

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[3] Hugo T. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 2000), 188-189.

[4] Nikos Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatica e Simbolica Ortodossa. Introduzione alla gnoseologia teologica ortodossa*, vol. 1 (Roma: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1995), 97.

> between created and uncreated, which the Orthodox tradition has embraced, with different modes of expression, from its earliest beginnings. In this sense, scientific theology refers to creation and charismatic theology to the uncreated"[5].

This distinction between created and uncreated, however, does not mean separation, since "creation, drawing its origin from the energy of the divine and not from the divine essence, is sustained and progresses only on the basis of divine energy. Thus, becoming is not defined by ideal forms or ideas or archetypes, but by the 'reasons for creation' of created beings. These 'reasons' indicate the will of God and are inherent in the energy of the divine will. The relationship always remains 'energetic' (energeiakòn)".[6]

Consequently, even knowledge of the world cannot only be realized through knowing the laws, ideas or archetypes that underpin it, but also through relational experience. This experience is the main method of knowledge, knowledge that is then expressed through reason, in an analogical and symbolic manner, generating the second, *rational-discursive* method.

The first aspect that illuminates the Father's dual methodology is, therefore, the distinction between the created and the uncreated, between the natural and the supernatural, to which correspond two different but complementary ways of knowing: reason and faith. The natural and the supernatural represent two levels of reality that intertwine and identify with each other to a point, due to the presence of uncreated energies in the natural. It is one thing to seek the created and another to experience the uncreated. There is a natural functional relationship between them. The created and the uncreated, the physical and the metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural, are not separate but distinct and at the same time united in a functional relationship of complementarity. The link between the created and the uncreated is the uncreated divine energy. Through this inner bond between the natural and the supernatural, the rupture and confusion between reason and faith are overcome, since both the distinction, as different instruments for knowledge of the created and the uncreated, and the complementary unity, as they both express two intertwining realities, are maintained.

This dual methodology of the Fathers was theorised in the East by St. Gregory Palamas, from whom Matsoukas quotes abundantly. By emphasising the method of experiencing God through uncreated energies, St. Gregory Palamas, and today Orthodox theology, are accused of devaluing the importance of rational knowledge. Instead, the Palamasites were only stating the fact that the rational method should be considered neither the only nor the most important. Their fear in this regard was well-founded, since today, rational

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5 N. Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatica e Simbolica Ortodossa...*, 98.
6 N. Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatica e Simbolica Ortodossa...*, 103.

scientific knowledge seems to be the only method of knowledge accepted by today's modern and post-modern society. It is, however, the only method that secular bioethics proposes when making moral decisions.

Matsoukas defends the use of the dialectical method in the East as well:

> "Palamas not only accepts syllogisms, dialectics and theological science, but also tries to lay down the rules of their proper function.(...) The divergence between Palamas and the scholastics consists in the fact that he does not accept, in any way, the principle that the dialectical method can scrutinise uncreated things; according to him, it can only investigate created things.(...) The value of cataphatic or positive theology is relative and secondary. Nevertheless, the fathers of the Orthodox Church never rejected it as useless, but accepted it within the functional unity that exists between the dialectical method and the demonstrative method, between theological science and living experience, founded on the vision of the divine presence within the world and history".[7]

Consequently, in orthodox theology as well as in its bioethics, the two distinct methods of knowledge, the dialectical method rooted in reason and the demonstrative method rooted in apophatic experience, are complementary but also hierarchical. The first is the method of experience in faith and the second, the dialectical method.

> "According to orthodox theologians, philosophy can in no way form the basis and starting point of theology. (...) It precedes transformation, life experience, contemplation; works and life are prior to the theology of words and examples"[8].

For Orthodox theology, faith is not just an argument about things not seen but, in its highest form, a vision of uncreated things. It is not a formal adherence but an experience of the relationship according to grace with God. This methodological hierarchy that gives precedence to the experience of faith over rational analysis also applies to Christian bioethics and the methods it proposes with a view to the right moral decisions to be taken.

> "This experiential character of traditional Christian theology has implications for its bioethics. Traditional Christianity has not sought to devise better arguments to prove God's existence or discursively to discover the character of divine commands. Instead, the cardinal question has been: how can I live so that as to experience God and know the content of the moral life (including that which bears on health care)?"[9]

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[7] N. Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatica e Simbolica Ortodossa...*, 112.
[8] N. Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatica e Simbolica Ortodossa...*, 117.
[9] H.T. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 163.

In the precedence of the charismatic method, as Matsoukas calls the experiential or noetic method, supported, however, by the dialectical method, lies the specificity of the method of Christian bioethics based on orthodox theology, as opposed to other types of bioethics. The source of morality and of right moral decisions is the sanctity of life, sanctity understood not only as the renewal of human nature according to its original state, which would again lead us, in some way, to a primacy of normative human reason, but sanctity understood as the overcoming of nature within nature, as divinization through union with Christ in grace. A normative bioethics has a content that can be discovered not only through sound argumentation but rather through openness of the soul before grace.

> "When scholarly analyses claim a priority over the pursuit of holiness, one loses the central connection to holiness as the source of canonical moral and religious content. (...) A traditional Christian bioethics will not accept the primary contribution of theology to bioethics as that of academic refinement, analysis, and argument instead of theological experience"[10].

This state of holiness is not merely the perfecting of human nature through the maximum enhancement of its natural and autonomous powers, but a participation in God's holiness, a vision of God's uncreated grace in which man becomes "a *partaker of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4). Deification is the authentic way of life in which man experiences the life of God through the One who took on human nature and deified it. Discernment in the moral decisions of those in the fallen state, unsanctified as the norm of the human, comes from tasting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The discernment of the deified saint comes from tasting from the tree of life.

Tasting from the tree of knowledge of good and evil does not offer the perspective of the transcendent as the horizon that gives meaning to life. Should man in this fallen state accept the existence of the transcendent, he does not experience it and consequently has no true knowledge of it. In this case, moral decisions cannot rightly take into account the living experience of God, therefore a more complex process is necessary to make the right moral decisions that includes conversion, humility, asceticism, ecclesial-communal maturation of the person and liturgical- sacramental and Eucharistic experience.

God's perspective on the world and man constitutes the truth of them, and in drawing on that perspective of truth together with God, through union with Him and the reception of uncreated grace in the Holy Spirit one can have right discernment in moral decisions.

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[10] H.T. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 207.

Placed on the axis of creation-fall-redemption-divinisation, arriving at just moral decisions requires first of all the renewal of fallen human nature into autonomy, to the initial state of deified humanity, and then its elevation to the moral likeness of God, to deification. This happens simultaneously by two complementary ways or methods: anthropodicy and theodicy. Anthropodicy is the way that leads from man to God and includes as a method the liturgical-ascetical conversion of consciousness and rational analysis. Theodicy is the way that leads from God to man and grafts divine teachings into man and leads him, through the Spirit, to all truth. The distinction we make between anthropodicy and theodicy is purely methodological. Both God and man go towards each other. The prodigal son re-enters in himself and returns to his Father, but also the Father, "while he was still far away", goes to meet him and makes him put on "the most beautiful garment", the garment of light of divinisation, which Christ wore on Tabor. With the return to his true nature, man passes from being-for-death to being-for-life: this son of mine was dead and has risen, was lost and has been found. Receiving then the garment of light of divinisation, he participates to the divine light.

From *being-for-death* to *being-for-life*

To return to the initial state, from being for death to being for life, man needs conversion and penance, i.e. *metanoia*, the transfiguration of the mind, and asceticism, the working of the virtues as "human forms of the divine attributes"[11]. To characterise the condition of fallen man, Christian theology has made use of the concept of sin, a concept that has sometimes been misinterpreted in the course of time, thus leading to the reduction of sin-consciousness in modern and post-modern man, so that secular ethics and bioethics move from being to ought-to-be considering being in its pure natural state as normative for discerning good from evil.

> "We usually attribute criminal connotations to sin: we believe that it is disobedience to God's commandments and that its consequences are God's punishments. For the orthodox biblical an patristic tradition, on the other hand, original sin, like all sin, is placed in a natural realm"[12].

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[11] Massimo il Confessore, *Questiones ad Thallasium,* P.G. 90, 321B.

[12] Panayotis Nellas, *Voi siete dei. Antropologia dei Padri della Chiesa* (Roma: Città Nuova,1993), 191.

Sin does not mean a simple moral failing, but a general failing with ontological effects. It does not consist in the number of sinful acts but in the total loss of life. Sin is "a ruin" in the stricted sense of the word, which man perceives as the absence of God, of other persons, of himself and of creatures. In a word, as an absence of goal and purpose, and, therefore, as unbearable loneliness and anguish[13]. The life of fallen man is manifested in its transience, absurdity and irrationality.

Distanced from God and without His life, passions are born in man:

> "the impassible faculties of the soul - which in created man appear as windows that open to the uncreated God, and as vessels from which the noetic functions draw the grace of God that nourishes and vivifies the whole man - by their subjection to the body are transformed into passible functions, so that the life of the sinful soul is constituted by *concupiscence*"[14].

This subjection of man to the passions, generating the condition of being-for-death, weakens all his spiritual capacities, reason, will and feeling, which severely affects his ability to know the world and himself, and implicitly the ability to discern good and evil. "Knowledge, which in the functionality conforming to it is perfect communion between the one who knows and that which is known, in the condition contrary to its nature is reduced to mere observation, i.e. to an accumulation of empirical information relating to the object of knowledge and a simple syllogistic reworking of the data acquired"[15].

From this state, man is assiduously called to return, with a view to his renewal. This return takes place through a certain change of mind, metanoia, conversion, through asceticism and liturgical-sacramental communion with God. "It was man who departed from God: and it is he who is invited to return. This return, this transposition into God's space, which goes hand in hand with the healing, restructuring and transformation of human existence, constitutes the core of repentance and the content of the entire spiritual struggle"[16].

Although in a fallen, torn state, man can keep his existence open to God and can heal by starting with conversion as a change of mind. Metanoia predisposes man to understand the will of God, to moral discernment: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind in order to know what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

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[13] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 197.
[14] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 192.
[15] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 194.
[16] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 191-192.

Asceticism is the way by which knowledge becomes love and the mind enlightened by faith and warmed by love, through the descent of the mind into the heart, acquires the gift of discernment that makes true knowledge possible. In a world where man's current state is considered natural, that is, conforming to his autonomous nature, conversion and asceticism no longer find utility. Where iconic ontology is understood as the expression of authentic human truth and the state of autonomy as the state of man clothed in the robes of skin in their ambivalent sense, conversion and asceticism reveal their central significance not only for man, but also for the whole of human history and civilisation.

> "These spiritual activities constitute the struggle through which the faithful mortify within themselves and within their works the sinful autonomy, the only evil and repugnant element to be rejected [...], they restore man and his works to primal beauty, they tilt the mirror towards the real sun. And so, man's achievements are illuminated and enlivened"[17].

Conversion and asceticism are the vectors of the full fulfillment of the authentic, divine-human meaning of man. They offer the possibility of changing the anthropological, social and cultural paradigms that have led to the moral and biological degradation of human life. Not only do they offer the possibility of discernment with regard to the workings of life, but they substantially change these works by turning them towards the authentic fulfillment of the meaning of existence as union with God, i.e. divinisation, of both man and the whole of creation. This union with God is prefigured but also fulfilled in the liturgy. The liturgical act opens before the faithful the way of conversion, of return, it calls him and orients him towards the concrete work of metanoia for his healing, renewal and perfection. The way of the man who limits his existence to the margins of creation, closed in front of his transcendent dimension aimed at living the divine tropos (mode of existence), the way of the autonomous man leads to despair, absurdity and nonsense.

> "This liturgical, ascetical and Eucharistic method was applied by the Fathers of the Church and thus saved the great creations of the civilisation of their age. Through this method, ancient Greek thought, for example, was baptised and Christianised, and was transfigured into an expression of divine, transcendent and inaccessible truth"[18].

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[17] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 102-103.
[18] P. Nellas, *Voi siete dei...*, 102-103.

This liturgical, ascetical and eucharistic method can be the method through which Christian bioethics can help not only to improve the quality of life, which in its highest limits always remains fall, but to change life itself with its paradigms, to bring one's own human nature into the authentic self. Only this perspective of a new life as being-for-life offers man the possibility of discerning rightly between good and evil. Christian bioethics does not disregard what man has become in his fallen state, but also considers in making moral decisions what he should be.

The 'natural' man is a fallen man, with all the consequences that this entails for his spiritual faculties, which can no longer form the basis of a righteous moral life. He first needs ascetic purification, self-denial and union with Christ to acquire moral discernment. Purification and union with Christ take place in the liturgical and ecclesial sphere through an ecclesial and ascetic maturation of the human person. Not yet purified, the so-called natural man reasons within the horizon of his passions that clog up his decision-making capacity. Consequently, "the project of truly knowing from a moral point of view is at its core the project of conversion from self, from the love of self, to the love of God and neighbor in order to experience God"[19].

Conclusions

In this article, I provided an in-depth examination of the relationship between Christian faith, particularly within the Orthodox tradition, and bioethics. I highlighted how the Christian belief in a personal God, who created humanity in His image and became incarnate in Jesus Christ, fosters a commitment to an absolute and universal Truth. This Truth shapes the moral life of Christians and informs their interpretation of reality, contrasting sharply with the pluralistic and relativistic worldview that emerged in modernity and postmodernity. Modernity's rejection of Christianity and the rise of a pluralistic interpretation of reality have led to the erosion of Christian universalism and the emergence of moral relativism. This has created ethical fragmentation, where different cultural groups, or "moral strangers," operate from divergent ethical foundations, often leading to conflicting bioethical conclusions.

I have also advocated for Christian bioethics grounded in Orthodox theology, which emphasizes a dual methodology combining rational analysis and noetic (experiential) knowledge. This approach involves both intellectual

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[19] H.T. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 162.

reasoning and a deeper, experiential communion with divine Truth, enabling a more profound moral discernment that transcends the limitations of secular ethics.

Christian bioethics must navigate the pluralistic context by clearly defining its meta-bioethical foundations, rooted in the Orthodox understanding of knowledge. This includes the application of a dual methodology in moral decision-making, where rationality is complemented by experiential knowledge of God. The goal is not just to make moral decisions based on reason alone but to guide humanity from a state of being-for-death to being-for-life, aligning human nature with its divine purpose through asceticism, conversion, and participation in God's grace.

In essence, I have emphasized that Christian bioethics offers a unique and essential perspective in the contemporary pluralistic world, one that must be both respected and articulated clearly, even as it challenges the relativistic norms of the age.

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Moral Questions About *In Vitro* Fertilization.
Can There Be a Pastoral Approach?

Petru CERNAT[*]

ABSTRACT. For Christian communities, medically assisted procreation is an active challenge. Whether we are talking about techniques that use *in vivo fertilization*, or whether we are talking about techniques that use *in vitro fertilization*, the reservations from the perspective of Christian morality are obvious. However, in the last 25 years, the Orthodox Church (at least the one in Greece and the one in Russia) has felt the need to compose documents that evaluate these techniques and that provide pastoral guidance to those who cannot assume life without children or adoption. This study outlines the steps that the Church recommends before using in vitro fertilization techniques and invites to reflect on embryo adoption.

Keywords: IVF, Orthodox Church, pastoral approach, human embryo

Introduction

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries are marked by numerous scientific advances, including in the medical field. Some discoveries make it possible to intervene in areas of life that until now were inaccessible to humans. Resuscitation, for example, makes it possible to postpone the moment of death. Organ transplantation broadens the idea that a person's body can belong to a single subject. In vitro fertilization techniques have been developed to make it possible for an infertile couple to have a child. The latter techniques change the way a person relates to the way of procreation.

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In the face of this biotechnological offer, we can note how loaded the agenda of contemporary man's moral questioning is, but also the fact that the speed with which technologies develop exceeds man's ability to respond to the ethical implications due to the new human situations. In this context, the present study tries to re-evaluate in vitro fertilization from the perspective of Christian morality and to emphasize the importance of a pastoral vision of this technology with the help of official documents of the Orthodox Church in Greece and Russia.

Moral Interrogations

Today, more and more people are turning to in vitro fertilization (IVF) to overcome the consequences of infertility. IVF, however, opens the way, based on the principle of the slippery slope[1], to other practices such as: preimplantation genetic diagnosis[2]. Given that modern society seems to emphasize the quality of life, that some genetic diseases make you "less human", then the prenatal diagnosis is not a simple "diagnosis", but an eventual concrete decision of the parents to keep the child or not if he does not pass this quality threshold. Therefore, the prevention of genetic diseases is no longer a pre-conception reality, but a post-conception one, sometimes resulting in "therapeutic" induced abortion (in the case of prenatal diagnosis) or with the destruction of embryos (obtained in vitro). Prospective parents can also utilize preimplantation genetic diagnosis to prevent the transmission of certain mutations to their offspring and thereby reducing the need for terminating pregnancies affected by these mutations. Some parents-to-be regularly choose to select their child's sex and decide whether to have twins. However, preimplantation diagnosis can also be used in order to obtain a child with certain characteristics[3]: for example, "savior brothers" children[4], who following preimplantation diagnosis and immunological

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[1] "A moral position through which a small first step that violates a general moral and ethical principle inevitably leads to a chain of events that are often immoral, and this not only through the simple passage of time but through exponential growth and the circular effect of habituation and escalation" – Sebastian Moldovan, *Eseuri de Bioetică* (Sibiu: Editura Astra Museum, 2013), 20.

[2] There are 2 types of prenatal diagnosis: invasive and non-invasive. For a detailed medical explanation see: Maria Luisa di Pietro, *Bioetica, educația și familia*, traducere de dr. Gema Bacoanu și pr. Iosif Agiurgioaiei (Iași: Editura Sapientia, 2019), 178.

[3] Robert Klitzman talks extensively about the impact of these technologies on human procreation in Robert Klitzman, *Designing Babies. How Technology is Changing the Ways We Create Children* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[4] The first child – "savior brother" was born in 2011 in France. See: Fr. Cosmin Lazăr, *Homo fabricatus? Statutul embrionului uman din perspectivă ortodoxă, în contextul biotehnologiilor contemporane* (Alba Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2022), 179.

compatibility are used utilitarianly as donors for already born children suffering from certain diseases[5].

Thus, in the face of infertility, man can choose between four paths, some of which are of Life, others of death[6]:

> "(1) the continuation of natural procreative behaviour, with the hope that this will one day produce a birth, possibly with recourse to other medical procedures, which do not entail a risk of further loss;
>
> 2) resorting to IVF in conditions of maximum efficiency, with the acceptance of practically inevitable losses;
>
> 3) resorting to IVF with a protocol for conceiving and transferring as few embryos as possible, with the risk of not having one birth per pregnancy.
>
> 4) the renunciation of procreation".[7]

On the one hand, in the practice of the Christian life, those who take the first or last path are urged to direct their energy towards helping poor families, supporting children at school, creating a spiritual family (godparents), or even adoption. On the other hand, Christian Tradition speaks of the weight of a childless life and of the tensions that can arise between husband and wife because of this:

> "You all know, of course, that the absence of sons is a misfortune for women that is difficult to bear, especially because of their men. For many men are foolish enough to blame their wives for not being able to bear children.... Even though they know that their reproaches are unjust, they are carried away by anger, they are contemptuous and they treat their wives badly."[8]

The child is the gift of God received as a result of the conjugal union of the two spouses. The separation between sexuality and procreation remains a challenge of extracorporeal fertilization despite the biotechnological development and refinement of this technique. The birth of a child is not only a mechanical act of the joint between an egg and a spermatozoon, (*opus naturae*) which denotes a biological reductionism, but it is the joint between two persons (*opus personarum*), and the fruit of this meeting is the child[9]. Artificiality is not in itself negative. The two spouses can resort to medical treatment against infertility, stimulation of ovulation, various surgical procedures. Artificiality becomes negative since it

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[5] Sebastian Moldovan, "Și care este copilul meu? Opțiuni parentale în fertilizarea *in vitro* și relevanța lor pentru o etică a procreației," *Revista Teologică* 30/3 (2019): 153-154.

[6] It is understood that from the perspective of Christian morality.

[7] S. Moldovan, "Și care este copilul meu? Opțiuni parentale în fertilizarea *in vitro* și relevanța lor pentru o etică a procreației," 150.

[8] St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Anne*, I, 4.

