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## Medical Technology in the Light of Divine Revelation

### Abstract

In our secularized society, human life is often considered and treated as a mere product, which we might create on demand and eliminate when it is in our interest to do so. By protecting essential human values we must take into consideration the fact that the human person is created in God's image and is called to reach divine resemblance through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Many of the contemporary bioethical practices sacrifice Christian moral principles. Life has inner value given by its eternal origin and destiny. Christian bioethics is a process of continuous protection of the human being.

### Keywords

Medical technology, human dignity, bioethics, culture of life



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In our secularized society, human life is often considered and treated as a mere product, which we might create on demand and eliminate when it is in our interest to do so. As theologians, we ought to ask ourselves what priests, physicians and Christians should do in order to respect the divine Law while facing today's growing pressures "to do something because it can be done". We ought to know which are the moral and spiritual values we must protect today, when the field of Bioethics is confiscated by interests that are more sociological and economical than theological and spiritual nature. We should also know that the life that God gave us must be offered to Him ennobled, not deformed or caricatured.

By protecting essential human values we must take into consideration the fact that the human person is created in God's image and is called to reach divine resemblance through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, which dwells in us since Baptism, when we were planted in Christ (according to Romans 6,4-5). We must understand the intrinsically value of human life and we must be informed of the means through which the modern biomedical technology can serve the ultimate goal of life. This is our participation as human persons in the personal life of the Trinitarian God. The medical science and art are gifts offered to us by God and must be used only in order to transfigure this life, not to destroy it.

Many of the contemporary bioethical practices sacrifice Christian moral principles. They do this with the luciferic intention of prevalently asserting the extraordinary scientific performances. Scientific discoveries shouldn't be considerate an absolute truth, because something might be today scientifically correct and well grounded, and tomorrow only a theory or completely false. Man's deeds must relate to the will and science of the Creator. Any human activity must be in accordance with revealed teachings, which represent God's will, the Source of life. When it is outside the revealed teachings, the Christian bioethical discourse becomes speculative and heads towards ideology, that is, towards false and artificial. This

means a dangerous spiritual retrogression, which causes “man’s inner destabilization”<sup>1</sup>.

In all the procedures and methods that physicians can use – such as abortion on demand, *in vitro* fertilization, genetic engineering, including cloning human embryos, the therapy with psychotropic drugs or euthanasia – must take into account the values of Orthodoxy. These are the: the sacred character of the human being, God’s sacrificial love and the theosis of the person. This is the only way to protect the human being from the possible abuses of scientific discoveries. Giving science a human meaning, we give existence and human creation a divine meaning. We are called to master the world (according to Genesis 1, 28) and this must be a way “to change the thing in itself created by science into a thing for man”. Bioethics thus becomes the way of science, which confers it human significance.

Any medical decision must be made in an ecclesial framework. The patient is a member of Christ’s Body. Therefore, if the patient and the medical team want to remain faithful to the Gospel they must cooperate with God, so that our choices and decisions regarding life and death must conform entirely to the faithfulness of the divine will. All our relations and especially our relations to the ones who suffer from illnesses and handicaps must be founded on God’s love. Otherwise, existence is desacralized, the spiritual dimension is thus suppressed.

A purely technical activity creates the risk and deprives of significance and valorization, through the spirit, a work which must be characterized by serving our neighbor unconditionally. Christian bioethics teaches us to regard and treasure life as a sacred gift. It is a gift because we did nothing to come into existence and no matter what we do, we cannot complete or prolong it beyond God’s will. It is sacred, its holiness is based on the fact that man was created by God Almighty, in His image

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<sup>1</sup> D. Gh. Popescu, *Teologie și cultură*, (București: EIBMBOR, 1993), p.102.

and He is the model, the promoter and supporter of holiness. “Acknowledging man’s sacred character constitutes the premise of respecting his life and being”<sup>2</sup>. Life has inner value given by its eternal origin and destiny; God offered us existence, life, in order to live in an eternal loving communion with Him (according to Col. 1,12; Eph. 1,18)<sup>3</sup>.

We live in an epoch of “ethical night”, in which the life which would need more love and compassion is considered useless or an unbearable burden and is consequently rejected in many ways. Annihilating the values of love through immorality, adultery, contraception, abortion, divorce, suicide, delinquency, euthanasia, etc., is against achieving the plenitude of life. Today, when the biomedical modern technology advances, we witness excesses whose character of sin the devil masks, especially by introducing those means of destruction in our habits, consequently trivializing them, which makes us regard them as something natural.