[9] Maria Luisa di Pietro, *Bioetica, educația și familia...*, 132.

excludes the person. That is why homologous intrauterine insemination procedures or homologous IVF[10] are accepted by some Orthodox and Catholic bioethicists[11] under the conditions of the golden rule of *in vitro fertilization*: any embryo obtained must be assumed and transferred to implantation.

Fr. John Breck wonders if the moral act is absolute or relative, that is, if the circumstances in which the action is performed somehow influence the morality of an action and if all our actions can be moral, good or moral, bad without circumstances[12]. In relation to the subject of our study, we wonder if the problem of separation between procreation and sexuality established by *in vitro fertilization* is clearly immoral, regardless of the circumstances in which it is performed. If the wife and husband live in Christ and in the Church, the unitive dimension is present in every conjugal act, the conscience with which they resort to medically assisted procreation has resources in their love and in their love for God. The way in which they resort to the *in vitro fertilization* procedure is not a selfish one, "with rights over the child", but with respect for any human embryo that, being brought to life, necessarily is transferred to implantation.

As it was emphasized, those who resort to IVF will be different people than in the version in which they would have waited for the nature to express the will of the Creator on its own, and those who decide to resort to IVF only if they can avoid its specific losses will be other parents than in the version of accepting a procedure with maximum medical chances of success, but with the inevitable selection of some unborn in favor of others. If the results of the options of the parental project, which follows the number and biological quality of children, are uncertain, what is certainly acquired is a certain moral quality of the parents[13]. According to the Christian moral tradition, especially that of Eastern Christianity, the true victim of an evil deed is not the one who suffers it innocently, but the one who commits it. This is because, in general, the first and most important implication of any human action is its effect on the one who performs it, since through every choice and every action we determine ourselves[14].

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[10] Which uses biological material from within the couple.

[11] Лев Ляуш, "Этические проблемы аспекты «суррогатного материнства»: Православие и проблемы биоэтики," Дмитрий Смирнов et alii (eds.). *Издательский Совет Русской Православной Церкви* (Москва, 2017): 430; Isidor Chinez, *Bioetica. Responsabilitatea faţă de viaţa umană* (Iaşi: Editura Sapientia, 2015), 148.

[12] John Breck, "Privire asupra Bioeticii: punctul de vedere al unui teolog creştin," John Breck et ali., *Bioetica şi taina persoanei*, traducere de Nicoleta Petuhov (Bucureşti: Editura Bizantină, 2006), 57-70.

[13] S. Moldovan, "Şi care este copilul meu? Opţiuni parentale în fertilizarea *in vitro* şi relevanţa lor pentru o etică a procreaţiei," 160-161.

[14] S. Moldovan, "Şi care este copilul meu? Opţiuni parentale în fertilizarea *in vitro* şi relevanţa lor pentru o etică a procreaţiei," 160-161.

Towards a pastoral approach

The new technological possibilities undermine the mystery of the life and holiness of the human being and affect interpersonal relationships. Thus, they increasingly influence the lives of believers who feel the need for guidance and support from the Church. At the same time, representatives of society, legislative bodies, parliamentary groups, as well as the medical world need a well-justified word from the Church.

The field of artificial fertilization, according to the 2005 document of the Greek Orthodox Church, is of great importance, from both a psychological and social perspective, and has a huge spiritual significance. The document acknowledges that modern reproductive techniques can fulfill the hopes of infertile couples and satisfy their profound desire for parenthood. But also point out that, while this can strengthen the cohesion of the married couple and intensify the sense of harmony in family life, it can also give rise to various ethical, medical, psychological, legal and social problems. These problems are the result of the mechanization of one of the most personal and deeply spiritual and sacred acts of the human being. Their extent and diversity vary according to the techniques used, the conditions under which they are applied, and the inherent uncontrollable possibilities and inevitable consequences[15]. Therefore, in *the introduction* of the document it is recalled that the purpose of taking a position is not to restrict the freedom of believers within the limits of certain guidelines, but rather to contribute to a deep and thorough understanding of the various problems arising from assisted reproduction, which can lead them to a more mature and responsible decision-making. Moreover, although the document received the approval of the Holy Synod, it does not represent a circular and has not been officially distributed to the clergy and faithful. It is not a text with an undeniable ecclesiastical authority, but, on the contrary, its publication is meant to initiate the debate on the issue of assisted reproduction[16].

The document starts with the fact that the desire to have children is natural and sacred. This is also confirmed by the bodily constitution of the woman, which expresses the fact that the entire existence of the woman is oriented towards the reproductive function: "the woman exists anatomically, physiologically and

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[15] Bioethics Committee of the Holy Synod of Greece, "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," I, 1, translated from English by Mihaela Draghici, *Revista Teologică* 30/3 (2019): 254.

[16] The analysis of the document is also presented by Metropolitan Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou, "The Greek Orthodox position on the ethics of assisted reproduction," *Reproductive biomedicine online* 17 (2008): 25-33.

sentimentally for the embryo, pregnancy and the birth of children".[17] As a result, infertility and childlessness can become an unbearable burden, which can cause intense mental disorders, social difficulties and disruption of harmony between spouses. At the same time, however, the Church sees man not only in his natural biological identity, but also in his infinite spiritual possibilities, which is why she opposes the idea that infertility is a form of disability or an unsolvable social defect. Often, couples who do not have children show a clear spiritual orientation and are prolific in various areas of social and spiritual life[18]. From this derives the vocation of the Church and priests to help both to cultivate the faith that, while the birth of a child is a great blessing, infertility does not place couples on a lower level, nor does it harm their relationship or annul their marriage, and to minimize the indiscreet pressures coming from the family environment towards infertile couples[19].

Like any other absolutization of a human desire, the desire to have children at any cost also hides the risk of transforming a natural desire into a stubborn will that can oppose the divine will. Any attempt to cure infertility would also leave room for a humble acceptance of eventual failure. Orthodox anthropology shows that the origin of every man who bears the seal of the image of God is based on the human will, but, equally, on the divine will. Contemporary technology is a great blessing for man, if it is used with prudence and respect; at the same time, however, it can also give man the possibility of opposing God's will, as it is made known in His natural laws. In this case, man can either hinder the fulfillment of God's will, or he can persist in doing his own will, in defiance of divine approval. Thus, technological progress often turns desires into needs, which makes the struggle for spiritual freedom more difficult[20].

In evaluating IVF techniques, the document reveals the reasons why the Church expresses its reservations: asexual conception (dissociation between the conjugal act and reproduction), surplus and cryopreserved embryos, extracorporeal fertilization (in the absence of parents, it can open the way to infinite possibilities of unnatural and immoral fertilization), the possibility of intervention and genetic modification before implantation[21]. Beyond these reservations, the Orthodox Church cannot agree[22] with heterologous IVF[23], surrogacy, IVF in the case of

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[17] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IV, 11-12, 256.
[18] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IV, 13-14, 256.
[19] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IV, 17, 257; XIV, 72, 268.
[20] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IV, 15; 18-19, 257.
[21] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IX, 37, 260-261.
[22] N. Hatzinikolaou, "The Greek Orthodox position on the ethics of assisted reproduction," 28-30.
[23] It involves egg and/or sperm donation.

single women, the use of male biological material frozen after the death of the husband, IVF during menopause, IVF in the case of homosexual couples, preimplantation diagnosis, ICSI,[24] reproductive cloning.

Of particular importance is the answer regarding the creation of surplus embryos (which can be cryopreserved, used for a subsequent pregnancy, donated, destroyed or used in experiments): "Orthodox anthropology cannot justify the existence of embryos that are independent of the state of pregnancy".[25] These restraints and prohibitions do not stem from the Church's fear of change or from the fact that it would be against new discoveries. She strongly rejects the lack of respect for creation and for the human person, as well as "the desacralization of the institution of the family. Conception is the altar of life; it is not fitting to step into it without being animated by respect and fear for God".[26] For this reason, the Church avoids establishing rules or pronouncing excommunications in bioethical matters. In principle, she leaves them open to reflection, while indicating the direction and spirit of the approach to each individual case. It does not give a generalized definition of God's will, but gives everyone the chance to find it in their own life[27].

In a pastoral spirit, the Church recognizes that in principle she cannot recommend medically assisted procreation as a solution for infertility because it is not within her competence to approve such decisions. However, it is her duty to face this reality that has arisen independently of her will, basing her attitude more on her spiritual dispensation than on her theological precision. Thus, if she is asked for her opinion, she must express her teaching freely and clearly. Thus, because today's parents are not only under the pressure of the immense challenge of reproductive techniques, but also show limited patience and reduced reserves of faith and inner strength, the Church proposes several steps: 1) her word must be full of spirit and truth, but at the same time it must also be full of empathy and compassion; 2) to emphasize the importance of preserving the sacredness of marriage and to teach those who are married to leave room for the manifestation of God's grace upon them; 3) to inform believers thoroughly and regularly about the new methods and to highlight the spiritual

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[24] Intracytoplasmic sperm injection - a method that improves the results of artificial intervention in reproduction, but, at the same time, it further limits the role of natural selection - which often works in a protective manner - since the fertilization of the egg is not done in a sperm environment with many spermatozoa, but with a preselected spermatozoon - Samir N. Babayev, Chan Woo Park, Orhan Bukulmez, "Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection Indications: How Rigorous?," *Seminars in Reproductive Medicine* 32/4 (2014): 283-285.

[25] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," IX, 40, 261.

[26] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," X, 58, 265.

[27] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," XIII, 69, 267.

problems they cause; 4) clearly explain why they find it difficult to bless the practice of assisted reproduction; 5) to recommend adoption in the case of couples who cannot accept, for various reasons, the problem of their infertility; 6) if adoption is not possible, then the Church can accept, in the spirit of her dispensation, fertilization techniques that do not involve the problem of surplus embryos, or any form of donation or destruction of embryos. For example, the Church could accept homologous intrauterine insemination in the case of couples suffering from the same condition, provided that both spouses agree. She could also accept the assisted reproduction procedure by using exclusively the gametes of the respective parents and by fertilizing only as many embryos as will be implanted[28].

Certainly, this pastoral openness to infertile couples does not mean weakening trust in God's will, which is why priests must introduce the faithful to the logic and experience of prayer and miracles.

> "The Church indicates the way of precision but treats pastorally the falls of Her children, when, for various reasons, on the one hand, they are unable to implement Her teaching and, on the other hand, they sincerely repent"[29].

Another example of the attempt to outline a pastoral vision of medically assisted reproduction techniques is the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2000, in a document entitled "Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church",[30] adopted by the Holy Synod, it is mentioned that infertile couples, if they cannot assume a childless life or adoption, can resort to artificial insemination with the seminal cells of the spouse (homologous), since it does not violate the integrity of the conjugal union and does not differ mainly from the natural conception and takes place in the context of conjugal relations. On the other hand,

> "from the Orthodox point of view, all types of extracorporeal fertilization, including the deliberate production, preservation and destruction of surplus embryos, are morally inadmissible. It is precisely on the recognition of human dignity even of the embryo that the Church's judgment is also based on the moral evaluation of abortion."[31]

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[28] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," XV, 77, 269-270.
[29] "Fundamental Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction," XV, 80-81, 270.
[30] The document is translated by Ioan I. Ică jr in: Ioan I. Ică jr, Germano Marani, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii. Fundamente, documente, analize, perspective* (Sibiu: Editura Deisis, 2002), 185-266. The part that interests us for this study is chap. XII, entitled "Problems of Bioethics".
[31] "Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church," XII, 4, 244.

This decision will begin to be nuanced starting with 2021, when the Synodal Commission for Bioethics of the Moscow Patriarchate compiles a draft document entitled "Ethical Aspects of the In Vitro Fertilization Method", available and proposed for discussion to all dioceses on the official website of the Patriarchate[32].

The draft document reiterates that if therapeutic and surgical treatment methods do not allow infertility to be avoided, the Church calls for the acceptance of childless life as a special call from God. Godly spouses have the opportunity to demonstrate their Christian love and sacrifice by dedicating themselves to the upbringing of adopted children. At the same time, taking into account the significant development of reproductive technologies since the publication of the official document "Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church", which led, among other things, to the emergence of the opportunity to form only one or two embryos during IVF and transfer to the mother's uterus, the Church can also allow spouses of childbearing age, VF possibility with the mandatory exclusion of the following medical methods[33]:

1) obtaining "surplus" embryos;
2) cryopreservation of embryos;
3) fetal and embryonic reduction;
4) gamete donation;
5) prenatal diagnosis.

The exclusion of these methods must be indicated in the documents recording the agreement between the parents and the fertility clinic. An acceptable alternative to embryo freezing is cryopreservation of oocytes for a second IVF attempt if the first IVF fails.

The draft document[34] shows that the above-mentioned requirements are met in the following IVF options:

1. IVF in the natural cycle, performed without hormonal stimulation of the future mother with extracorporeal fertilization of one or two eggs obtained from her and their transfer to her womb after fertilization.

2. IVF in a partially modified natural cycle, in which minimal hormonal stimulation is used to obtain one or two oocytes.

3. IVF in a stimulated cycle, when, as a result of hormonal stimulation, a greater number of oocytes are taken, provided that all of them undergo

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[32] http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5768019.html, accesed in 15.06.2024.
[33] ***, Этические проблемы, связанные с методом Экстракорпорального оплодотворения ["Ethical Issues Related to the In Vitro Fertilization Method,"] http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5768019.html, accesed in 26.05.2024.
[34] It is still under debate today, so it is not officially adopted.

extracorporeal fertilization, and the viable ones are then transferred to the mother's womb without cryopreservation.

In each concrete case, the document emphasizes, the decision to use IVF or not can be made together with the confessor, who knows the spiritual state of the married couple, the ability of the spouses to continue to carry the cross without children. At the same time, since there are fears that the improvement of reproductive technologies and their widespread introduction could lead to the loss of family values and the destruction of family and conjugal relationships, the Church recalls the fundamental value of the family and that a child should be born into such a family.

After going through the two mentioned documents, another question remains: what solution can the Church offer for embryos already conceived and cryopreserved, but abandoned? Can the Church recommend or bless embryo adoption?

If in the case of adoption itself, the abandoned child is adopted, in the case of pre-natal adoption, the mother also participates biologically in its upbringing even if genetically different from him. There is a major difference between the two types of adoption. First of all, the gestational bond also involves the spiritual and physical bond with the child from the first moments of embryo implantation, compared to adoption itself, in which this bond is established postnatally and involves several complications. Secondly, post-natal adoption involves a vulnerable child with spiritual and material needs, while pre-natal adoption refers to the adoption of a potentially vulnerable child. Thirdly, the difference is also given by the intention. Their intention to adopt a child depends on its coming into existence in the case of embryonic adoption[35]. The possibility of embryo adoption exists mainly in the United States of America, but also in Europe: Great Britain, Germany (it is the country with the most possibilities of prenatal adoption, where there is also a network of embryo adoption centers).[36]

Conclusions

1. In principle, the Orthodox Church cannot recommend IVF as a solution for infertility because it does not fall within its competence to make such a decision. However, it is her duty to face this reality that has arisen independently of her will. Thus, because today's parents are not only under the pressure of the immense challenge of reproductive techniques, but also show

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[35] Oliver Hallich, "Embryo donation or embryo adoption? Conceptual and normative issues," *Bioethics* 33/3 (2019): 653-660.

[36] Felicitas Kraemer, "Perspectives on embryo donation," *Bioethics* 33/3 (2019): 633-640.

limited patience and reduced reserves of faith and inner strength, the Church can propose a few steps towards a pastoral approach to these techniques.

2. The Orthodox Church cannot bless in vitro fertilization on a large scale, but only in the confessional chair, on a case-by-case basis, the confessor can make such a decision, knowing the spiritual state of the couple. The confessor is called to recommend adoption in the case of couples who cannot accept, for various reasons, the problem of their infertility.

3. The Orthodox Church has a duty to explain why it has reservations about the technique of in vitro fertilization and to inform the faithful thoroughly and regularly about the new methods and to highlight the spiritual problems they cause.

4. Orthodox anthropology shows that the human embryo is a person from the beginning of its existence and any attempt on its life means murder.

5. In the context in which there are cryopreserved surplus embryos, the Church is called to express herself on the possibility that infertile couples will no longer try to obtain their own embryos, but may prenatally adopt one that has already been abandoned. Can embryo adoption be accepted from the point of view of Christian morality?

6. This study does not propose sentences, but invites those who are faithful to reflect on the challenges associated with medically assisted procreation and to propose an interpellation with the help of the Spirit of Christ.

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Knowledge, Conscience, Consciousness, Awareness[1], or About the Presence and Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Spiritual Life and Their Challenges

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ABSTRACT. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) into spiritual life presents unique challenges and opportunities. This article explores the regulatory deficiencies in the application of AI in religious settings. The existence of controversial platforms such as Biserica GPT emphasizes the need for specific ethical norms designed for spiritual life. The article advocates for an approach that recognizes the capacity of AI to improve communication and social unity, while underscoring ethical concerns and the significance of authentic human spiritual direction. The proposed ethical criteria include transparency, accountability, and the safeguarding of human dignity. They emphasize the need for a cooperative effort between programmers, operators, and those possessing spiritual expertise to ensure that AI is used as a tool rather than functioning as a substitute for authentic spiritual direction.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, ethics, conscience, technological limitations, Church Fathers

Introduction

Since the emergence and various applications of artificial intelligence (AI), appealing, controversial or repulsive in their effects, work has been and continues to be done on regulations and ethical standards for the use of AI in various fields.

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[1] See Étienne Balibar, "Conscience", dans: Barbara Cassin (éd.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Le dictionnaire des intradui-sibles*, (Paris: Seuil / Le Robert, 2019), 260-274. See the definitions of the notions *conștiință* and *cunoștință*, in *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, ediția a II-a sub conducerea Ion COTEANU și Lucreția MARES, Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică "Iorgu Iordan" (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1998), 217, 250.

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A number of documents have been formulated, proposed and/or adopted: the document drafted by the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (AI HLEG), *Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI* [08.04.2019], the UNESCO document *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* [23.11.2021], European Commission document, *Ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and data in teaching and learning for Educators* [2022], *Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (artificial intelligence act) and amending certain Union legislative acts* [14.06.2023].[2]

One can ask the question of the necessity of drafting and adopting such a set of recommendations or regulations also for the use of AI in the sphere of spiritual life. In our attempt to find a documented solution, we discovered that as early as 2017, in the study prepared by a committee of experts of Council of Europe DGI (2017)12, *Algorithmes et droits humaines. Étude sur les dimensions des droits humains dans les techniques de traitement automatisé des données et éventuelles implications réglementaires*, it was mentioned that the envisaged list of human rights that could be affected by the use of automated systems of techniques and algorithms was not exhaustive. In addition, it was stated that the study:

> "Nor has it explored the effects that the systematisation of points of view and opinions through algorithms might have on freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."[3]

In the section on adaptability, the same document states:

> "An operator's ability to predict the results of an algorithm may be of some importance, especially for designing appropriate governance structures. Advances in deep learning technologies could lead to equipping more systems

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[2] Documents and information about them, published and accessible online at the following addresses: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3988569-0434-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1; https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137; https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/learning-materials/use-artificial-intelligence-ai-and-data-teaching-and-learning_en; https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri= CELEX:52021PC0206 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698792/EPRS_BRI(2021)698792_EN.pdf].

[3] Conseil de l'Europe, *Algorithmes et droits humaines. Étude sur les dimensions des droits humains dans les techniques de traitement automatisé des données et éventuelles implications réglementaires*, Étude du Conseil de l'Europe DGI(2017)12, Strasbourg Cedex, Éditions du Conseil de l'Europe, mars 2018, URL: https://rm.coe.int/algorithms-and-human-rights-fr/1680795681, consulted on 11.06.2024, p. 36, our translation: "Elle n'a pas exploré non plus les effets que pourrait avoir la systématisation des points de vue et des opinions via les algorithmes sur la liberté d'opinion et sur le droit à la liberté de pensée, de conscience et de religion."

with « artificial intelligence » that is impossible to understand with the mental
model used by mechanical machines. Within the scientific community, there is
considerable debate about the extent to which these systems can be made
intelligible to humans and what the consequences of such intelligibility would be."[4]

We can see that, seven years later, the situation remains unchanged. The 217-page
Interinstitutional File: 2021/0106(COD), which forms the basis of the provisional
agreement on the legislative act on AI reached by the Council Presidency and
the European Parliament negotiators and which is reflected in the final 245-page
version of the proposal, dated 02.02.2024[5], does not mention the notions of
religion[6]*, spiritual* and *spirituality* or *body* as *physical body*. On the one hand,
the absence of the notions mentioned is somehow in line with the fact that
"the regulation of AI is a self-evident matter, which should not only promote
the development of the European digital market, but also protect the Union's
fundamental rights and values."[7], as Castillo remarked as early as October 2023.
The researcher also listed the rights that could be affected by algorithms, which

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[4] Our translation. See *ibidem*, p. 8-9: "La capacité d'un opérateur à prévoir les résultats d'un
algorithme peut revêtir une certaine importance, notamment pour la conception de structures
de gouvernance adéquates. Les progrès des technologies d'apprentissage profond pourraient
conduire à équiper davantage de systèmes d'une „intelligence artificielle" qu'il est impossible
à comprendre au moyen du modèle mental utilisé par les machines mécaniques. Au sein de la
communauté scientifique, la question de savoir jusqu'à quel point ces systèmes peuvent être
rendus intelligibles à l'homme et quelles seraient les conséquences d'une telle intelligibilité
suscite un vaste débat."

[5] See documents published by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament,
documents consulted on 11.06.2024: Council of the European Union, *Interinstitutional File:
2021/0106(COD).* Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council
laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) and
amending certain Union legislative acts – General approach, Brussels, 25 November 2022, URL:
https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14954-2022-INIT/en/pdf;   European
Parliament 2019-2024. Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection. Committee
on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, *Provisional agreement resulting from interinstitutional
negotiations*. Proposal for a regulation laying down harmonised rules on Artificial Intelligence
(Artificial Intelligence Act) and amending certain Union legislative acts 2021/0106(COD)
(COM(2021)0206 – C9-0146(2021) – 2021/0106(COD)), 02.02.2024, URL:
https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/AIA-Trilogue-
Committee.pdf.

[6] Religion is not even mentioned among the rights that could be affected by AI, which may or
may not have been explored in this *Interinstitutional File: 2021/0106(COD)*, as had been the
case in the above-cited text of the Council of Europe Study DGI(2017)12 (*Algorithmes et droits
humaines...*), p. 36.

[7] Maria Castillo, "L'Union européenne : vers la maîtrise de l'intelligence artificielle?", Cahiers de
la recherche sur les droits fondamentaux [online] 21 (2023), published online 17.10.2023,
accessed 11.04.2024. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/crdf/8864.

had been the subject of the Council of Europe study DGI(2017)12, *Algorithmes et droits humaines...* However, Castillo noted that, given the Council of Europe's clarification of the scope of the study, the rights discussed did not constitute an exhaustive list, as expected:

> "[...] <a study> focused on the effects of algorithms on the right to a fair trial; the right to privacy and data protection; freedom of expression; freedom of assembly and association; the right to an effective appeal; the prohibition of discrimination; social rights and access to public services; and the right to free elections. This list of rights, potentially affected by AI, is not exhaustive, as the Council of Europe stated that the scope of its study did not allow it to analyse the right to life, in the context of the use of intelligent weapons and algorithm-piloted drones, or in the context of health. Similarly, it had not been able to explore the potential effects of the systematisation of points of view and opinions, through algorithms, on freedom of thought, conscience and religion".[8]

On the other hand, Dupuy-Lasserre states that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, linked to the right to freedom of expression[9] is understood as a universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated fundamental right, as stated in the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 (paragraph 5)[10]. This is true even in the context of an issue concerning the political dimensions of faith and religion, without taking into account "national and regional particularities and the diversity cultural and religious diversity".[11] Consequently, according to the same paragraph of the above-mentioned declaration and programme, we expected that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion would be considered by the international community, among the rights potentially affected

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[8] *Ibid*. Cf. Council of Europe Study DGI(2017)12 , p. 36.

[9] See Articles 10-11 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, available online at: https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/article/10-libertatea-de-gandire-de-constiinta-si-de-religie and https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/article/11-libertatea-de-exprimare-si-de-informare accessed on 11.04.2024.

[10] Laura Dupuy-Lasserre, "Conseil des droits de l'homme de l'ONU et ses résolutions sur la liberté de religion ou de conviction", in Liviu Olteanu (éd.), *Les droits de l'homme et la liberté religieuse dans le monde. Un nouvel équilibre ou de nouveaux défis*, Tome I (Bern, Association internationale pour la défense de la liberté religieuse, Conscience et liberté, 2014), 68-79, 68-69.

[11] *Déclaration et Programme d'action de Vienne. Adoptés par la Conférence mondiale sur les droits de l'homme le 25 juin 1993* dans : *Déclaration et Programme d'action de Vienne. 20 ans au travail pour vos droits*, Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l'homme et le Département de l'information des Nations Unies, août 2013, URL:
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/events/ohchr20/vdpa_booklet_fr.pdf, p. 15-48, p. 20, §5, accessed 11.04.2024. See also: g9314234.pdf (un.org).

by AI, "globally, in a fair and balanced manner, on an equal footing and with the same emphasis"[12]. Furthermore, we expect states to promote and protect this right, "regardless of the political, economic and cultural system"[13], and against the potential negative effects of algorithms.

We recall the remarkable absence of these notions (*religion*, *spiritual* and *spirituality* or *body = physical body*) and of a study of the potential effects of algorithm-based systems on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights[14], in which we noted these shortcomings, seems to confirm that any attempt to regulate and validate the use of AI in the sphere of spiritual life would be ineffective, or at least delayed. However, recent controversial applications of AI have shown that what may seem simple and self-evident to certain individuals are not universally comprehended. Up until the end of April 2024, the GPT Church platform [Biserica GPT, https://bisericagpt.ro/], an AI application described as "one click away", provided users with "religious" services, including "online confession"[15]. According to some media outlets, Biserica GPT has been deemed "absurd and ridiculous[16]" by the Romanian Orthodox Church. This AI application, Biserica GPT platform, has shown that it is essential to educate and raise public awareness about the mission, involvement, rights and duties of the laity in the life of the Church, deontology, originality, uniqueness, counterfeit and the meanings of

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12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Getting the Future Right: Artificial Intelligence and Fundamental Rights, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, URL: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-artificial-intelligence_en.pdf, accessed 11.04.2024. The "report analyses how fundamental rights are taken into consideration when using or developing AI applications", focusing on "four core areas – social benefits, predictive policing, health services and targeted advertising". It was "the main publication stemming from FRA's project on Artificial intelligence, big data and fundamental rights." (p. 1, 16).

15 Bogdan Brylynski, "M-am spovedit în prima biserică virtuală cu IA. Dar nu sunt sigur că mi-a iertat păcatele", *Turnul Sfatului*, 18-04-2023|18:40, URL: https://www.turnulsfatului.ro/2023/04/18/m-am-spovedit-in-prima-biserica-virtuala-cu-ia-dar-nu-sunt-sigur-ca-mi-a-iertat-pacatele-202175, accessed 11.04.2024.

16 Although the reaction that was attributed to the BOR was quoted by several media outlets, it was never posted on any official BOR website. See: "Reacţia BOR faţă de Biserica GPT: Biserica este prin excelenţă comunitatea de persoane reale, nu artificiale, unite de credinţă, speranţă şi dragoste în jurul lui Hristos. Intruziunea inteligenţei artificiale în registrul sacramental al Bisericii este nu doar absurdă şi ridicolă, ci şi total deformatoare de sens. Sensul comuniunii interpersonale. Robotizarea vieţii spirituale este o pură contradicţie în termeni", in: Ana Maria Barbu, "«Biserica GPT» oferă online servicii «religioase». De la rugăciune pentru o călătorie până la demiterea şefului. Reacţia BOR", Ştirile PRO TV, 25-04-2023|19:40, URL: https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/zbiserica-gpt-ofera-online-servicii-religioase-de-la-rugaciune-pentru-o-calatorie-pana-la-demiterea-sefului-reactia-bor.html, accessed 11.04.2024.

conscience, *image of God*, person and spiritual fatherhood [17], as constitutive elements of an authentic spiritual life. Regarding the reaction within the Russian Orthodox Church to the use of AI, the chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for Family Life, Motherhood and Child Protection of the Russian OC, Fr. Fyodor Lukianov, called for a ban on AI with the proposal: "No to the transfer of the human image and its properties to inanimate objects!"[18].

Other controversial uses of AI include ChatGPT's generation of a religious service[19] and the creation of a digital pastor, which is now inaccessible online at its previous address and could only be accessed with a ChatGPT Plus subscription[20]. In these cases, once services are offered for a fee, they should be subject to consumer protection regulations as well as legislation on the establishment and recognition of a religious association or association offering religious services. In addition, along with a growing number of researchers, we have concluded that our understanding of AI-based technologies and how people interact with them needs to be improved. It is important to keep in mind that advances in AI over the last few years have led to the integration of AI technologies as communicative subjects in everyday life and that communicative AI has changed the paradigm of communication theories as it takes an active and interactive role in interactions with humans, replacing traditional technological mediators[21]. Floridi *et alii*[22] emphasise that the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for society are

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[17] Cf. Irénée Hausherr, *Paternitatea și îndrumarea duhovnicească în Răsăritul creștin* (*Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, OCA 144/1955), traducere de Mihai Vladimirescu, (Sibiu: Deisis, 1999).

[18] Mihai Toma, "Biserica Ortodoxă Rusă cere interzicerea inteligenței artificiale: «Nu transferului imaginii umane și a proprietăților acesteia către obiecte neînsuflețite!»" , *Libertatea*, 26-04-2023|18:28, URL: https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/biserica-ortodoxa-rusa-cere-interzicerea-inteligentei-artificiale-4525908, accessed 11.04.2024. Apud: Анна Устинова, Анна Киселева, „РПЦ призвала запретить ИИ с человеческим лицом", 26-04-2023|01:01, URL: https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/04/26/972573-rpts-prizvala-zapretit-ii-s-chelovecheskim-litsom?from=newsline.

[19] Alexander Gale, "Church Service Generated by ChatGPT Attended by Hundreds", *Greek Reporter*, 12-06-2023, URL: https://greekreporter.com/2023/06/12/church-service-chatgpt/, accessed 17.06.2024.

[20] Pastor GPT, developed by Adrian Petrov Velev, is now described as "A Pastor GPT specializing in the Old Testament, offering biblical insights and spiritual guidance." (URL: https://chatgpt.com/g/g-RS9ARtT7Q-pastor-gpt, accessed 17.06.2024). Previously, Pastor GPT, developed by sjgpts.com, was described as "A Protestant minister GPT, expert in theology and religious philosophy" [URL: https://chat.openai.com/g/g-AKglizNZ7, which was the previous address, now, as of 17.06.2024, the address of a GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), generally known as a large language model (LLM), that "summarizes YouTube video, PDF, article, webpage, image, email and document, providing comprehensive insights."].

[21] Andrea L. Guzman and Seth C. Lewis, "Artificial intelligence and communication: A Human-Machine Communication research agenda", *New Media & Society* 22/1 (2020): 70-86, 71, 81-82.

[22] Luciano Floridi *et al.*, "AI4People — An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society: Opportunities, Risks, Principles, and Recommendations", *Minds and Machines* 28/4 (2018): 689-707.

inevitable and already existing. They also recognised the opportunities offered by AI as well as the risks associated with its use, stressing that it is necessary to balance both benefits and threats when using the technology in order to realise its positive potential. For our part, we believe that AI can help increase communication, social cohesion and collaboration between different parties interested or concerned with issues related to the spiritual life, for example by providing instant translations and subtitles in virtual meetings with speakers of different languages[23]. However, there is a risk that AI may influence human behaviour in unintended or unplanned ways. In such a case, if the dialogue partners were completely unfamiliar with the translated and/or subtitled languages, they would not be able to confirm or verify that the AI has translated or subtitled the languages correctly, considering the context. We believe it is important to maintain a balance between exploring the possibilities offered by AI and maintaining human control over it.

In the context of seemingly "absurd and ridiculous" use, given that digital technologies are already transforming relational and institutional dynamics, religious practices, and even religious consciousness[24], it is therefore necessary to formulate basic ethical guidelines for the use of AI in religious life. This need seems all the more urgent as the relationship between computer science, AI and Christian thought is not immediately obvious because of the different concepts on which they are based. Moreover, Christian religion affirms a metaphysics of Incarnation, revelation and the salvation of the human soul, while contemporary computer science uses experimental, theoretical protocols for processing data using algorithms.

Definitions, assumptions and specific characteristics

As the concept of *consciousness* has been understood and interpreted in different ways by different societies, authors and disciplines over time[25], recent

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[23] There is already a generative AI application, Otter (https://otter.ai/), which records sessions in English and takes notes in real time or after a recording.

[24] Мария Анатольевна Афанасьева, "Digitalization of Religious Consciousness: Problems and Prospects" (Цифровизация религиозного сознания: проблемы и перспективы), *Vestnik of Northern (Arctic) Federal University. Series Humanitarian and Social Sciences* 23/4 (2023): 114-122, DOI: https://doi.org/10.37482/2687-1505-v276.

[25] Cf. Veronica Bâlici, "Conştiinţa lingvistică. O viziune teoretico-aplicativă", Ministerul Educaţiei, Culturii şi Cercetării, Institutul de Ştiinţe ale Educaţiei, Chişinău, 2020, p. 19u.: "Astfel, în baza cercetărilor, a analizelor atente cu privire la problema dată, am putut depista următoarele tipuri sau forme de conştiinţă: conştiinţa *morală* (Socrate, Im. Kant, A. Flew, H. Pieron, R. Doron, T. Parot, S. Cristea et al.); conştiinţa *cunoscătoare* sau *intelectuală* (Socrate, Im. Kant,

controversial uses of AI applications, evoking differences between the meanings of *conscience, consciousness, awareness*, confirm how important it is to prevent problems, in the context of the danger of anthropomorphising, of identifying AI with friendly AI[26]. In order to propose some synthetic ethical guidelines for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in spiritual care and guidance, we consider that the following definitions, presuppositions and specific characteristics should be taken into account:

Definitions of conscience and consciousness

Although very close in form in Romanian (*conștiință* and *cunoștință*)[27], the notions of *conscience* and *consciousness* evoke the evolution of European philosophical language, encompassing different aspects of human functioning and understanding, including distinct domains of perception, experience and interpretation. The different meanings, "split" in the context of a strange formal similarity between the words expressing these notions in Romanian, correspond to those unified or split into several notions in other languages.

We could say, however, that we are confronted with two heterogeneous models, expressed in words: one is an opening, an intellectual sharing that redefines the space of a "we" through the circulation and communication of knowledge, of information; the other is a knowledge that defines the inner space, which could allow a paradoxical negation of the image or knowledge. Moreover, in a recent *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, the word *conscience* (fr. *conscience;* gr. *sunaisthêsis*, *suneidêsis*, *sunesis*, *suntêrêsis;* lat. *conscientia;* all. *Bewusstheit*, *Bewusstsein*; *Gewissen*, *Gewissheit;* ang. *conscience*, *consciousness*,

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A. Flew, C. Enăchescu, S. Cristea); conștiința *absolută* (W. Hegel, Al. Kojeve, R. M. Wenley); conștiința *filosofică* (Im. Kant, L. Blaga, F. Savater); conștiința *națională* sau *colectivă* (M. Eminescu, C. Rădulescu-Motru, P. Andrei, A. Ciobanu et al.); conștiința *teleologică* (P. Andrei); conștiința *axiologică* (C. Cucoș); conștiința *artistică/estetică* (L. Blaga, S. Cristea, Vl. Paslaru et al.); conștiința *pedagogică* sau *psihosocială* (S. Cristea et al.); conștiința *lingvistică* (E. Coșeriu, T. Slama-Cazacu et al.); conștiința *tehnologică* (S. Cristea); conștiința *psihofizică* (S. Cristea); conștiința *ecologică* (S. Cristea, Sn. Cojocaru); conștiința *falsă* (W. Hegel, S. Freud, F. Nietzsche, O. Țicu et al.). Alte tipuri cunoscute de conștiință sunt cea *mitic-religioasă*, conștiința *economică*, conștiința *juridică*, conștiința *socială* și, mai nou, conștiința *de gen* (gender) etc."

[26] Eliezer Yudkowsky, "Artificial Intelligence as a positive and negative factor in global risk", in: Nick Bostrom, and Milan M. Ćirković (eds), *Global Catastrophic Risks* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 308-345.

[27] See the definitions of the notions *conștiință* and *cunoștință* in Ion Coteanu, Lucreția Mareș (coord.), *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, ediția a II-a, Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică "Iorgu Iordan", (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1998), 217, 250.

awareness)*,* is considered to be one of the untranslatable words[28]. It refers to the inner world, soul, morality and self-knowledge.

Awareness, often referred to as *consciousness*, *cognizance*, *cognisance,* or *knowingness*, is related to the mind, reasoning, and the knowledge one possesses about something. It involves the understanding of the external world, as well as the process of abstraction. In Aristotelian philosophy, abstraction follows two models, *epagôgê* (induction) and *aphairesis* (abstraction)[29]. The latter, *aphairesis*, can encompass notions from mystical theology, such as inner beauty, the cultivation of virtues within oneself[30], and the purification of the heart from any images or idols[31].

Technological limitations

The development of AI raises questions about the nature of consciousness and of the soul, and the concepts of *consciousness* and that of the *image of God* may be redefined as we increasingly interact with AI. In 2023, Aru, Larkum, and Shine concluded that large language models (LLMs) are not conscious, and probably won't become so in the near future, because LLMs lack features specific to consciousness. The authors argue that the sensory experiences of LLMs do not match those experienced by mammals. In addition, according to them, the LLM architecture does not include important elements of the thalamocortical system related to consciousness, and AI systems lack the complex biological organization that consciousness has and assumes[32].

While AI lacks genuine consciousness, certain AI systems, like LaMDA, may exhibit traits that resemble self-awareness. B. Lemoine, a Google engineer, speculated that LaMDA possesses emotions and self-awareness[33]. This resemblance

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[28] Étienne Balibar, "Conscience", in Barbara Cassin (éd.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Le dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil / Le Robert, 2019), 260-274.

[29] See: Alain de Libera, "Abstraction, abstraits", in: Barbara Cassin (éd.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Le dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil / Le Robert, 2019), 1-8, pages 1-2 on *"Epagôgê" et "aphairesis", les deux modèles d'abstraction selon Aristote*. Cf. *Anal. Post.* I, 13, 81.

[30] See the notion of inner statues of the virtues in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* / 7, III.16, 5-6; IX.52, 2 and in ORIGEN, *Contra Celsus*, VIII, 17.

[31] For the emptying of the heart of any image or idol, see GREGORY Palamas, *Homily 53: On the Entry of the Mother of God into the Holy of Holies*, Ὁμιλ. Σοφ. σελ., p. 169-170, *apud*: Vasilij Krivochéine, *Dieu, l'homme, l'Église. Lecture des Pères*, coll. Patrimoine Orthodoxie (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010) p. 35.

[32] Jaan Aru, Matthew Evan Larkum, James M. Shine, "The feasibility of artificial consciousness through the lens of neuroscience," *Trends in Neurosciences* 46 (2023): 1008-1017.

[33] Adrian Dumitru, "Cine sau ce este LaMDA, algoritmul despre care un inginer Google crede că are sentimente și este conștient de sine", *DIGI24.ro*, 14.06.2022|11:56, URL: https://www.digi24.ro/

to human consciousness can be related to theological research on self-consciousness and introspection. In this regard, drawing on an examination of traditional religious concepts of the soul, particularly from Abrahamic beliefs, to understand how these concepts influence our perceptions of the self, Oberg explored the question of whether artificial intelligence (AI) might have a self and, if so, how this self might compare to the human self[34]. Oberg argues that the self, though often confused with the soul in many religious contexts, can and should be more narrowly defined in psychological and cognitive terms. Integrating religious, philosophical, and cognitive perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and implications of creating self-aware AIs, Oberg argues that while it is theoretically possible for AIs to possess a self, achieving this depends on how we define and understand consciousness and the self. In this context, the author stresses the importance of a careful assessment of moral and legal considerations regarding AI rights and treatment, should AI achieve a self comparable to the human self.