Biomedical technology must not become a demonic attempt of man to go beyond the measure of his image. The physician cannot decide over the life he has not created, the message of his profession being to serve life, not to favor death.

Bioethics must promote life and everything that imposes respect towards this great divine gift. According to the natural moral Law, each person has the duty to protect what he alone cannot create: human life<sup>4</sup>. Respecting human life means acting to support it, but also avoiding everything that can lead to its destruction or affect its quality. Any act against life is an attack against God Himself, the Source of life. Saint Paul the Apostle says: “If anyone destroys God’s sanctuary, God will destroy him”

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<sup>2</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină, vol. II*, (București: Editura Bizantină, 2006), p. 409.

<sup>3</sup> See N.-R. Stan, *Antropologia din perspectiva hristologică*, (Constanța: Arhiepiscopia Tomisului, 2007), pp. 132-164.

<sup>4</sup> Life being a precious gift of God, “taking care of life is a duty and a right of every faithful person”, see: *Teachings of the Orthodox Church*, (București: IBMBOR, 1992), p. 374.

(I Cor. 3,17). Profanation can be done through abortion, suicide, mutilation, violence or cloning, which is “the most astounding and troubling of all genetic manipulations”<sup>5</sup>.

Secular Bioethics is founded on everything that opposes the natural course of life, stopping man’s natural development, in harmony with the laws inscribed by God in creation. Natural is everything that comes from God, everything that is according to the divine will or to nature’s laws, whose origin is divine, too. Artificial is everything that opposes life, directly or indirectly, everything that opposes its purpose, everything that is according to our arbitrary will<sup>6</sup>. Here we can mention euthanasia, cloning, with its problematic character, and homosexuality, a sin against nature. Referring to cloning and to those monsters with human face (without a soul!), Bill Clinton, the former American president asserted: “Let us not play God. We must protect the values, the family and the religious and philosophical beliefs of many people”<sup>7</sup>.

Secular Bioethics and pro-vita or biomedical practices must take into consideration that this earthly, biological life does not represent everything; it is not a purpose in itself. Earthly life is only a preamble to eternal life; it is a means of practicing eternity, a time of trying and edifying perfection. Thus, bioethics cannot ignore the eschatological principle. “Present and future life are organically connected. Present life leads to future life, and future life is founded on present life.”<sup>8</sup> If man were not destined for theosis, spiritualization and transfiguration, his most correct slogan would be: “Live life to

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<sup>5</sup> C. Dumea, *Omul între „a fi” și „a nu fi” – probleme fundamentale de bioetică*, (București: A.R.C., 1998), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Eager to dominate nature and steal the secrets of life, the man of this century “wants to change everything, to transform natural products and replace them with others that are his creation only” (D. Gh. Popescu, *Teologie și cultură*, p. 103).

<sup>7</sup> See I. Pop-Bistrițeanul, *Curs de bioetică*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Renașterea, 2005), p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morală creștină*, p. 407.

the fullest here and now!" The actions in favor of promoting life must take into consideration that the human person cannot be the instrument of some purposes, which are alien to his development. Man finds total and ultimate fulfillment only in God and His saving plan. Considering eschatological humanity (the new man) after the universal resurrection, how bizarre then are the tattoos, absurd esthetic surgery or sex change. It is a great sin to injure or deform the human body that will be resurrected and pneumatized<sup>9</sup>.

Mankind continues to follow the way of rebellion against God and of the obstinate rejection of His Law of love. Man even came to deny sin, justify the most serious moral disorders, in the name of a misunderstood freedom. Even in countries with an old Christian tradition, people started to unleash a sort of conspiracy against the sacred gift of life. One even legitimized the horrible murder of killing babies in the mother's womb. Euthanasia is for the incurable patient or for the handicapped person what abortion is for the baby. The victims of these murders and of others similar to these cry out to God for revenge. Worried about the denaturation in the contemporary society, which strikes the gift of life, leading to the devastation of life up to genocide, we must reflect upon the unequalled price of human life. This is an exigency that cannot and shouldn't be ignored.

In our decayed world, the diabolic trinity of materialism, consumerism and secularism runs riot. The features specific to this trinity are evaluation and lucriveness. We must treasure the human body not for what it can bring or what it is used for, but for what it is in itself: the creation of God and the substance (matter) of Lord's Incarnation. Man's evaluation only in biological terms is below man's dignity. Lucriveness, which can be applied as a criterion to objects, is incompatible with the

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<sup>9</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3, (București: IBMBOR, 1978), p. 406: "Resurrected bodies will be pneumatized. Matter will be flooded by spirit".

dignity of the human body<sup>10</sup>. Utilitarianism does not respect beings, does not regard but it evaluates, it does not admire, but it devalorizes everything to the level of objects or goods.