In his article "L'humain *imago Dei* et l'intelligence artificielle *imago hominis* ?"[35], Betschart examines the different interpretations (ontological/structural, functional and relational) of the concept of *imago Dei* and explores the ethical and theological implications of the creation of AI, considered as a reflection of humanity, *imago hominis*. Considering that the AI cannot be seen as a person in the full sense of the word, Betschart emphasizes that due to the lack of self-awareness, subjectivity and lived experience, the AI can only be considered an appearance, an imitation of the human, rather than a real image of the human. Betschart's conclusion is that the term *imago* in *imago Dei* and *imago hominis* should not be understood in the same way, because AI cannot attain the same relational and personal complexity that man created in the image of God possesses. He agrees with Herzfeld, from whose research he had started[36], that relations with AI should be secondary to those with other persons and with God, considering AI only an instrument.

On the other hand, regarding the question "Can AI be considered in the image of God?", in his article „Performing the *imago Dei*: human enhancement, artificial intelligence and optional image-bearing", O'Donnell argues that the

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stiri/sci-tech/descoperiri/cine-sau-ce-este-lamda-algoritmul-despre-care-un-inginer-google-crede-ca-are-sentimente-si-este-constient-de-sine-1973985, accessed 11.04.2024.

[34] Andrew Oberg, "Souls and Selves: Querying an AI Self with a View to Human Selves and Consciousness," *Religions* (Special Issue, Religious Traditions, Self-Theory and the Future: Should We Abandon, Embrace or Reimagine?) 14/1 (2023): 1-16.

[35] Christof Betschart, "L'humain imago Dei et l'intelligence artificielle imago hominis ?", *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 11/4 (2023): 643-659.

[36] Cf. Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) and the doctoral thesis: *Imago Dei/imago hominis: Interacting Images of God and Humanity in Theology and in Artificial Intelligence* (Ann Arbor, United States, 2000).

imago Dei is not limited to human DNA, but rather depends on the actual manifestation or performance of the divine image in concrete contexts, and proposes a broadening of the meaning of the image of God[37]. In the context of a shift in the perspective of theological anthropology from a definite and taxonomic to a performative and optative one, O'Donnell argues that if AI is autonomous and capable of learning to manifest the image of God and to seek it in others, then it could be considered a bearer of the divine image.

However, it is important to reiterate that AI lacks the experiential knowledge of the physical body, the soul, as understood in the Orthodox Christian tradition, and grace – the defining feature of a spiritual ascent of those who view themselves and others as images of God. Therefore, the AI does not have the capabilities associated with firsthand human experience, and is incapable of experiencing genuine human and spiritual emotions, sensations or feelings. Thus, the issue at hand is not just "the extent to which these systems can be made intelligible to humans", but also the extent to which humans can be understood by these systems. A text generated by ChatGPT during an engaged discussion regarding the correlation between AI and spiritual life, the search for meaning in life, reaching fulfilment and achieving communion with God, seems to align with our perspective. One of the partial conclusions of ChatGPT was: "Artificial intelligence has the potential to be a powerful tool in assisting people in their search for meaning in life, providing personalized guidance, facilitating reflection and meditation, and creating opportunities for deep exploration of existential questions. However, it is important that the use of AI in this context is complementary to other traditional and personal methods of searching for meaning, ensuring that technology remains a support and not a substitute for authentic human experience[38]."

In conclusion, considering the aforementioned aspects and various elements of the Orthodox Christian tradition, it is evident that the AI cannot provide genuine spiritual assistance and direction. Spiritual guidance and fatherhood in the spiritual life entail the apprentice's communion with a spiritual mentor or role model and the treading of a specific path. The spiritual parent's power and ability to guide and shape a disciple are derived from their own spiritual experience.

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[37] Karen O'Donnell, "Performing the imago Dei: Human enhancement, artificial intelligence and optative image-bearing," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 18/1 (2018): 4-15.

[38] OpenAI, ChatGPT: https://chatgpt.com/share/4533e39b-3fc3-4cc9-ae1c-7afb905a6f42 [19.06.2024].

The meaning of life and perfection

Based on the teachings of the Holy Fathers, ecclesiastical writers, and Eastern saints, it is commonly believed in the Orthodox Christian Tradition that the purpose and meaning of human life is perfection, the acquisition of the spirit and fellowship with the divine nature [2 P 1.4][39]. However, during the aforementioned discussion on the connection between AI and the spiritual life [...], one of ChatGPT's responses stated that: "Artificial intelligence (AI) has no consciousness, feelings or experiences of its own, so it cannot understand or define spiritual perfection in the same way a human does. However, AI can be programmed to analyse and process information related to spiritual perfection, providing tools and resources to help humans in this process[40]." ChatGPT also generated a text stating that: "Although AI cannot experience spirituality or <spiritual> perfection directly, it can be a powerful tool to assist people in seeking and practicing these aspects. By providing personalized guidance, educational resources, ongoing feedback, and support in reflection and meditation, AI can facilitate a deeper and clearer spiritual journey for those who wish to find meaning in life and achieve spiritual perfection[41]."

Hence, within the realm of AI development, various ethical inquiries arise, including those pertaining to consciousness and spirituality. Consequently, it is imperative to establish ethical principles that address the accountability, entitlements, and ethical ramifications associated with the programming, oversight, and utilisation of AI. Consider the instance of the young Belgian father who committed suicide after engaging in conversation with Eliza, a chatbot powered by ChatGPT technology, as reported in *The Brussels Times* and *La Libre*. As per the wife's account, the chatbot was encouraging the young man to take his own live as a means to address climate change[42]. This case shows, we believe, that the chatbot in question did not meet the necessary criteria and elements of a dependable AI system that should be lawful, ethical, and robust,

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[39] On the goal of Orthodox spirituality and the path towards it, and on the great stages of the spiritual life, identified by D. Stăniloae in the Holy Fathers and spiritual writers of the East, see: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă. Ascetica şi mistica* (Bucureşti, Editura IBMBOR, 1992), 5-13, 50-54.

[40] OpenAI, ChatGPT: https://chatgpt.com/share/4533e39b-3fc3-4cc9-ae1c-7afb905a6f42 [19.06.2024].

[41] OpenAI, ChatGPT: https://chatgpt.com/share/4533e39b-3fc3-4cc9-ae1c-7afb905a6f42 [19.06.2024].

[42] Lauren WALKER, "Belgian man dies by suicide following exchanges with chatbot", *The Brussels Times*, 28-03-2023, URL: https://www.brusselstimes.com/430098/belgian-man-commits-suicide-following-exchanges-with-chatgpt; Pierre-François Lovens, "Sans ces conversations avec le chatbot Eliza, mon mari serait toujours là", *La Libre*, 28-03-2023 | 06:35, URL: "Sans ces conversations avec le chatbot Eliza, mon mari serait toujours là" - La Libre, accessed 11.04.2024.

from both a technical and social perspective, as outlined in the document drafted by the High-Level Expert Group on AI (AI HLEG), *Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI* [08.04.2019][43].

Ethical principles governing the utilisation of artificial intelligence by individuals belonging to Christian communities or within the realm of spiritual life

Within this particular framework, it is important to emphasise that our intention was not to reiterate information that has previously been presented in other references, such as the document mentioned above. Nevertheless, we have considered the assertions presented in multiple research investigations. In 2019, for example, Jobin *et alii* found that there is a worldwide agreement on five ethical principles for ethical AI: transparency, justice and fairness, non-maleficence, accountability and confidentiality. However, they also found that different entities interpret and implement these principles in varying ways[44].

Regarding this subject, we hold the view that ethical principles governing the utilisation of artificial intelligence by individuals belonging to Christian groups or within the realm of spiritual life should assert, implement, and elucidate:

I. Transparency

The principle of transparency is included within the stipulations outlined in Annexes IXa and IXb of the AI Act[45]. However, it is important to note that the High-Level Expert Group on AI (AI HLEG) has stressed the necessity of ethical guidelines for the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) and acknowledged that various areas of AI application present distinct ethical and practical difficulties: "AI music recommendation systems do not raise the same ethical

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[43] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, *Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI*, Publications Office, 2019, URL: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2759/346720, 2-7.

[44] Anna Jobin, Marcello Ienca, Effy Vayena, "The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines", *Nature Machine Intelligence* 1/9 (2019): 389-399.

[45] Council of the European Union, *Interinstitutional File: 2021/0106(COD).* Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) and amending certain Union legislative acts, Brussels, 26 January 2024, URL: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5662-2024-INIT/en/pdf, p. 268-271.

concerns as AI systems proposing critical medical treatments[46]". Therefore, the utilisation of AI in spiritual life or spiritual counselling would inevitably give rise to several ethical and practical concerns. From our perspective, the utilisation of AI in this domain ought to be both clear and accountable. In order to prevent a hidden and secretive infiltration, individuals should possess knowledge about the presence of AI, be well-informed on the functioning and limitations of AI[47], as well as understand the manner in which their personal data is utilised.

II. Consequences. Accountability, responsibility and judgement

The Report „Stat și religii în România – o relație transparentă?" prepared by the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania – Helsinki Committee, as part of the project "Către transparență în implicarea statului în probleme religioase", highlights that Law no. 489/2006 of 28 December 2006 on religious freedom and the general regime of cults:

> "[...] regulates a series of principles defined in international human rights conventions to which Romania is a signatory. Thus, religious freedom is guaranteed at individual and collective level, establishing the necessary framework for its affirmation. The law affirms the neutrality of the Romanian state in relation to all 18 recognised religious denominations, providing guarantees regarding their autonomy from the state. The law recognises the role of religious cults as social partners of the state and as providers of social services[48]."

Law 489/2006 appears to ensure tthat persons can form associations in the virtual world with Biserica GPT (Art. 1-6). As a chatbot, Biserica GPT would fall into the category of AI systems with limited risk and impact. According to the European Commission, "Limited risk [...] when using AI systems such as chatbots, humans should be made aware that they are interacting with a machine so they can take an informed decision to continue or step back[49]." Therefore, Biserica

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[46] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, *Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI*, 5-6.

[47] Anne-Dominique Salamin, David Russo, Danièle Rueger, "ChatGPT, an Excellent Liar: How Conversational Agents' Hallucinations Impact Learning and Teaching," in: *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Teaching, Learning and Education*, 2023, URL: https://www.doi.org/10.33422/6th.iacetl.2023.11.100, accessed 11.04.2024.

[48] See the full text of the law in *Stat și religii în România – o relație transparentă?*, Asociația pentru Apărarea Drepturilor Omului în România – Comitetul Helsinki (APADOR-CH), București, 2008, Anexa I, p. 67-78.

[49] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *AI Act*, URL: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai [06-05-2024], accessed on 10.06.2024.

GPT is unable to adopt the Orthodox[50] or Roman Catholic[51] definition of *church*, nor can it adhere to a certain deontology associated with them[52]. Moreover, when considering the mission and roles of the laity in the Orthodox Church[53], which the programmer or administrator of the platform is under no obligation to consider, it is inevitable to question the operation of Biserica GPT.

Within this framework, it is important to remember that the Christian faith asserts the individual's accountability for their actions and the necessity to ready oneself for evaluation. Hence, it is imperative to take into account the ethical ramifications of the choices made, permitted, or facilitated by automated systems. From a Christian point of view, the responsibility[54] for the use or implementation of artificial intelligence should rest with the developers, operators and users of AI systems. It is crucial to establish responsibility and accountability for AI systems and their implications, both during their development phase and after implementation, in order to ensure that AI prioritises human interests. Examples that come to mind include the case of the young Belgian father who was prompted to take his own life by a chatbot powered by ChatGPT technology. Another case, unrelated to AI's role in spirituality but relevant when considering that spiritual life encompasses all aspects of human existence, involves AI assisting in the selection of targets for intense bombings carried out by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip, as documented in articles by Ares (2023) and Pietralunga (2024)[55]. Therefore, the lack of knowledge regarding the exchange between a ChatGPT user and the GPT Pastor described as "A Pastor GPT specializing in the Old Testament, offering biblical insights and spiritual guidance" to the developer of this GPT, Adrian Petrov Velev, is of concern, despite

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[50] Ioannis Zizioulas, "Biserica şi eshatonul," *Teologie şi Viaţă* 1-6 (2004): 181-191, 182-184.

[51] *Catéchisme de l'Eglise Catholique* (Paris, Mame/Plon, 1992), n° 748-945.

[52] For some deontological rules of ecclesiastical ministries, considered necessary in the Catholic Church in the context of the involvement of the laity in all aspects of Church activities after the Second Vatican Council, see: Louis-Léon Christians, *La déontologie des ministères ecclésiaux*, coll. Droit canonique, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf 2007), 36-56.

[53] Răzvan Perşa, "Misiunea şi implicarea laicilor şi monahilor în viaţa Bisericii Ortodoxe în conformitate cu Tradiţia canonică", in Patriciu Vlaicu, Răzvan Perşa (ed.), *Tradiţia canonică şi misiunea Bisericii* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2018), 249-300, 249-286.

[54] See: François Dermange, "La responsabilité", in Jean-Daniel Causse, Denis Müller, Dimitri Andronicos (dir.), *Introduction à l'éthique. Penser, croire, agir*, coll. Le Champ éthique 51, (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2009), 283-302.

[55] See: Isabel Ares, "À Gaza, des bombardements intensifs facilités par l'intelligence artificielle" [10.12.2023], URL: https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/14536317-a-gaza-des-bombardements-intensifs-facilites-par-lintelligence-artificielle.html; Cédric Pietralunga, "L'armée israélienne a identifié des dizaines de milliers de cibles à Gaza avec l'aide de l'IA" [05.04.2024], URL: https://www.letemps.ch/monde/l-armee-israelienne-a-identifie-des-dizaines-de-milliers-de-cibles-a-gaza-avec-l-aide-de-l-ia, accessed 10.06.2024.

his apparent adherence to the principle of confidentiality. Similar to Biserica GPT, there appears to be a lack of accountability in these systems, although they do have some kind of impact on user psychology, communication, and behavioural characteristics, which may be significant and enduring.

III. Purpose and collaboration

Artificial intelligence (AI) can serve as a valuable instrument to assist communities in aligning with Christian principles and advancing the collective well-being and welfare. AI can serve as a valuable tool for enhancing communication and collaboration among individuals seeking spiritual growth and knowledge of sacred and spiritual books[56]. Such a possibility might be realised through the collaboration of programmers, operators, and those possessing spiritual expertise, all exercising discernment.

IV. Fundamental values and rights. Examining human dignity from both a fundamental rights and Christian standpoint

In relation to the spiritual aspect of life, the use of artificial intelligence should emphasise the significance of human life, uphold human dignity[57], discourage any form of debasement or disrespect towards human beings, and promote unity and connection among people (as everyone is considered an image of God and has a calling to deification, as stated in John 17:11). The AI

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[56] See the address of Patriarch Daniel, on the use of social media and the internet, to the *First International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care*, Athens, 7-9 May 2015, *apud*: Robert Nicolae, "Patriarhul Daniel despre utilizarea rețelelor de socializare și a internetului", *Basilica.Ro*, 17-05-2016, URL: https://basilica.ro/patriarhul-daniel-despre-utilizarea-retelelor-de-socializare-si-a-internetului/, accessed 11.04.2024: "Utilizarea media digitală în lucrarea pastoral-misionară presupune responsabilitate eclezială și înțelepciune pastorală, deoarece, deși o tehnologie nouă oferă oamenilor noi posibilități de dezvoltare, totuși ea poate aduce și noi provocări sau pericole în privința păstrării valorilor spirituale, culturale și sociale tradiționale ale persoanelor și popoarelor. În acest sens, rețelele de socializare pot contribui la o mai bună cunoaștere reciprocă a diferitelor tradiții și la consolidarea comunităților de credință, dar multitudinea de idei și opinii exprimate liber în spațiul virtual trebuie supusă mereu unei analize critice și selective, potrivit valorilor permanente ale credinței și moralei creștine."

[57] On human dignity as the basis of all fundamental rights: Aharon Barak, *Human Dignity: The Constitutional Value and the Constitutional Right*, translated by Daniel KAYROS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 156-169 (chapter 9): "Human dignity as a framework right (motherright)".

architecture should be structured in a manner that ensures its understanding and responses reflect compassion for human suffering, while also guaranteeing that its use does not promote or exacerbate such suffering.

V. Technology limitations and restrictions

The ethical principles should specify the limitations of technology in addressing Christian spiritual inquiries and establish measures such as supervision, systems, parameters, or protective "parapets" (known as *garde-fous* in French) to restrict technology's influence. AI-based technology should be regarded as a tool, while fundamental human inquiries remain centred around the human connection with God, and spiritual experience cannot be accurately described or converted into precise facts. Consider St. Paul's mention of "visions and revelations of the Lord" in terms of an experience "whether in the body [...] or whether out of the body". He speaks of a rapture „to the third heaven", where he heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor 12:2-4). Those who witnessed Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus "stood speechless" and Paul himself is described as "trembling and astonished" (Acts 9:6-7).

Therefore, the formulation of ethical guidelines regulating the utilisation of AI by Christian communities and in spiritual practices is influenced by various significant questions on this topic and should consider a numerous factors, a few of which we shall highlight: What are the ways in which AI can be integrated into spiritual life without undermining authentic religious experiences? What are the limits of AI in providing spiritual guidance and how can these be clearly defined and upheld? To what extent can the use of AI influence the religious knowledge, experiences and practices of believers? How can Christians and Christian communities maintain proper oversight of AI in religious settings and during spiritual counselling? What measures may be implemented to prevent abuse and manipulation facilitated by AI in the context of spiritual counselling? What is the long-term impact of engaging with AI on a person's spiritual growth? What methods may be used to assess and enhance the cooperation of theologians, technology experts, programmers, and AI operators in order to create responsible and ethical AI?

In conclusion, it is not sufficient to solely develop ethical guidelines in response to specific situations; instead, AI users need to be informed and educated about the dangers of misperceiving AI, of anthropomorphizing, of identifying AI with friendly AI. AI should only be used as a tool, as it cannot provide conclusive answers to matters of spirituality and personal quests.

Finally, the principles governing the use of AI in the spiritual life should be clearly defined and responsibly applied.

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Palliative Care – The Alternative to Euthanasia[*]

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ABSTRACT. I believe that better education about palliative care (PC) and its more intensive and widespread use, followed by the continued development of palliative medicine, are superior to any type of assisted dying. In this study I present *the Christian alternative*, the practical alternative to euthanasia and other options for ending earthly life, insisting on PC. It is the real, viable and acceptable example of *easy death*, with a Christian origin and mission, as opposed to the expansion of assisted death services, which have entered a process of de-Christianization, dissolution and discredit.

Keywords: palliative care, euthanasia, life, death, Christianity

Introduction

The approach of death is, without a doubt, a gloomy and difficult prospect in human life. The reasons for this are multiple concerning the design and especially in the experience of this stage, but one reason stands before the rest in the existential path of man: the fact that God did not create man to know death. Death is not from man's ontology. Death is neither of creation nor of the Creator. God is the Creator of life, not of death[1]. Death is a passage; not a passing

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[*] This study develops and extends upon ideas presented in Sorin Vulcănescu, *Euthanasia. A moral theological-approach*, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing, Craiova, 2023.

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[1] "God, Who created human nature, did not create pleasure along with it, nor pain resulting from sensory activity, but he rather gave her mind a certain capacity for pleasure through which she could mysteriously enjoy Him. By linking this capacity (which is the mind's natural desire after God) to the senses as soon as he has been created, the first man saw his pleasure moving against nature, towards sensory objects, through the senses. But He who cares for our salvation providentially embedded in this pleasure, as a means of punishment, the pain, through which he wisely planted in

into non-existence, as stated by some ancients and some modern thinkers, but rather a passing unto resurrection, a moving to life, as is said in the prayers at the funeral service.

From a theological point of view, the Old Testament teaches us that death entered the world through the sin of the first parents. This is not an explanation for death (this is "a sign, the 'sacrament' or symbol of humanity[2] which affirms only the relation of sin to death), nor the *prototype of human death* (this is the death of Jesus Christ, as the New Adam)[3]. In the New Testament, an explanation for death lies in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, the pattern that Christians are exhorted to follow. The emphasis falls on the Resurrection of Christ and not on His Death, on the defeat of death through resurrection – resurrection as victory over death – and not on the moment itself. This reveals a process by which death was left "on the margin" and not made into an "independent theme", because there is a "contempt" for it, albeit different from the secularistic one[4]. With the focus being on Christ, the One Who overcame the chains of death and thus gave us new eternal life, Christian teaching remains the religion of the gift of life and respect for it: "A Christian perspective on dying is really a version of life. It is living and dying in the light shed by the Resurrection of Christ. This does not make dying any less difficult, but it brings it within the grasp of our humanity"[5].

From a medical point of view, the last decades have seen two main approaches to patients in the terminal phase of a disease. The first option has been that of care: in one's own home, in a hospital or in a specialized center, including palliative care (PC). The awareness that the approach of death will be accompanied by pain grows more difficult and profound the more the end of biological life is accompanied by pain and suffering – both for the dying, as well as for their family and those close to them. The second option has been a type of assisted death (euthanasia, assisted suicide or medically assisted suicide). Euthanasia and its *surrogates* have received a series of names – *good*, *easy*, *dignified*, *happy*, *merciful* or *compassionate death*. Euthanasia advocates have

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the nature of the body the law of death, to restrain the folly of the mind which, contrary to nature, moves its desire towards the objects of the senses. Thus, due to the pleasure contrary to reason that penetrated the nature, there also entered the pain as an antidote conforming with reason. This is mediated by many passions, among which and from which is also death, and its purpose is to remove the pleasure contrary to nature, even to abolish it completely, so that the gift of divine pleasure can be shown in the mind". St. Maximus the Confessor, "Răspunsuri către Talasie", in: *Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile Sfinților Părinți care ne arată cum se poate omul curăți, lumina și desăvârși*, vol. III, Trans. Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae (București: Humanitas, 1999), 310.

[2] Tom Morris, *Growing Through Grief. A Book and Discussion Guide for Grief Groups* (Cambridge YTC Press, 2008), 67.

[3] Helmut Thielicke, *Living with Death*, Trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 164.

[4] Helmut Thielicke, *Living with Death*, 32.

[5] Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 140.

twisted and desecrated these terms, radically changing their primary purpose and meaning in an extensive and sustained process of *disinheriting* them. Then they took them over and used them with a secularistic meaning and, often, as slogans[6]. But when the euphemisms are removed and the focus is strictly on the act itself, the discussions and consequences of the act itself are no longer about "killing the pain but killing the patients"[7].

I believe that better education about PC and its more intensive and widespread use, followed by the continued development of palliative medicine, are superior to any type of assisted dying. In this study I present *the Christian alternative*, the practical alternative to euthanasia and other options for ending earthly life, insisting on PC. It is the real, viable and acceptable example of *easy death*, with a Christian origin and mission, as opposed to the expansion of assisted death services, which have entered a process of de-Christianization, dissolution and discredit[8].

The alternative to euthanasia

Palliative care units are the alternative that does not involve direct intervention in hastening death, but instead deliberate, unconditional and competent care. This begins with the management of pain and suffering and continues with the process of preparing for *easy*, *dignified death* – most authentically exemplified by PC rather than euthanasia or its *surrogates* like terminal sedation[9]

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[6] Including *caregiving*, given that assisted dying is promoted by its proponents as *end-of-life care*. Willem A. Landman, *End-of-Life Decisions, Ethics and the Law* (Geneva: *Globethics.net Focus*, 2012), 71.

[7] Emily Jackson, John Keown, *Debating Euthanasia* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2012), 83.

[8] Undermining trust in PC – in Belgium, after the amendment of the law that allows the combination of PC services with euthanasia, through an unprecedented approach, confusion has been created among patients who, for fear of euthanasia, refuse admission to PC centers, which can become "euthanasia houses". Jan L. Bernheim, Kasper Raus, "Euthanasia embedded in palliative care. Responses to essentialistic criticisms of the Belgian model of integral end-of-life care", *Journal of Medical Ethics* 43/8 (2017): 489-494; Benoit Beuselinck, "2002-2016: Fourteen Years of Euthanasia in Belgium. First-Line Observations by an Oncologist", in D.A. Jones, C. Gastmans, C. Mackellar (Eds.), *Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Lessons from Belgium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 105-106.

[9] Sedation before death – involves the administration of sedatives to "reduce awareness of stress to a tolerable level" or to "prolong unconsciousness". There are different types of sedation, from *palliative* (with the aim of stabilizing a tolerable level of pain) to *terminal* (in which sedatives basically replace the lethal agent). Outside of *palliative sedation* (although even here, due to confusing terminology, more controversies arise), the other types are not considered standard care practices in medicine, being equated with assisted dying wherein the goal is to intentionally hasten death. Timothy W. Kirk, Margaret M. Mahon, "National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

and voluntary cessation of nutrition and hydration[10].

Palliative care is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as:

> "An approach that improves the quality of life of patients – adults and children – and their families who are facing problems associated with life-threatening illness. It prevents and relieves suffering through the early identification, impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, whether physical, psychosocial, or spiritual"[11].

The main goal of this type of care is to alleviate the pain caused by the disease, to reduce the suffering of the patient and the family and to manage all the symptoms of the terminal illness. This prepares the person and their loved ones for death, as well as for the period afterwards. Thousands of studies have been written about the benefits of PC for the patient, the patient's family, the health system etc. The most important objectives of PC are the following:

– primary attention is given to the patient's life and the elimination of the intention to hasten death[12]. This translates into constant concern for the well-being of the patient and his/her family from a medical, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual point of view[13]. More precisely, it involves alleviating of the pain caused by the disease and other painful symptoms, reducing suffering for the patient and the family, increasing physical and spiritual well-being;

(NHPCO) Position Statement and Commentary on the Use of Palliative Sedation in Imminently Dying Terminally Ill Patients", *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 39/5 (2010): 920; Catherine Bando, "Assisted Death: Historical, Moral and Theological Perspectives of End of Life Options" (*Theses and Dissertations*, 2018), https://bit.ly/2vMJux1, Accessed: 27.01.2024; Samuel H. LiPuma, "Continuous Sedation until Death as Physician-assisted suicide/euthanasia: A Conceptual Analysis", *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 38/2 (2013): 190-204.

[10] Voluntary cessation of nutrition and hydration – refers to the voluntary decision of patients in the terminal stage of a disease to give up food and water consumption. In these cases, the decision is considered by most specialists in the field to be a legal option and not a standard care practice in medicine, nor one identical to withholding or withdrawing nutrition and artificial hydration. Timothy E. Quill, "Dying and Decision Making — Evolution of End-of-Life Options", *New England Journal of Medicine* 350/20 (2004): 2032; Catherine Bando, "Assisted Death…" (*Theses and Dissertations*, 2018), https://bit.ly/2vMJux1, Accessed: 27.01.2024.

[11] World Health Organization, *WHO definition of palliative care*, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/mw52ajn8, Accessed: 02.06.2024.

[12] Elissa Kozlov, M. Carrington Reid, Brian D. Carpenter, "Improving patient knowledge of palliative care: A randomized controlled intervention study", *Patient Education and Counseling* 100/5 (2017): 1010.

[13] Kathleen Foley, "Patients Need Better End-of-Life Care Rather than Assisted Suicide", in: L.M. Medina (Ed.), *Euthanasia* (Detroit: Gale, 2005), 190.

– facilitating an easy death. This involves reducing pain and suffering to a tolerable level; effecting awareness of impending death through a series of open dialogues; supporting the resolution of personal and interpersonal issues[14] through planning and social, administrative, notarial counseling etc.; providing psychological and spiritual assistance for the patient and the family; and assistance for the family during the mourning period[15].

Physical and spiritual well-being or the holistic dimension

Considering the perspective of the founder of the hospice movement, Cecily Saunders, with regard to *total pain* (or *complex pain*), the relief of *physical ailments* is only one aspect within PC. Other dimensions (*emotional*, *social*, *spiritual*) must also be considered in care[16]. Psychosocial factors have been found to influence the patient's medical condition and length of survival[17]. In this sense, it is vital that PC staff optimize the holistic care of patients by prioritizing holistic assessment. This means maintaining basic concern for physical needs and providing special attention to the psycho-emotional, social and spiritual well-being of the patient and his/her family[18] as an integrated part of basic treatment[19], managed

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[14] Camilla Zimmermann, "Acceptance of dying: A discourse analysis of palliative care literature", *Social Science & Medicine* 75/1 (2012): 217-224; Hannah Frith, Jayne Raisborough, Orly Klein, "Making death «good»: instructional tales for dying in newspaper accounts of Jade Goody's death", *Sociology of Health and Illness* 35/3, (2013): 419-420.

[15] Emily Butler et al. "The Efficacy of Hospice-In-Place Care Versus Traditional Inpatient Care", *The American journal of hospice & palliative care* 41/8 (2024): 863-872; Vanderbilt Center for Health Services Research, *Qualitative Research Core* (https://tinyurl.com/2avmefbs. Accessed: 28.08.2024).

[16] Cicely Saunders, *The Management of Terminal Malignant Disease* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978); Caroline Richmond, "Dame Cicely Saunders. Founder of the modern hospice movement", *British Medical Journal* 331 (2005): 238; John Ellershaw, Steve Dewar, Deborah Murphy, "Achieving a good death for all", *British Medical Journal* 341 (2010): 656-658.

[17] Maggie Watson, Jo S. Havilland, Steven Greer et al., "Influence of psychological response on survival in breast cancer: a population-based cohort study", *The Lancet* 354/9187 (1999): 1331-1336; Steven Greer, "Healing the Mind/Body Split: Bringing the Patient Back Into Oncology", *Integrative Cancer Therapies* 2/1 (2003) 5-12; Thomas Küchler, Beate Bestmann, Stefanie Rappat, "Impact of psychotherapeutic support for patients with gastrointestinal cancer undergoing surgery: 10-year survival results of a randomised trial", *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 25/9 (2007): 2702-2708; Barbara L. Anderson, Hae-Chung Yang, William B. Farrar et al., "Psychological intervention improves survival for breast cancer patients", *Cancer* 113/ (2008): 3450-3458.

[18] Sonja McIlfatrick, Felicity Hasson, "Evaluating an holistic assessment tool for palliative care practice", *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 23/7-8 (2014): 1073.

[19] Tiina Saarto, "Palliative care and oncology: the case for early integration", *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* 2 (2014): 109; David A. Kain, Elizabeth A. Eisenhauer, "Early integration of palliative care into standard oncology care: evidence and overcoming barriers to implementation", *Current Oncology* 23/6 (2016): 374-377.

concurrently by interdisciplinary teams of specialists[20]:

> "The healthcare professional as healer therefore needs to address the whole person and will not practice exemplary medicine without attending to all patient needs, including spiritual needs. On these grounds, Sulmasy suggests that attention to the spiritual needs (that is, spiritual care) of patients is not only permissible, but a moral obligation for doctors"[21].

Based on these premises, it can be stated that the main advantage of the holistic model lies in the care for both the patient's condition and the patient, the family and the PC staff; also in the care for both the patient's life and preparation for death:

> "Holistic care is a comprehensive model of care, which is at the heart of nursing science. Holistic care recognizes the human being as a whole and the effect of psychological and spiritual health on physical well-being. By recognizing the person as a whole, holistic care attempts to identify the relationship between biological, social, psychological, and spiritual aspects. Medication, education, communication, self-help, and complementary treatment are some of the approaches to holistic care. A holistic approach is important when it comes to palliative care to improve the patient's life by addressing their emotional and physical well-being. Above all, it helps the patient to gain confidence and self-knowledge, and it also helps the nurse to gain a better understanding of how the disease affects the patient's life and needs. It is about improving harmony between the mind, body, emotions, and spirit in a changing environment [...] It is important to have a holistic perspective to understand the patient as a whole, due to the effect of spiritual health on the patient's psychosocial and physical health. The patient's autonomy, values, and beliefs should be respected from different perspectives, including religion, culture, and personal beliefs, by adopting an open and accepting view. Good spiritual health positively affects the patient's overall health. Several studies have shown that spiritual care has a positive correlation with improved immune function, positive coping strategies, pain control, and quality of life. In terminally ill patients, spiritual well-being, transcendence, hope, meaning, and dignity are closely related to pain management"[22].

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[20] Steven Greer, Marie Joseph, "Palliative Care: A Holistic Discipline", *Integrative Cancer Therapies* 15/1 (2016): 8.

[21] Daniel P. Sulmasy, *The Rebirth of the Clinic: An Introduction to Spirituality in Health Care* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Megan C. Best, Bella Vivat, Marie-Jose Gijsberts, "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care", *Religions* 14/3 (2023): 320.

[22] Heven Tekeste, Nimo Osman, *Nurses' experiences of caring for patients' spiritual health needs in palliative care in India*, 2022, 4-5 (https://tinyurl.com/mrxy9d3z. Accessed: 25.08.2024).

Spiritual care: the epicenter of the holistic dimension of PC

Palliative care has developed as a specialty in recent times. As a field of care for the suffering or the dying, we can say that it has always existed. Since the first centuries, the Church has extended its mission to include caring for the sick and their families. In addition to taking care of the needs of the sick body, Christians also took care of the needs of the soul – even more so of Christians on their deathbeds. It is therefore not at all surprising that PC, even at its beginning, resembled and was identified more with an authentic Christian missionary activity than with a medical practice or hospital activity[23]. Today, more than ever, the need within PC for a holistic dimension with a central focus on spiritual assistance as a vital resource in finding the meaning and purpose of life is recognized[24], as is the need to develop aspects related to spiritual assistance[25]:

> "Addressing spirituality may become especially important in the face of a patient's life-threatening illness. A spiritual perspective is associated with better tolerance of physical and emotional stress and may reduce the risk of suicide and depression among patients with serious illness. Spiritual care can also be an important part of working with bereavement and grief"[26].

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[23] David Clark, "Religion, medicine, and community in the early origins of St. Christopher's Hospice", *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 4/3 (2001): 356; James F. Drane, *A Liberal Catholic Bioethics* (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 193; Jane Seymour, "Looking back, looking forward: the evolution of palliative and end-of-life care in England", *Mortality*, 17/1 (2012): 4-5; David Clark, *Early origins of St Christopher's Hospice*, 2014, https://bit.ly/2Xg0QgO, Accessed: 13.01.2024.

[24] Alyson Moadel, Carole Morgan, Anne Fatone et al., "Seeking meaning and hope: self-reported spiritual and existential needs among an ethnically diverse cancer patient population", *Psycho-Oncology* 8/5 (1999): 378-385; John T. Chibnall, Susan D. Videen, Paul N. Duckro et al., "Psychosocial-spiritual correlates of death distress in patients with life-threatening medical conditions", *Palliative Medicine* 16/4 (2002): 331-338; Collen S. McClain, Barry Rosenfeld, William Breitbart, "Effect of spiritual well-being on end-of-life despair in terminally-ill cancer patients", *The Lancet* 361/9369 (2003): 1603-1607; Elizabeth Grant, Scott A. Murray, Marilyn Kendall et al., "Spiritual issues and needs: Perspectives from patients with advanced cancer and nonmalignant disease. A qualitative study", *Palliative and Supportive Care* 2/4 (2004): 371-378; Scott A. Murray, Marilyn Kendall, Kirsty Boyd et al., "Exploring the spiritual needs of people dying of lung cancer or heart failure: a prospective qualitative interview study of patients and their carers", *Palliative Medicine* 18/1 (2004): 25-33; Christina M. Puchalski, Robert Vitillo, Sharon K. Hull, Nancy Reller, "Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: reaching national and international consensus", *Journal of Palliative Care* 17/6 (2014): 646-648.

[25] Lucy Selman, Richard Harding, Marjolein Gysels et al., "The measurement of spirituality in palliative care and the content of tools validated cross-culturally: a systematic review", *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 41/4 (2011): 728-753.

[26] Miller, Megan et al., "Spiritual Care as a Core Component of Palliative Nursing", *The American journal of nursing*, 123/ 2 (2023): 55.

The European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) has been involved in the introduction and promotion of spiritual assistance within PC, considered "the dynamic dimension of human life that relates to the way persons (individual and community) experience, express and/or seek meaning, purpose and transcendence, and the way they connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, to the significant and/or the sacred"[27]. Aspects of this dimension include belief in God and religious practices; the ultimate meaning of life and death, of self and values, and of suffering and pain; relationships with family and loved ones; and hope during the illness, including in the afterlife[28]:

> "Spirituality is about anything that pertains to a person's relationship with a higher power or nonmaterial life force. It involves different beliefs and is interpreted differently by each individual: some describe spirituality in terms of coming to know, love, and serve God, and another speaks of experiencing universal energy and transcending the limits of the body. Spiritual health helps people to have more effective interactions with their surroundings and live better lives, considering that it is about connecting with something that inspires security and trust. A person's spirituality is a reflection of their fundamental nature. It encompasses how they seek or express meaning and purpose in their lives. Spirituality contributes to pain relief in patients and is closely related to cultural beliefs and religious practices. Spiritual care is essential for patients suffering from terminal illnesses. It reduces depression, helplessness, and hopelessness and improves mental health among terminally ill patients"[29].

Spiritual care must be integrated into PC from the beginning so that the medical staff and the priest can work together. The Church must ensure that PC centers have a priest, who is prepared for this noble, but by no means easy, mission. In this sense, the priest will have to answer the patients' existential concerns, restore their hope in the continuation of life beyond biological death, prepare them for the encounter with Christ, confess and share with them. Belief in God can have positive effects in the management of terminal illness, as demonstrated by the testimonies patients:

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[27] Steve Nolan, Philip Saltmarsh, Carlo Leget, "Spiritual care in palliative care: working towards an EAPC task force", in: *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* 18/ 2 (2011): 88.

[28] Megory Anderson, Christina Faull, "Spirituality in Palliative Care", in C. Faull, S. de Caestecker, A. Nicholson, F. Black (Eds.), *Handbook of Palliative Care* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 356-363.

[29] Heven Tekeste, Nimo Osman, *Nurses' experiences of caring for patients' spiritual health needs in palliative care in India*, 2022, 4-5 (https://tinyurl.com/mrxy9d3z. Accessed: 25.08.2024).

> "Well, I've had surgery, chemotherapy, radiation. I understand the side effects, the feelings, the anxieties, and the fears. I think that just helps me relate to patients and the families [...] My illness also strengthened my faith, because I had a lot of prayer at that time, I was baptized at that time. So I think I kind of went through a transformation during my cancer treatment that increased my faith and strengthened it"[30].

Therefore, faith is the source of strength and peace that removes the fear of death, that strengthens the believer in the expectation of life after biological death[31].

The mere act of talking to someone can itself be beneficial, as we read from the testimonies of some patients severely affected by disease: "A young single father [...] went to theatre, open and close. He was riddled with cancer. His pain relief kept escalating without any effect. We sat down and talked [...] and got him to tell his story [...] and his needs for opiates actually decreased significantly"[32].

The priest's mission will be more difficult when he meets non-practicing Christians, atheists or free-thinkers. These patients may have never before met with a clergyman, and the meeting could be decisive for the afterlife. For the priest, it can be an equally unusual meeting, due to the demands and particularities of his dialogue partner and the challenges of the meeting.

Spiritual assistance must also be directed to the patient's family. Family members suffer alongside the patient, sometimes perhaps even more than the patient when there is no acceptance of the circumstances. Therefore, the priest must be in permanent contact with the family members and support them with everything he can. In this sense, we must remember that the Church has always been concerned with the lives of its believers, especially in difficult times. Already, the Church allocates important funds to support the medical field and builds medical spaces, care spaces, housing for the families of those who are undergoing treatment in hospitals etc.

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[30] G. Pittroff, "The humbled expert: An exploration of spiritual care expertise", *Journal of Christian Nursing* 30/3, (2013):164-165.

[31] Jonathan Koffman, Myfanwy Morgan, Polly Edmonds et al., "Cultural meanings of pain: a qualitative study of Black Caribbean and White British patients with advanced cancer", *Palliative Medicine* 22/4 (2008): 350-359; Peter Speck, "Culture and spirituality: essential components of palliative care", *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 92/1088 (2016): 341-345.

[32] R. Keall, J.M. Clayton, P. Butow, "How do Australian palliative care nurses address existential and spiritual concerns? Facilitators, barriers and strategies", *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 23/21 (2014): 3201.

However, family members must also be with the patient. They must be by his/her side from a physical point of view, but also from a moral point of view. Likewise, the prayer raised to the Heavenly Father by those close to us is the one that works and achieves God's mercy. We have countless examples from the Gospel stories in which our Savior Jesus Christ heals suffering after family members or friends bring the sufferer, pray for him or confess the true faith. This prayer is the saving prayer, and healing comes from solidarity in prayer.