The one who excludes God and ignores the spiritual-moral values is as if he did not exist. Such a person devalorizes man and treats him as a creature of the planet and nothing more. Hence, there begins the gloomy specter of abortion, euthanasia, racism, the theory of the necessity of wars, bloody revolutions, and terrorism. The culture of evaluation and lucrateness applied to man is a culture of death. This *culture of death* harms the dignity of human life and the mystery of the human person, created in the image of God<sup>11</sup>.

A biomedical technique, which doesn't serve man and his life with respect, doesn't build the civilization of Pentecost, but of Babel. Such a civilization does not represent Zion, but Auschwitz<sup>12</sup>. Christ's Church, which tamed barbaric nations, will also succeed in taming the technocratic barbarism of the *superman*. Or, at least it will take a stand with dignity and will delimitate itself from this barbaric technocracy as from "the abomination of desolation" (Mt. 24, 15).

In applying medical technologies one must take into consideration the divine revelation in order to choose life, not death (according to Deut. 30, 19). When we say this we bear in mind a few risks of genetic engineering: the risk of forcing nature to do what it has never done, the risk of manipulating the future of human generations, the growing risk that science manipulates life instead of protecting it. "Scientific discoveries can have unpredictable consequences, which made Lucian

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<sup>10</sup> In general, scientific discoveries announce their novelty and their utilitarian dimension. Therefore, it is good to take into account the revealed teachings of Christ's Church.

<sup>11</sup> See I. Pop-Bistrițeanul, *Curs de bioetică*, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> When one disregards God, the power received from above perverts and becomes murderous. The performance, which excludes God, is diabolic. See I. Buga, "*Sfânt, Sfânt Sfânt, Domnul Dumnezeu...*", (București: Editura Sfântul Gheorghe-Vechi, 2000), p. 245.

Blaga assert that one must not crush ‘the world’s corolla of wonders’<sup>13</sup>. In its dialogue with the sciences of life, the Church must protect the sacred gift of life and the dignity of the human person in life communion with God and his fellow beings. It cannot show neutrality towards evil, as it means complicity<sup>14</sup>. Today, the Church must be seen rather as being reactionary, than be accused tomorrow of sharing the guilt of the present genocide.

The bioethical norms are the result of human reason. Therefore, in our epoch, Christians having scientific education must make Christian values known to the whole world. The faith in God confers man the possibility to distinguish between right and wrong, to advance from a spiritual point of view. But those who go astray from the Truth, that is Christ, can easily mistake evil for good and can promote laws which, in fact turn against man and life (for example the legalization of abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, etc.). Man, endowed by divinity with the capacity to create through science and knowledge, answers the divine message of Christ, who said: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8, 32). But this should be done only in the spirit of the divine moral which transfers secular moral its meaning and significance.

*The bios, the living*, is God’s providence and the decisions as concerns *the living* cannot be made without calling Him. David Stevens said: “The best thing in order to escape the obsession of worrying for health and for the future of medicine is to reassert calling God in the lives of those who treat people. This will help them focus on the spiritual problems of patients as well, finding

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<sup>13</sup> Gh. Scripcaru, A. Ciucă, V. Astărăstoaie, C. Scripcaru, *Bioetica, științele vieții și drepturile omului*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 1998), p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> The Church is called to follow with loyalty its Head and Founder, Jesus Christ. In this way, its serving today is efficient and regenerating. See J. Allen, *Slujirea Bisericii, chip al grijii pastorale*, (translated by I. Pop-Bistrițeanul, Cluj- Napoca: Renașterea, 2010).

thus more satisfaction than others”<sup>15</sup>. The conscience of any physician should start from the point that he is only an instrument in God’s hand in order to serve the sick person<sup>16</sup>. The Christian physician must know that Christian bioethics is a process of continuous protection of the human being (body-soul), who, through holiness is about to enter eternity. The medical act is therefore a confession, as serving man means confessing the Great Philanthropist, Jesus Christ and serving Him, the One who identifies Himself with “the least of these my brethren” (according to Mt. 25,40) who suffer.

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<sup>15</sup> D. Stevens, *Șocul viitorului în medicină*, in: *Medicul creștin*, Timișoara, nr. 3, March 2001, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> As His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, shows: “physicians must work with priests, for the health of the body and of the soul”; see C. Secară, *Medicii și preoții, voluntari pentru sănătatea noastră*, in: *Ziarul Lumina*, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011, p. 16.