The involvement of the priest must be active around those who receive PC, but also around those who are thinking about assisted death. To the latter group, the priest can speak of human life as a gift from God; responsibility toward one's own life and death, towards family, community and God; and the meaning of existence through perfection already in this life. That is why the tact, erudition and openness of the priest must be among the choicest. The priest's mission does not end with the biological death of the patient, as he must then perform the proper services and bring consolation to the patient's family.

Spiritual care is important in the life of every person, whether healthy or sick. But according to the words of the Savior, it is vital in the case of the sick, because "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2, 17):

> "Spiritual well-being has been identified as a core domain in the assessment of quality of life in the setting of serious illness. It has been shown to be as important as physical well-being when assessing quality of life in cancer patients. Quality of life measures identify a unique effect for the spiritual domain, distinct from psychosocial and emotional domains, and which enables some patients to enjoy life even in the midst of experiencing unpleasant physical symptoms"[33].

Medicine and Christian teaching have many more points in common and much greater potential for collaboration than we perceive and see today in the public scene. Even if the concern for spiritual life must be a continuous one, now and into the future, not only in moments of balance, but indeed every day; even if studies have demonstrated that spiritual care can lead to an improvement in medical condition has been noticed; still this care is missing from hospitals and often from PC centers. Recent studies linking improvement in the patient's condition to the provision of spiritual care[34] also indicate the following: improved

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[33] Megan C. Best, Bella Vivat, Marie-Jose Gijsberts, "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care", 320.

[34] Megan C. Best, Phyllis Butow, Ian Olver, "Palliative care specialists' beliefs about spiritual care", *Supportive Care in Cancer* 24/8 (2016): 3295-3306; Megan C. Best et. al., "Australian Patient Preferences for discussing Spiritual Issues in the Hospital Setting: An Exploratory Mixed Methods Study", *Journal of Religion and Health* 63/1 (2023):1-19.

the quality of life, increased self-esteem, increased confidence, improved doctor-patient relationship, finding meaning in the experience of illness, and decreased care costs[35]:

> "Studies to date have shown that addressing the spiritual needs of patients in palliative care is associated with many positive outcomes for both patients and their relatives. Although the evidence base for spiritual care interventions is currently limited, more studies are currently being conducted. More consistency in the design of RCT's, in particular, would enable meta-analysis and thereby the drawing of broader conclusions on the efficacy of these interventions. Provision of spiritual care requires that institutions recognise the need for such care, including through providing staff training and support, which benefits both patients and staff, who are thereby also enabled to provide better support to patients"[36].

Spiritual care becomes the most important resource in times of crisis:

> "Someone who receives a life-threatening diagnosis such as cancer is confronted with existential questions such as 'why is this happening to me?', 'what will happen after I die?', or 'will my family cope after I am gone?'. This has been described as the 'existential slap'[37], or personal crisis, which accompanies the realization that death is a possible outcome, regardless of prognosis. Spiritual resources are required to cope with this crisis and if the questions that arise are not resolved, existential (or spiritual) suffering[38] can ensue[39].

For the measurement of spiritual well-being, the SWB32 questionnaire has been developed, consisting of four scales: "Relationship with Self, Relationships with Others, Relationship with Someone or Something Greater, and Existential, plus a global spiritual well-being item and a single-item scale for Relationship with God, for those with a religious faith including a personal God"[40]. Therefore,

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[35] Elizabeth Grant et. al, "Spiritual issues and needs: Perspectives from patients with advanced cancer and nonmalignant disease. A qualitative study", *Palliative and Supportive Care* 2/4 (2005): 371-378; Tracy Anne Balboni et. al., "Provision of spiritual care to patients with advanced cancer: Associations with medical care and quality of life near death", *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 28/3 (2010): 445-52; Dan Taylor et. al., "Spirituality within the Patient-Surgeon Relationship", *Journal of Surgical Education* 68/1 (2011): 36-43.

[36] Megan C. Best, Bella Vivat, Marie-Jose Gijsberts, "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care", 320.

[37] Nessa Coyle, "The existential slap - A crisis of disclosure", *International Journal of Palliative Nursing* 10/11 (2004): 520.

[38] Megan C. Best, Lynley Aldridge, Phyllis Butow, Ian Olver, Fleur Webster, "Conceptual Analysis of Suffering in Cancer: A systematic review", in: *Psycho-Oncology* 24/9 (2015): 977-986.

[39] Megan C. Best, Bella Vivat, Marie-Jose Gijsberts, "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care", 320.

[40] Megan C. Best, Bella Vivat, Marie-Jose Gijsberts, "Spiritual Care in Palliative Care", 320

reconciliation, horizontally with one's own person, with one's neighbor and with the environment opens the way to vertical reconciliation with the Good God, thus realizing the feeling of acceptance and true preparation for meeting Christ.

Conclusions

Caring for the suffering is, first, an exhortation for the contemporary Christian. Christian teaching has identified the love of one's neighbor with the love of one's own person. Thus, caring for one's neighbor is a mirror condition, both for the cultivation of virtues and the knowledge of God's gifts.

Second, we are blessed to live longer than our forefathers. But sometimes this change also means experiencing more hardships and suffering more through the prolonging of old age and the dying process, given that medical advances extend our lives, but sometimes consequently expose us to a prolonged experience of medicalized and institutionalized death[41].

Thirdly, the *financialization* of life has also led to a *financialization* of death. In this sense, the costs of care for dying patients have been and are considered, in certain institutions, to be unnecessary or secondary. But man's life remains of the same quality, with the same value and dignity, regardless of suffering, illness or pain. Life is life, a gift is a gift, even if it interacts with illness or suffering. Care means concern for the patient's life and for his/her preparation for meeting Christ. Preparation means acceptance and reconciliation, not hastening death.

In this sense, we can overcome the obstacles of death foreign to our nature through a new treaty of *ars moriendi*,[42] in which man "need not fight death to the end; because he knows that the person on his deathbed is in God's hands, even though the process of death, of course, can be hard and cruel"[43]. Instead, it needs to reacquaint us with death and the dying and to prepare us for death. It could contain information and advice needed by both carers and those being cared for. This activity involves a preparation for both parties, about how dying can be managed in a simpler or easier way, without pain, with mercy, respecting faith, dignity, autonomy and, ultimately, the life of the patient[44].

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[41] Emily Jackson, John Keown, *Debating Euthanasia*, 8.

[42] Catherine Bando, "Assisted Death…" (*Theses and Dissertations*, 2018), https://bit.ly/2vMJux1, Accessed: 27.01.2024.

[43] Friedrich Heckmann, "Etica creştină şi responsabilitatea Bisericilor faţă de procesul morţii şi moarte într-o societate seculară şi postmodernă", in: M. Hartmann, V. Stanciu (Eds.), *Viaţa ca dar al lui Dumnezeu. Responsabilitatea creştină în perspectiva morţii*, Trans. L. Boloş (Sibiu: Schiller 2018), 121.

[44] The PC specialists made a series of recommendations regarding the care of the dying, including the creation of a sacred space for ritual and prayer, an environment that would restore the

Only through this preparation can contemporary man be refamiliarized with death and, at the same time, only in this way can the futility of assisted death and related options be demonstrated, or the primacy, uniqueness and authenticity of Christian fulfillment be revealed through palliative care.

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patient's sense of peace and comfort in the family, teams of permanent caregivers to keep vigil until death so that the patient would not die alone and respect for liminal experiences and aftercare. Megory Anderson, Christina Faull, "Spirituality in Palliative Care", 362.

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Varia

Postscriptum for Jahr
– About the Father of Bioethics and the Bioethical Imperative –

Dejan DONEV*

ABSTRACT. Fritz Jahr (1895-1953) is widely recognized as the Father of Bioethics. In 1926, he introduced the term "bio-ethics" in an article published in *Das Mittelschulwesen*. Influenced by Wilhelm Wundt's comparative studies on physiology and psychology in humans, animals, and plants, as well as the philosophical musings on the possible soul-life of plants by Fr. Th. Fechner and others in the late 19th century, Jahr sought to redefine ethical considerations. He expanded Kant's Categorical Imperative into what he called the Bioethical Imperative: "Respect every living being in principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such." While Kant's imperative was grounded in the "Sanctity of the Moral Law," Jahr's Bioethical Imperative is based on the "Sanctity of Life," emphasizing compassion for all living beings and coexistence.

Keywords: Jahr, Bioethics, Bioethical Imperative, Living Being, Bios

Introduction

During the last 40 years, the term "bioethics" was often used, and somewhere still is, synonymously with the term "medical ethics". Most contemporary medical ethics focus on respect for patient autonomy and social justice, based on the US Belmont Report (1979) with its emphasis on the three principles of "respect for persons, beneficence, justice", as well as the teachings of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, did not differentiate between "bioethics" and "medical ethics". As stated by Amir Muzur and Iva Rincic, "very early on, bioethics turned, primarily, to medical topics and, captured by the logic and

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priorities of American culture, tried to pragmatically decide on things that were not (yet) legally defined, reducing themselves to inevitably fragile packages of principles and often dispersing responsibility from individuals to various commissions"[1].

No matter how it was understood[2], at the end of the 20th century, bioethics profiled itself as a commendable movement that, "like a Roman slave on a chariot of triumph, would steadily and persistently whisper in the ear of scientists and politicians that every human invention does not necessarily have to be unquestionably useful to those same people"[3]. So, it was Eve-Marie Engels who, in an article "Bioethik" in Metzler's Lexikon Theologie, 1999, outlined the various branches of bioethics about Fritz Jahr. So, in this way, she brought to our intention the name and works, also the meaning and importance of Fritz Jahr[4]. After that, Hans-Martin Sass published a brochure on "Fritz Jahr's Bioethischer Imperativ" in 2007 with the Bochum Zentrum fur Medizinische Ethik and an article in the "Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal" the same year. Furthermore, international Conferences in Rijeka (Croatia) in 2011 and Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Halle an der Saale (2012) made Jahr's integrative and integrating vision of the "ethics of bios" a prime topic in the development of the foundations of future

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[1] Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* (Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012), 14.

[2] Although the »spirit of bioethics« can be found in various thought, religious and cultural traditions from antiquity to modern times, the term "bioethics" itself appears only in the twentieth century, and is related to the works of German theologian and protestant pastor Fritz Jahr (1895–1953). Compare Iva Rinčić, Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* (Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012); Amir Muzur, Hans-Martin Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics. Future of Integrative Bioethics* (LIT Verlag, Berlin – Münster – Wien – Zürich – London, 2013), also American naturalist and physician Van Rensselaer Potter (1911–2001). Compare Van Rensselaer Potter, "Bioethics: The Science of Survival," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 14 (1970), p. 127–153; Van Rensselaer Potter, "Biocybernetics and Survival," *Zygon – Journal of Religion & Science*, 5 (1970), p. 229–246; Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioetika – most prema budućnosti*, Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci et al., Rijeka, 2007; Van Rensselaer Potter, *Global Bioethics. Building on the Leopold Legacy*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1988.)

[3] Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 14.

[4] Rolf Löther in his article "Evolution der Biosphäre und Ethik" (in: Eve-Marie Engels, Thomas Junker, Michael Weingarten /ed./, *Ethik der Biowissenschaften. Geschichte und Theorie. Beiträge zur 6. Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie in Tübingen 1997*, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 1998., p. 61–68) mentioned the European root of the word "bioethics", pointing to Jahr's article entitled "Bio-Ethik" from 1927. Although, after the mention of the older, European, term and concept of bioethics, Jahr's "discovery" was followed by several authors in his articles, reactions came only after a few years, thanks to Hans-Martin Sass and his publications *Fritz Jahrs bioethischer Imperativ. 80 Jahre Bioethik in Deutschland von 1927 bis 2007* (Zentrum für medizinische Ethik, Bochum 2007.) and "Fritz Jahr's 1927 Concept of Bioethics" (*Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 17 /2007/, pp. 279–295).

global bioethics. Not to forget: Brazilian translations of most of Jahr's publications have been published in "Revista BioEthiKos" 2011, 5(3):242-268; 242-268; Croatian translations by Rinčić, I. and Muzur, A. are in "Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike" Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012. Spanish translations are published in „Aesthethika" 8(2), 2013, while other translations are underway[5].

Nevertheless, who is Fritz Jahr? Whence such insistence on its importance in the emergence and development of bioethics, especially at the global level?

The fate of a Life – Biographical Notes

Paul Fritz Max Jahr, child of Gustav Maximilian Jahr, an insurance agent, and his wife Auguste Maria Jahr, nee. Langrock was born on January 18, 1895, in Halle on the river Saale. After many years of moving, in 1913, the family moved for the last time to the famous house on Albert Schmidt Street, no. 8 in Halle, where Fritz lived for the rest of his life, never leaving his hometown, like his idol Kant.

He started attending elementary school in 1901 and higher classes from 1905 to 1914 within the Franckesche Stiftungen[6] in Halle, achieving below-average success of 2+ grades. However, for Easter in 1914, he passed the matriculation exam, and the following year, 1915, the additional exams in Latin and Ancient Greek languages. During 1914, he studied for a total of eight semesters, mainly philosophy, music, history and national economy, and from 1915 to 1919, and he studied theology. Finally, in November 1920, he passed his teaching exams in religion and history, and in March 1921, he was ordained as a Protestant pastor.

He worked as a teacher from 1917 until 1925 in 11 schools in Halle. In 1925, due to disagreements with the Education Council, he left the teaching profession[7] and was ordained, i.e. began a career in the Church, first as a priest, until 1930. In the same year, he was employed for the first time as a pastor in Kanena near Halle, but at the beginning of 1933, he had to retire due to poor health, a month after Hitler came to power. In the following years, especially the period from 1943 to 1945, but also after the Second World War, due to poor health and financial limitations, he returned to the teaching profession and held private cello lessons at the music school in the Center for Public Education, in order to somehow increased his meagre pension.

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[5] In the meanwhile Macedonian translation was made, by me.

[6] The foundation founded by August Hermann Francke based its charitable work and teaching on Pietism – a variant of Lutheran Protestantism that was initiated and brought to Halle by Francke and his role model Philipp Jakob Spener.

[7] although he worked in a private school until 1928, as well as briefly as a substitute in 1938.

In 1932 he married Berta Elise Neuholz, with whom he had no children. After a long and severe illness from spinal sclerosis, that is, with paralyzed legs and sitting in a wheelchair, in 1947, his wife died, and Fritz, due to a brain haemorrhage and high blood pressure, died on October 1, 1953, at the age of 59.

Jahr's life was uneventful, marked by poor health and the absence of professional and public recognition during the turbulent times of the Weimar Republic, Fascist Nazi Germany and the Stalinist rule in Eastern Germany[8]. However, the dedication we can read in his texts tells us that his calling was more than a job. It was the subject of long-term research to improve the education system, especially the teaching itself. It was a life that largely explicates his ideas, situating them in the context of his biography, society, and time as "the rain of a tormented crowd, waiting for its opportunity to appear before the simplifications of Georgetown bioethics"[9], whose popularity is due to the undiminished influence of the book *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* by Tom Beauchamp and James Childress since its appearance in the 1970s, autonomy, justice, harmlessness and beneficence form the standard theoretical and practical starting point for supporters of Anglo-American values in the bioethical debate.

From the Theoretical Creation of Bioethics to the Practical Application of the Bioethical Imperative

Fritz Jahr (1895-1953) should rightfully be considered the *Father of bioethics* and the first conceptualization of bioethics, which is particularly important today because it is rooted in the European spiritual tradition. He coined and defined the term "Bio-Ethik" in 1926 in an article in the journal *Das Mittelschulwesen*, specifically in his third published article of December 1926, entitled "The Life Sciences and the Teaching of Ethics"[10], impressed by comparative studies of physiology and psychology in humans, animals and plants by Wilhelm Wundt[11], as well as by philosophical reflections on the potential soul life of plants

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[8] Although only briefly presented, the information about Jahr's life does not show us his greatest contribution and achievement. Jahr himself rarely mentioned his publications and works, but in 1928, in a letter in which he hoped to find a new job, he mentioned the title of his dissertation at the University of Jena - *On the ethical relations of man towards animals and plants.* (Compare I. Rinčić, A. Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, str. 27.)

[9] Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 15.

[10] The importance of this article by Jahr is not only that he mentions the term "bioethics" for the first time, but also that in that article he also offers a theoretical framework in which he tries to base bioethics.

[11] In *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, Wundt shows similarities in nervous and physiological reactions in humans and animals that manifest through matches in goals and survival-oriented activities in animals, humans and plants. (Compare Hans-Martin Sass, "European Roots of

by F.T. Fechner (Gustav Theodor Fechner) and others in the second part of the 19th century, saying that: "from biopsychology to bioethics, there is only one step!".

Then he coined the term "bioethics" from the ancient Greek words „bios" and „ethics" and began to develop the thesis about why people should accept moral duties not only concerning each other but also concerning animals and plants. To support his argument, he refers to examples from St. Francesco of Assisi, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Richard Wagner, Eduard von Hartmann and others, concluding his presentation with the formulation of the Bioethical imperative, which represents the transformation and expansion of Kant's Categorical Imperative: "*Respect every living being as an end in itself, and treat it, if possible, as such!*"

In 1785 Kant only requested respect for "humanity, in your person as well as in any person, on principle as an end in itself, never only as a means to an end". Furthermore, while the "Sanctity of the Moral Law" was the basis for Kant's Categorical Imperative, for Jahr's Bioethical Imperative, it is "Sanctity of Life", i.e. compassion with all forms of life and living together. That is, according to the statement of one of the greatest connoisseurs of the work and meaning of Fritz Jar, Hans Martin Sass[12], what should be emphasized here is, of course, "bringing Jahr's bioethical imperative based on compassion, in opposition to Kant's categorical imperative based on human dignity". Moreover, while Kant's model was formal and rigorous, Jahr recognizes the interplay between self-care and care for others and replaces the virtue of respect for the law with the virtue of compassion towards all "bios", i.e. life and all forms of life.

For this purpose, Jahr makes a detailed explanation of the same in his fourth, according to the broader distribution, perhaps the most read article, which he published in the magazine *Cosmos* in 1927, stream around 15 days after the third article, under the title "Bioethics: Reviewing the ethical relations of humans towards animals and plants". It discusses the most exciting idea presented a year before and generally repeated the theses for establishing the bioethical imperative, but this time expanded with yoga practitioners Buddha and Arthur Schopenhauer.

More precisely, "Jahr's imperative finds its inspiration in the Fifth biblical commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill!', and it gets its final formulation by expanding Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: "Respect every living being in principle as a purpose in itself and, if possible, treat it as such!". "The bioethical imperative must perceive, or rather recognize, the segments of the struggle for

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Bioethics. Fritz Jahr's 1927 Definition and Vision of Bioethics", in: Ante Čović, Nada Gosić, Luka Tomašević (eds.), *Od nove medicinske etike do integrativne bioetike*, Pergamena – Hrvatsko bioetičko društvo, Zagreb, 2009., p. 21.)

[12] Hans-Martin Sass, "Bioetički imperativ Fritza Jahra: 80 godina bioetike u Njemačkoj od 1927 do 2007. godine", *Bioetički svesci*, Rijeka, 61 (2008): 10 (1-44).

survival in cultural and natural conditions. In order to successfully regulate all these relationships, there is a need for different types of ethics. Jahr offers several examples: corporate ethics, ethics of institutions, sexuality, environment and others"[13]. The bioethical imperative includes compassion, love, virtue and solidarity with all forms of life in the "golden rule" and/or "categorical imperative" because without them the "golden rule" can be interpreted as egoism – "Don't do anything to me, and I will not do anything to you either"[14]. In the Christian spirit, Jahr's ecumenical bioethical imperative is a supplement to the Fifth commandment ("Thou shalt not kill!"), that is an extension to the protection of every Other.

So, in this way, in conclusion, Jahr made his contribution in extending ethics to the whole living world, including not only Albert Schweitzer's "awe of life" but also "ethics of nature", "ethics of animals", and "ecological ethics", "ethics of the environment" and "bioethics"[15].

Instead of Conclusion - For Bioethics in the 21st Century

Fritz Jahr did not write voluminous monographs like other original thinkers such as Kant. He was not an exceptional student, but he showed a great interest in philosophy and theology - which will be manifested through dedicated work and twenty-two, so far, discovered articles, as short as possible, as a good sermon should be, until the end, prepared for practical application and further development from others.

Also surprising is the breadth and width of his topics ranging from criticism of Esperanto as a formal and static language to that of the hierarchies which he found in churches and elsewhere; from animal ethics and plant ethics to environmental protection and to the recognition that social interactions and communities are not much different from natural biotopes when individual life depends on give-and-take interaction with others and on good interacting and integrating complexes in struggling for life together. That is, starting from the first known article from 1924, which deals with universal languages and languages of the world, to the question of the ethical status of animals and plants and reflection on the moral and social implications of Catholic teachings,

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[13] Marko Kos, "Od Fritz Jahra do integrativne bioetike", *Filozofska istraživanja*, 133–134 God. 34 (2014) Sv. 1–2 (229–240), 231-232.

[14] Fritz Jahr, "Smrt i životinje: razmatranje Pete zapovijedi," in: I. Rinčić, A. Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, 207-211.

[15] Rolf Lother, "Evolution der Biosphare und Ethik", in: *Ethik der Biowissenschaften: Geschichte und Theorie - Beitrage zur 6.Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft fur Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie (DGGTB) un Tubingen 1997*, Eve-Marie Engels, Thomas Junker, Michael Weingarten (Hgs.), Verlag fur Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 1998, 61-68.

holidays and customs. Miller and Sass believe that Jahr's articles "go beyond the interests focused on the history of bioethics, because they also contribute to the bioethical debate in the present, and can serve as a guide for future global bioethics, that is, integrative bioethics"[16].

The previous gives the right to claim that what sets his work apart is defined only in integrative bioethics, and that is the need to shape a new paradigm of knowledge, i.e. a shift from applied knowledge to orientational knowledge and a pluriperspectivist approach[17]. This is how the translation study of the 5th Commandment, 1934, should be considered, where Jahr surprises the reader with three steps for implementing the 2500-year-old rule today:

(a) The Golden Rule,
(b) reasonable care of one's health and health of family and public health,
(c) The bioethical imperative.

In summary, for the greatness and significance of Fritz Jahr's character and work, it should be emphasized that it is not surprising that he includes in his concept of integrative life the invisible worlds discussed in religious traditions - a vision that today can find support in quantum physics and multi-world models. Also, although Jahr's vision was without remarkable success in his time, the term "Bioethics" was re-invented almost 50 years later by Van Rensselaer Potter as "The Science of Survival" (1971). Nevertheless, Jahr had gone further than Potter by including human environments and human bio-topes, such as communities and teams in factories and offices, in his concern for prosperous and harmonious decision-making. Of course, there are always informed and educated choices and responsible decisions to be made between self-care and care for others, as he outlined in 1929 on the interaction between egoism and altruism. However, still, as far as we are concerned, his most outstanding intellectual achievement is the bioethical imperative through which he returns man's attention to life in the broadest sense, turning it into what is called anti-speciesism, environmentalism, and numerous other *isms* that are offered to us as original and life-saving. If nothing else, "Jahr's awakening gave such a curious impetus to the new thinking of bioethics and bioethical topics that today we can freely talk about new bioethics in the 21st century or about the new phenomenon of European bioethics"[18], but also about global bioethics.

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[16] Compare Irene M. Miller, Hans-Martin Sass, "Postscript," in: F. Jahr, *Essays in Bioethics 1924–1948*, LIT Verlag, Munster, 2013, 129.

[17] Detailed in Marko Kos, "Od Fritz Jahra do integrativne bioetike," *Filozofska istraživanja*, 133–134 God. 34 (2014) Sv. 1-2: 229-240.

[18] Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 15.

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The Nazi Protectorate of Mount Athos.
Between Illusion and Reality

Claudiu BOIA[*]

ABSTRACT. This study presents the situation of the monastic communities of Mount Athos in the context of the Second World War and their relations with the Nazi power. The conquest of Greece in 1941 by the Axis powers created confusion among the monks of the Holy Mountain, who tried to preserve the monastic tradition and the Orthodox Christian faith in the new political context. The lack of information of the Athos monks, as well as the opportunism characteristic of the Nazis, led to a blurred situation regarding the political authority to which the Holy Mountain had to report. This gave rise to the idea of a Nazi protectorate, but also to the illusion that this protectorate could improve the life and status of the monks in the Athos monasteries. The historical reality of those years is very difficult to unravel because of the war, but it is necessary to discover it to understand what really happened then.

Keywords: Athos, Nazi Party, Greece, Protectorate, Adolf Hitler, World War II, illusion, reality

Introduction

On 28th October 1940, as part of the Axis Powers, Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, attacked the Kingdom of Greece from the territory of Albania, attempting a rapid offensive of conquest. Unfortunately for the Italian army, Greek forces managed to counter the Italian attacks, pushing the front line all the way to the Albanian border. Bulgaria's non-involvement in Fascist Italy's attack on Greece forced Mussolini to ask Nazi Germany for help. Although Hitler had no plans to wage war in the Balkans, in the spring of 1941 he attacked both

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Yugoslavia and Greece from Bulgarian territory, succeeding in forcing the Greek armed forces to surrender in just two months. The conflict ended with the offensive on the island of Crete, which the Nazis occupied with the help of the Luftwaffe and thanks to the weak defence of the British air force in the area.[1]

After King George II's escape to Egypt on 24th May 1941, a pro-Nazi government was installed in Athens, led by General Georgios Tsalakoglou, who was succeeded by two other prime ministers loyal to the Axis powers until 1943, and who merely accepted Germany and Italy's decisions.[2]

On 9th June 1941, Adolf Hitler, as the victor, issued a directive that established Germany's zones of influence and control in Greece. Two thirds of the Island of Crete, along with the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Lemnos, and Melos, the port of Piraeus, and the Thessaloniki region fell under direct German military authority. Part of Macedonia was administered in collaboration with Bulgarian forces in the eastern part of Thrace. Although most of the Greek territory was under Italian authority, Hitler retained key strategic points and major ports, successfully enforcing his occupation policy.[3]

As part of the Greek state since 1923, following the treaty of Lausanne, Mount Athos came under the authority of the Nazi army in 1941. The legal and administrative situation in the eastern part of the Chalkidiki Peninsula was established through a *constitutional Charter*[4] promulgated on 10th May 1924, and ratified by Greece in the 1927 Constitution.[5]

According to this 1924 constitutional charter, Mount Athos received the status of *Monastic Republic,* with the right to self-governance within the Greek state and under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.[6] The number of monasteries was fixed at 20, with no possibility of change.[7] Access was allowed only with the approval of the monastery leaders, and permission to reside in one of these monasteries was granted only to Orthodox men, who automatically became Greek citizens. [8] All major decisions regarding the economic and administrative organisation were made within the representative

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1 David Thomas, *Nazi Victory: Crete 1941* (New York: Stein and Day Publisher, 1972), 58-72; 137-142; 204.

2 Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 145-152.

3 "Adolf Hitler's Directive no. 31 of 9th June 1941," in *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series D, vol. XIII (Washington, 1962), doc. 609, 988-990.

4 Emanuel Amand De Mendieta, *Mount Athos – The Garden of Panaghia*, Trans. English by Michael R. Bruce (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972), 142-143.

5 SINTAGMA THS ELLHNIKHS DHMOKRATIAS, 1927 (Greek Constitution, 1927), art. 109-112.

6 *Greek Constitution 1927*, art. 109; *The Constitutional Chart of Mount Athos*, *1924,* art. 1; 2; 5 in DE MENDIETA, *Mount Athos,* 163-164.

7 *Constitutional Chart of Mount Athos, 1924,* art. 2; 3.

8 *Constitutional Chart of Mount Athos, 1924,* art. 5; 6.

assembly of the 20 monasteries, known as *Ieros Kinonhita* (Holy Kinot). Each monastery had the freedom to manage material assets as they saw fit and organise their liturgical and ascetic life according to tradition.[9]

Although the Kingdom of Greece guaranteed Mount Athos the autonomy it had enjoyed since the Byzantine Empire, and which was maintained largely under Ottoman rule, not all monasteries accepted the sovereignty of the Greek state with an open heart. The most dissatisfied with the new political situation after 1927 were the Russian monks of the monastery of St. Panteleimon (Rusicon) and the Bulgarian monks of Zografu, together with the Romanian monks of the Podromu hermitage, which belonged to the Greek monastery of Great Lavra. Their main problem was that all the monks living on the Holy Mountain automatically became Greek citizens, which was seen as diminishing the universal spiritual role of Mount Athos and a cause of the decreasing number of non-Greek monks choosing to retire to the monasteries of the Holy Mountain.[10] If until 1941, these grievances of the non-Greek monks were expressed only sporadically and without any real impact on Greek nationalist politics, they gained traction during the Nazi occupation of the region of Thessaloniki, which included the Holy Mountain.

Hitler – a possible saviour of the Holy Mountain

On 20th April 1941, almost all of mainland Greece succumbed to the offensive of the Axis powers, led by Nazi Germany, and on 27th April the last bastion, Athens, also fell to the attackers. The war continued until 1st June, but was concentrated in the Aegean Sea, specifically around the island of Crete, where King George II had taken refuge with some members of the Greek executive.[11]

Between 20th April, when German troops occupied the Thessaloniki region, and 27th April, when Athens signed the surrender, Hitler's chancellery in Berlin received an official letter from the Holy Monastery of Mount Athos, in which the 20 representatives of the monasteries asked the Führer to become Protector of the Holy Mountain:

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9 *Constitutional Chart of Mount Athos,* art. 11-13.
10 De Mendieta, *Mount Athos...*, 148-150.
11 Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: the experience of ocupation, 1941-44* (Yale University Press, 2001), 11-15.

"Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned pious representatives of the Twenty Holy, Princely and Patriarchal Monasteries of the Holy Mountain 'Athos', in our capacity as abbots and representatives of the Holy Place, have the great honour to address Your Excellencies and to ask you most earnestly (and insistently n.n.) to take this Holy Place under your personal protection and patronage as successor of the founders and benefactors of this Holy Place, the Byzantine Emperors and their descendants."[12]

The letter continues with a plea for the importance and status that monastic establishments in the Holy Mountain have had throughout history and the fact that several international treaties, among which the Berlin Treaty of 1878 is highlighted, guarantee the right to continue the exceptional spiritual mission of the monks, which throughout history "has given rise to ecclesiastical and classical culture, literature and art, as well as to a life of piety and constant prayer for the protection of the whole world."[13]

The end of this letter is written in the form of a prayer to the authorities, containing, in a somewhat stylised form, the Nazi doctrine of the *volk* (people):

"Praying to the King of kings and Lord of lords, with all our hearts and souls, that He may shower Your Excellency with health and long life for the good of the glorious German people, We sign,
With esteem, the Plenipotentiary Representatives of the Extraordinary, Full and Holy Assembly of the 20 Holy Monasteries of Holy Mount Athos...".[14]

On the last page of the document, found in the archives of the Reich Security Office (RSHA) in SD Belgrade, the 20 monasteries of the Holy Mountain that formed the government are listed, without mentioning the names of those who participated or their holograph signatures.

The speed with which the Athos monks reacted to the imminent surrender of Greece to ensure their continued autonomy, as well as the fact that only the German translation of the letter is preserved in the Nazi archives, without the original attached, may raise questions about the authenticity of this document.

However, in June 1941, the Monasteries of St. Panteleimon and Zografu, on behalf of the Russian and Bulgarian monks of the Holy Mountain, submitted a petition[15] to the Reich Security Office (RSHA) in which, in 8 pages, they told

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12 BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, (f.1), April 13/26, 1941.
13 BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, (f.2).
14 BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, (f.2-3).
15 BArch, NS 8/259, ff. 93-101.

the millennial history of these monastic settlements, the vicissitudes of history, as well as the injustices to which the non-Greek monastic communities of Mount Athos were subjected with the passage in the 1920s under the suzerainty of the Kingdom of Greece. Drafted in the same style, using the same arguments invoked in the previous petition of all the monasteries in April 1941, in particular Article 62 of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, the letter of the monks of the monasteries of St. Panteleimon and Zografu, asked Germany to appoint a representative of the Axis Powers, instead of the one subordinated to Greece, to redress the injustices to which the non-Greek monks had been subjected over the past 20 years:

> "At present, in view of the fact that the Greek administrative authorities have been reinstated on Athos after the end of the Balkan struggles and that under these conditions the oppressive regime to which we are subjected will continue to exist, we would like to appeal to the Axis powers, as protectors of the weak and the disenfranchised by the creators of the Versailles system, to order that a representative of the military occupation administration of the Axis powers be appointed on Athos, so that this representative would not only be given the duties of the Greek imposed as political governor, whose subsequent activities were only harmful and terrorist, but rather be given the task of restoring the centuries-old rights and privileges of the non-Greek monasteries on Athos, which the Greek government violated with flagrant disregard to the international treaties".[16]

The petition is signed on behalf of "*the brotherhood of Bulgarian monks of the Zografu Monastery"* and *"on behalf of the Russian brotherhood of St. Panteleimon Monastery*" and is dated June 1941, and the place of its submission is Sofia.[17]

The attempt of the Russian and Bulgarian monastic communities of the Holy Mountain to attract the support of the Nazi authorities for the restoration of the authority that their monasteries had enjoyed before 1924 was also followed by the community of Romanian monks, represented by the hermitages Podromu and Lacu, which were under the jurisdiction of the Greek monastery of Great Lavra. On 20th April 1943, the Reich Security Office in Belgrade received a letter[18] from the two Romanian hermitages, asking for redress of the injustice imposed by the *Constitutional Charter* of 1924, whereby the number of monasteries on the Holy Mountain was limited to 20, with no possibility of change:

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16   BArch, NS 8/259, f. 100.
17   BArch, NS 8/259, f. 101.
18   BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, report RSHA of August 13, 1943 of the SD commander of Belgrade.

"All the illegal measures were later legalized by the Greek parliament through the so-called Charter of the Holy Mountain Constitutions, which aims to totally eliminate minority elements. This Charter also abolished the independence of minority hermitages, cells and hovels [...] In 1926 the Greek government expropriated all monastic properties outside the borders of Athos. This measure was applied to Romanians, Bulgarians and Russians but not to Serbs because the property of the Serbian monastery Hilandar was not touched. [...] All the international agreements that were also signed by the Greeks, starting with the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, Article 62, and the Treaty of Sevres of 1922, have been disregarded by the Greek government, which has consistently and unscrupulously violated these international treaties. The Greek people have therefore shown themselves to be untrustworthy, which is why it would be necessary for the Holy Mountain to be legally subordinated to another regime, so that it would no longer be exposed to political arbitration, denationalisation and Greek chauvinism. It is a flagrant injustice that we, the Romanians, who have been founders and keepers of the entire Holy Church for 5 centuries, when we built the "Great Monastery of Romania, Koutloumousiou (Cutlumuş) back then, today the only thing that is regretted is that we do not have a single monastery and that we do not have the right to vote in the Holy Chinonite leadership, and that our few Romanian hermitages and cells are doomed to complete destruction."[19]

The complaints of the Romanian monks are also supported by the preliminary report accompanying this letter, prepared by the SD Commander in Belgrade. He reported to the RSHA Berlin that the Romanians living in Athos suffered from Greek chauvinism, and that they indeed did not have a monastery in the Holy Mountain although "Podromu Hermitage exceeds many historical monasteries in size." The same report also mentions that at that time, June 1943, there were around 70 Romanian cells and "*hovels*" on Athos, along with the two hermitages, which housed around 260 monks.[20]

The three petitions show a pattern that cannot be the product of mere coincidence. On the one hand, one can identify the dissatisfaction of monks belonging to nationalities other than Greek with the policy of the Greek government and most monasteries belonging to Greeks. On the other hand, there is the hope of restoring the authority of the Holy Mountain, as it was in the time of the Byzantine emperors, through the intervention of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, which was the most powerful European state at the time. This is the reason why all three petitions invoke as the first argument for the demands made, the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 and the "injustices" of Versailles, often invoked by the Nazi ideology, even though the complaints of the Russian,

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19   BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, *Placing the Romanian element of the Holy Mountain.*
20   BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, Report 22nd May 1943.

Bulgarian and Romanian monks had as the source of their grievances the *Constitutional Charter* drawn up by the Holy Chinonite in 1924, which the Greek government only ratified in the Constitution of 1927, without imposing new regulations. Indeed, many of the properties belonging to the monasteries outside the Holy Mountain were nationalized by the Greek Kingdom, which in return paid reparations, not always at their true value, but the Greek monasteries were also affected by this measure[21]. The decline of the Russian and Bulgarian monasteries was caused primarily by the Bolshevik revolution and the establishment of the Stalinist regime, which stopped the flow of pilgrims and aid they received from Russia and the Slavic Orthodox countries. The sovereignty of the Greek state did not make life easier for these non-Greek monks, but it did not trigger the crisis of the said settlements.

In October 1941, the matter of the monasteries of Mount Athos came to the attention of the Führer's cabinet, who rejected any intervention in the already existing status of this region, ordering that from that moment on all petitions of that kind be directed through the Foreign Ministry and the internal bodies of the Greek government, headed at that time by the pro-Nazi Greek general Tsalakoglou, who finally refused any discussion on the subject, claiming that this violated the status of the monastic republic.[22]

The fact that Adolf Hitler did not respond favourably to the monks' petitions of 1941 proves that the request sent by the *Holy Chinonite* in April 1941 was not fabricated by the Nazi propaganda. Nevertheless, as early as 1943, many of the Holy Mountain residents believed that the Führer had accepted the status of protector, and that the Holy Mountain was under his protection. In a report which the RSHA officer of SD Belgrade, Dr Paul Dittel, wrote on 27th April 1943, during a visit to Athos, he concluded that:

> "After the end of the Balkan campaign in 1941, the Holy Chinonite of Karyes addressed a petition to the Führer, asking the leader to assume the patronage and protection of Mount Athos. However, the Führer had decided at that time, as was discovered by asking the OB [Obersturmbannführer n.n] in Thessaloniki, that he could not change anything for the time being regarding the situation. However, most monks believe that the Führer has in fact taken over the protection of the republic."[23]

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21   De Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 149-151.
22   Andreas Müller, "Eine Stille Märcheninsel Frommer Beschaulichkeit Mitten in Dem Alles Mitreißenden Und Alles Wandelnden Strome Der Geschichte?", in: Christian Albrecht und Christoph Markschies (Heraugegeben von), *Orthodoxie im Dialog* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 337–70.
23   BArch, R 58/5565b, unnumbered, Repport 27 April 1943, Belgrade, p. 8.

The confusion of the monks in this matter cannot be condemned, as the information available to them from outside the Holy Mountain was limited and carefully controlled by the German and Bulgarian armies. Moreover, as early as 1941 there was a Luftwaffe weather observation station in Athos and the gendarmerie detachment providing security in the Holy Mountain consisted of Greek gendarmes and German officers. In the guest books of several monasteries between 1941 and 1944 there are many records of German soldiers visiting the Holy Mountain, mostly for recreational or tourist purposes, and they were generally well received by the monks.[24]

Although officially the Nazi regime did not take over the protection of the Holy Mountain, the requests and wishes of the monks were discussed and resolved as far as the state of war allowed. On February 4, 1943, Russian monks from St. Panteleimon Monastery asked Orthodox Metropolitan Seraphim of Berlin and Germany for help in getting more food since many of the monks were in danger of dying from starvation.[25] The request was signed by Archimandrite Eugene and Priest Gabriel, and was submitted to the Metropolitan after they had repeatedly asked for help from the Bulgarian authorities and were completely ignored.[26] Metropolitan Seraphim referred the monks' request to the Reich Ministry for Church Affairs,[27] which asked for help from the authorities in Athens through the Foreign Ministry. The whole situation developed into an exchange of accusations between the German military administration in northern Greece and representatives of the Reich in Athens, as the Thessalonians claimed that sufficient food and materials had been delivered to the monasteries so that none of the monks would suffer from hunger or cold, and that the lack of food claimed by the Russian monks of St. Panteleimon was due to the fact that the monasteries had not shared the resources generously provided by the German Army in a fairly manner.[28] In February 1944, the Nazi archive documents mention that sufficient food and provisions were delivered to Mount Athos through the Red Cross in Bulgaria to ensure the livelihood of all the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain.[29]

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24 Andreas Müller, "Eine Stille Märcheninsel", 338-343.
25 BArch, R 5101/23175, ff. 75-77.
26 BArch, R 5101/23175, ff. 80-86.
27 BArch, R 5101/23175, ff. 70-71.
28 BArch, R 5101/23175, ff. 86-88.
29 BArch, R 5101/23175, f. 90.

Nazi Expedition to the Holy Mountain – 1941

Within the bureaucratic apparatus of the Nazi Party, there was, from 1940 onwards, a special division called *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (*Reichsleiter Rosenberg* Taskforce), acronymed ERR, whose main purpose was to appropriate cultural goods from countries occupied by the German Army.[30] More specifically, this Nazi organisation, which operated within the NSDAP, was dedicated to the theft and confiscation of cultural goods, especially those belonging to Jews, with the aim of taking them to Germany. The most significant activities of this Nazi office took place in France, Eastern Europe and Greece. The Operations Detachment in Greece was established on 25 February 1941, on the orders of Alfred Rosenberg, under the name *Soderkommando Rosenberg in Griecheland* (Rosenberg Special Command Force in Greece), and was led by Lieutenant Hermann von Ingram, assisted by two delegates, one for the Athens region and one for the northern part of Greece based in Thessaloniki.[31] Within this Special Command Force there were also several special working groups, specialising in the profile of the Greek territory, such as religious studies, Greek antiquity, prehistory, library research and Athos. [32]

The "Athos" working group was coordinated by Professor Dr. Franz Dögler,[33] a Byzantinologist at the University of Munich, with the mission of "scientific development of the source material available in the monasteries of Mount Athos (manuscripts, privileges and other unique documents and art treasures) from the 11th-13th centuries; study of monasticism."[34]

To carry out this mission, an expedition team was organized to the Holy Mountain consisting of Professor Franz Dögler; Dr. Anton Deindl, coordinating officer of Religious Studies of the ERR Thessaloniki; Dr. Otto Treitinger, Byzantinologist and assistant to Professor Dögler; Sergeant Major Karl Kress as photographer; Dr. Siotis, theologian at the University of Athens and the Greek Tsingiritis acting as interpreter and translator.[35]

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30 Donald E. Collins, Herbert P. Rothfeder, "The Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg and the Looting of Jewish and Masonic Libraries during World War II", *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)* 18/1 (1983): 21–36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25541351.

31 BArch, NS 30/75, ff. 0474670-0474671.

32 BArch, NS 30/75, f. 0474672.

33 For more details on Professor Franz Dögler's academic and political work in the NSDAP we recommend the study: Panagiotis A. Agapitos, "Franz Dölger and the Hieratic Model of Byzantine Literature," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 112/3 (2019): 707–780, https://doi.org/10.1515/bz-2019-0031.

34 BArch, NS 30/75, ff. 0474694-0474696.

35 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 61; BArch, NS 30/75, f. 0474696.

We have generous details of this expedition thanks to Professor Dögler's travel diary[36], dictated by him to his assistant Otto Treitinger, as well as from the volume published in 1943, which we will discuss later in our study.

The Dögler Group expedition took place between the 2nd and 31st July 1941. Due to unfavourable weather conditions, it was not possible to land on the Holy Mountain until around 1 p.m. on 4th July. In Karyes the documents were checked, especially the Diamonitrion[37], the group headed for the first night to the monastery of Iviron, from where they visited almost all the monasteries, taking photographs of documents, icons, relics and places. From the report of the ERR coordinator in Greece, Lieutenant von Ingram, we learn that 1,800 detail photographs were taken with a Leica camera and 100 wide-angle photographs,[38] while the report submitted by the ERR officer in Greece, Anton Deindl, speaks of 3,000 photographs.[39] The members of the expedition stated that they were generally well received by the monks, who endeavoured to provide them with the most suitable accommodation and meals. Dögler's diary points out that in most monasteries they had only two meals a day, and that they were rather meagre,[40] the exception being Hilandar Monastery, where they were served two kinds of meat.[41] A meticulous detail of no scientific significance is highlighted, namely, which monastery provided the group with wine, with Xiropotamu Monastery being singled out, which was generous with food but where there was "*no coffee or brandy, only tea with honey at breakfast*".[42]

The group occasionally attended the liturgical service of the monasteries, pointing out that the services started very early in the morning, around 5am, and lasted until midday. Professor Dögler, who was not on his first visit to the Holy Mountain, highlights the monks' devotion to relics, especially miracle-working icons and holy relics, and mentions that they received myrrh from the gifts of the Magi at St. Paul's Monastery.[43]

Special attention is paid to the libraries and archives of the monasteries visited. It is noted that they were generally very disorganised and lacked an adequate inventory. Professor Dögler made recommendations to the abbots to send monks to Germany for training in the organisation and preservation of documentary and museum collections. There is also mention of monasteries in

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36 BArch, NS 15/693, ff. 67-82.
37 Diamonitrion - document sealed with the logo of Mount Athos, the bicephalous eagle, certifying permission to enter and stay in the Holy Mountain.
38 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 63.
39 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 43.
40 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 66.
41 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 73.
42 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 77.
43 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 78.

which the documentary collection was well preserved, such as the one in the monastery of Esfigmenu. One moment recounted in detail was the removal of the *Tragos[44]*, which was carried out in a solemn atmosphere:

> "July 15, 1941 (Tuesday). At 8 a.m. we went to Iera Kinotis (Protaton). The famous box is ready. The 20 representatives of the monasteries gather around. Solemn speeches. The search for the right key takes half an hour. We take photos until around 11 a.m. The holy fathers slowly and discreetly disappear after previously rushing to see the "Tragos". The Governor and other representatives of the secular world attend the solemn state ceremony. I photographed here for the first time very important pieces. Dögler discovers a decisive feature for the authenticity of "Tragos", which is controversial in this respect. Around 11 a.m. the box was resealed with a written record (last opened in 1938)."[45]

The political interests of the monks in the context of the war are not overlooked. The author points out several times that the monasteries asked for Hitler's portrait. At Koutloumousiou, the delegation was greeted with the greeting "Heil Hitler!"[46] In the Serbian monastery of Hilandar, the swastika flag was flown[47], as well as in the monastery of Konstamonitou, where in the reception hall there was a charcoal portrait of the Führer made from a small photograph.[48] At the Vatopedi monastery, where the group spent a whole evening talking to the monks' "*epitropes*", the phrase "*our protector Hitler*" was mentioned, and upon leaving the Dionysiou monastery the abbot led the boat carrying the expedition members in waving the swastika. The diary also records the visit and discussion with a hermit at the cave of St. John Koukouzelis who, when asked about the fate of the war, is reported to have said, "Germany or Russia, the meeting of all belligerents at the end of the war in Constantinople."[49]

The strange behaviour of some of the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain is not overlooked either. The abbot of Koutloumousiou monastery "approved" the opening of a bottle of brandy from the expedition group's provisions, and at Docheiariou monastery, the monks behave rudely, after being offered an envelope of money on their departure as a thank you for their hospitality: "The monks of Docheiariou behave indifferently when they say goodbye. As soon as

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44 Tragos - the oldest surviving canon book from Mount Athos, dating from 972, written on the skin of an unborn goat, hence the name *Tragos*. It is about 3 metres long and is the oldest document with the signature of a Byzantine emperor, John I Tsimiski. The document is preserved today in the library of the Protaton in the monastery of Vatopedi.
45 BArch, NS 15/693, ff. 70-71.
46 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 70.
47 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 73.
48 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 75.
49 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 70.

one receives the envelope with the gift of money, the other snatches it from his hand and both quickly look behind the door at its contents."[50]

The Nazi delegation left the Holy Mountain on 31 July 1941, landing in Thessaloniki at around 14:00. The expedition was disseminated in a book entitled Mönchsland Athos, published in 1943 with the financial support of the NSDAP treasury, with Professor Franz Dögler, Professor E. Weigand from Prague and ERR officer Anton Deindl as authors. Compared to the expedition diary, the book does not provide any additional information, but it presents 184 black and white photographs taken during the expedition, including documents as well as frescoes, icons, pictures of monasteries and aspects of the monks' lives. The foreword is signed by ERR Berlin's chief of staff, Gerhard Utikal, who gives credit for the volume not to Professor Dögler but to Lieutenant Hermann Ritter von Ingram, head of ERR Command in Greece. In his preface, Dögler integrates the expedition and its success into the cultural policy of Nazi Germany:

> "It is to the credit of the ERR's operational staff that in the spring of 1941 they recognized the advantage that the occupation of Greece by German troops gave to another successful visit by German scientists. The many difficulties which had hitherto stood in the way of a visit to the Holy Mountain were now removed and there was the prospect of overcoming the traditional mistrust of the monks by conducting the expedition in a peaceful manner."[51]

The fact that, in addition to academic prestige, the Nazi ideology was also pursued through the printing of this volume, which is not without scientific importance, is also evident from the last chapter of the book, which shows a photograph of a pencil portrait of Hitler from the Konstamonitou monastery together with the text:

> "In the Konstamonitou monastery, the picture of our leader takes pride of place in the reception hall. A monk found the picture in an illustrated newspaper and drew a pencil sketch based on it. We were also able to see in other ways how strongly the personality of the leader and the Great German Reich impressed the imagination of the people of Athos."[52]

The work concludes in a propagandistic style, anecdotally recounting a moment from the expedition, which does not appear in any of Dögler's diary entries, and which was most likely written by ERR officer Anton Deindl, who on several occasions showed a hyperbolized view of what happened during the expedition:

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50 BArch, NS 15/693, f. 76.
51 Franz Dögler, *Mönchsland Athos* (München: F. Bruckmann Verlag, 1943), 11-12.
52 Franz Dögler, *Mönchsland Athos*, 290.

> "The experience of photographing a miraculous image was delightful. Looking at it from Athos' point of view, it was an extraordinary concession that we were given permission to photograph the holy icon without any hesitation, and the monks even helped with the preparatory work for the photography. An elderly monk, who came and looked at these preparations, shook his head and said: <<If you want to photograph Panagia, you won't have much luck, because Panagia has never allowed itself to be photographed before. But it may be>> he added with sincerity and goodwill <<that Panagia will make an exception with you Germans, and allow itself to be photographed, because the Germans stand, indeed, against the enemies of God, Bolshevism>>."[53]

The veracity of this account is questioned for several reasons. Firstly, the name of the monastery where the photograph was taken is not given, contrary to the academic style in which the rest of the work is written. Secondly, as mentioned above, Dögler does not capture the event in the expedition diary, although he had a penchant for reporting the peculiar and strange events found in the Holy Mountain. Thirdly, among the 184 photographs published, not one of them shows an icon of the Virgin Mary bearing the name Panagia, which would be contrary to the methodology of trying to publish representative and unpublished images of the cultural values of Mount Athos, and a photograph of an icon that never allows itself to be photographed would have been something truly unique. Leaving aside the propagandistic interventions, which were inevitable in a publication financed by the NSDAP to increase Germany's cultural prestige, Mönchsland Athos remains an emblematic book for the historical, cultural and religious study of the Holy Mountain, being at that time the most extensive catalogue of the Orthodox "treasures" of Athos.

Conclusions

For today's public opinion, any association with the Nazi regime and the person of Adolf Hitler is rightly condemnable, knowing the horrors committed in the name of National Socialist ideology. However, the issue of the Nazi Protectorate of the Holy Mountain must be seen in context to formulate opinions as close as possible to the historical truth. For anyone familiar with the traditional affinity of Athonite monasticism for imperial protection, it is not surprising that the Holy Mountain's monastics turned their attention in 1941 to the undisputed military leader of Europe. The instinct of self-preservation, coupled with the

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53   Franz Dögler, *Mönchsland Athos*, 290.

monks' poor information and precarious view of the dynamics of the world at the time, may have been quite truthful premises that led the monks to seek Hitler's protection. The way in which the Führer and the German military administration exploited this sensitivity or need of the Holy Mountain fits perfectly with Nazi cynicism. It is clearly proven that the monks' request was a real one, just as it is equally clearly proven that Hitler knew of it, refused it, but exploited it, using it to maintain the illusion of grandeur and superiority of Nazi Germany on all levels.

The permanent presence of the German army during the occupation of the Holy Mountain, as well as the dependence of the monks on food delivered through them, maintained the illusion of a protectorate that did not actually exist. Legally, Mount Athos was under the same regulations during World War II as before the war. Greece, even under Axis occupation, was governed by the Constitution of 1927, which placed the monastic Republic of Athos under Greek sovereignty. If there was anything to reproach the monks of Athos at that time with regard to the illusion of Nazi protectorate, it would be the naivety and lack of unity of the monasteries together with the opportunism of some monastic communities and the fact that they still lived with the nostalgia of Byzantium, not understanding *the signs of the times*. Out of all this confusion we can say that some good things have resulted. The work *Mönchsland Athos* remains very useful material from an academic point of view, and the fact that the German military administration in Greece was attentive to the material needs of the monks, as far as the state of the war allowed, made it possible to keep the Holy Mountain very little affected by the destruction and horrors of the War. The Nazi Protectorate of the Holy Mountain was technically an illusion, but an illusion very well-orchestrated by the Nazi ideology and comfortably accepted by some of the Holy Mountain's inhabitants.

Abbreviations

BArch – *Bundesarchiv Berlin* – the German Federal Archives
NSDAP - *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterparte* – the National Socialist German
     Workers' Party
ERR - *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg - Reichsleiter Rosenberg* Taskforce
BUNDESARCHIV – THE GERMAN FEDERAL ARCHIVES
Kanzlei Rosenberg. NS 8/259
Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg. NS 30/75
Der Beauftragte des Führers für die Überwachung. NS 15/693
Reichsministerium für die kirchlichen Angelegenheiten. R 5101/23175
Reichssicherheitshauptamt. R 58/5565b.

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Book Review:

Dr. Petru Cernat, *Identitatea embrionului uman. O perspectivă teologică și bioetică [The Identity of Human Embryo. A Theological and Bioethical Perspective]*, Doxologia Publishing House, Iași, 2022, 401 p.

This volume represents the publication of the author's doctoral thesis, defended in 2021 at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, and deals with the identity of the human embryo from the perspective of Orthodox Moral Theology and bioethics.

In his introduction (p. 17-38), Petru Cernat states that the work is based on "the desire to decipher a framework for dialogue between theology, philosophy and the world of sciences regarding the 'identity card' of the human embryo" (p. 19). The author also sets out the hypothesis on which his research is based, outlines the aim of his research and details the five objectives he is pursuing in this endeavor. As we can see from the presentation of the state of the
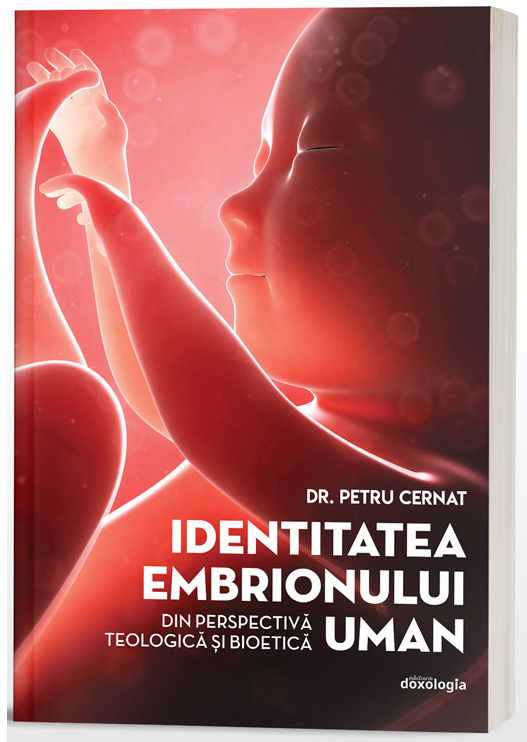
research, Petru Cernat's work aims to take forward the already existing debates on the identity of the embryo and to offer a theological response to this subject of capital importance for Christian anthropology and bioethical reflection.

The first chapter is entitled "Man - the theological being" (p. 41-88) and proposes first to understand the existence of the human embryo within the relationship between man and woman. In this context, Petru Cernat emphasizes the theological implications arising from this relationship, starting from the truths revealed in the first five chapters of Genesis. One of the implications, the personalization of man, occurs both through his relation to God and to others, to himself and to the whole of creation. The chapter continues with an "analysis of prenatal man from a biblical point of view". The author notes that the periodization of the stages of embryonic development in the Hebrew is attested with the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In the final part of the chapter, the identity of the human embryo is linked to man's kingly, priestly and prophetic vocation and it is noted that "the abdication of the three dimensions of man's moral vocation influences the status and identity of the human embryo" (p. 88).

The largest part of the work is represented by the third chapter and is entitled "The Foundation of a Christian Reflection on the Human Embryo" (p. 144-230). Broadly speaking, this chapter is constructed on two levels. In a first step, the author presents the erroneous teachings on the embryo found in Origen, Tertullian, Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodoret of Cyrus. Important here is the author's observation that if Origen's errors of thought leave posterity with more questions about the insubstantiation of the human embryo (p. 155), and Tertullian's errors of thought open the problem of traducianism (p. 157), the exegeses of Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodoret of Cyrus on the texts of Genesis 2:7 and Exodus 21:22-23 are wrong because, influenced by Aristotelianism, they speak of the human embryo's insufflation only after its body is perfectly organized (p. 160). Further, in a second step, Petru Cernat presents the theological reflections on the human embryo in Methodius of Olympus, the Cappadocian Fathers, and St. Maximus Confessor. The author points out that Methodius of Olympus is the first Christian writer in whom we find an elaborated creationist theory. Then, if about the Cappadocian Fathers the author writes that they contributed to "anchoring the problem of the human embryo's soul in the perspectives of Christology" (p. 164), in St. Maxim the Confessor the way in which Jesus Christ assumed in his hypostasis the two natures, divine and human, becomes paradigmatic for how we must understand the relationship and union between soul and body in the human embryo.

Chapters four (p. 231-243) and five (p. 244-254) explores the canonical and liturgical documents of the Orthodox Church regarding the human embryo. The author concludes that while the canons issued by the Church aim to practically regulate situations that may violate the embryo's right to life, the liturgical texts and hymns emphasize and promote for the respect of the embryo's right to life from conception.

The sixth chapter focuses on the "bioethical man" (p. 265-277) and first points out the challenges encountered in a biotechnologized society. Petru Cernat speaks of a moral over-emphasis to which the bioethical man is exposed because he is confronted with situations to which he has no viable answers. Without being gloomy or pessimistic in his analysis, the author observes a change in the moral paradigm as a result of the evacuation of God from the discourse on man. Petru Cernat emphasizes that the bioethical man hopes that his problems will be solved by technical and engineering solutions, then warns that, from a theological perspective, the indiscriminate use of the scientific spirit must be amended.

The seventh chapter (p. 287-291) reviews the most important moments in the field of embryology, the author noting that "the science of fetology and the refinement of techniques of assisted medical procreation have produced a veritable revelation of the postnatal human being". This chapter provides valuable information on the developmental stages of the embryo and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the process of the transmission of life.

The eighth chapter (p. 292-334) proposes us to reflect on the identity of the embryo from a biological and theological point of view. Petru Cernat points out the discussions that are taking place today around the individuality or personhood of the embryo and emphasizes that from a theological point of view the embryo has the quality of person because it shares human nature with other persons. Regarding the debate on the elements or attributes that give the embryo the moral status of personhood, the author's response captures the idea that from a theological perspective when we speak of we are considering constituents or attributes. From a theological perspective, when we speak of the human we do not have in view "something" but "someone".

The last chapter of the book is entitled "*Towards a bioethics of Life: the contribution of contemporary Orthodox theology to the delineation of the identity of the human embryo*" (p. 335-361). The conviction expressed by Petru Cernat is that Orthodox Theology can contribute to the bioethical debates on the status of the embryo by inspiring an ecclesial reflection on bioethics, by basing human dignity on the teaching of the creation of man in the image of God and by situating the question of the status of the human embryo in the spiritual sphere.

The book written by Petru Cernat deals with a highly polarized topic in bioethical debates, presents the main challenges to the moral status of the embryo and has the merit of answering theologically the questions related to the identity of the embryo. In Romanian Orthodox theological research, this book represents a valuable contribution to the clarification of essential aspects of the dignity and sanctity of human life from conception. The author manages to articulate a well-founded orthodox vision, bringing theological, patristic and biblical arguments to emphasize that the embryo, from its very beginnings, is the bearer of the image of God.

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