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Author(s): Iuliu-Marius Morariu

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BIOETHICS IN THE DISCUSSIONS OF THE PAN-ORTHODOX SYNODE FROM CRETE (2016)

Rev. Iuliu-Marius Morariu
„Babes-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: *In this article, the author presents the way how were presented the bioethics problems in the discussions of the Pan-orthodox Synod that took place in Crete in June this year. The document published by the bishops that participated to the international assembly has, between the points discussed, also one dedicated to the evolution of this domain, called today with the word "bioethics". After a short presentation of the history of the Pan-Orthodox Synod from there and a brief overview of the main subjects analysed there, there is emphasised the way how are perceived the bioethics problems by the delegates bishops and it is highlighted the actuality of the ideas presented in this document. There is also presented the way how the conception about bioethics of the Orthodox Church, expressed in the documents of the Council, contribute help the Church to be more opened to the today world's problems.*

Keywords: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Synod, bioethics, bishop, dignity of man.

The Pan-Orthodox Synod that took place in Crete in the June of 2016th, was certainly, an important event for the Orthodox World. Preceded by other important assemblies, from 1923 and until than¹ and

¹ For a presentation of the assemblies that preceded the event from Crete, see: Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009-Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe (The decisions of the pan-orthodox assemblies from 1923 until 2009-to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church)*, Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2013. For information about the participation and the contribution of the Romanian Theologians, see also: Iuliu Scriban, „Conferința interortodoxă de la Constantinopol” („The inter-orthodox conference from Constantinople”), in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, XLII (1923), no. 3, pp. 169-171; Viorel Ioniță, „Participarea profesorilor români la congrese, consfătuiri și întruniri inter-ortodoxe” („The participation of the Romanian professors at inter-orthodox congresses, conferences and assemblies”), in *Ortodoxia*, XXXIII (1981), no. 4, p. 559 et passim; Antonie Ploieșteanul (Plămădeală), „O privire asupra pregătirii Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe” („A regarding on the preparations of the Holy and Great Synod of The Orthodox Church”), in *Ortodoxia*, XXIX (1977), no. 2, pp. 246-249; Antim Nica, „A doua conferință Panortodoxă de la Rhodos (26-29 septembrie 1963)” („The second Pan-orthodox conference from Rhodos 26-29 September 1963”), in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, LXXXI (1963), no. 9-10, pp. 896-899; N. I. Nicolaiescu, „A treia Conferință Panortodoxă de la Rhodos” („The 3rd Pan-Orthodox Conference from Rhodos”), in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, LXXXII (1964), no. 11-12, pp. 10009-1012.

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with some important problems prepared to be analysed,² he had, just before the commencement, some unexpected changes, caused by different problems, like the misunderstandings between different autocephalous and autonomous Churches, or by other problems. So, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian one, the Antiochian and the Georgian one declined, some of them in the last moment, its participation, while, the Serbian one, decided to be an active part of the discussions in the last moment. It is not the purpose of this article to analyse the reasons that determinate the retreat of these Churches from the discussions, but, we must say that, their refuse to participate, surely influenced the evolution of the discussions and it contributed to some of the echoes, good or bad, of the event.³ Without having the pretention of being an Ecumenical Synod,⁴ but having the name of Pan-Orthodox, the great assembly of bishops took place at the feast of the Pentecost in 2016.

The Document

Without the aforementioned Churches, the Synod still discussed some of the problems proposed to be analysed in the prior meetings,

² For more information, see: Viorel Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe-documente premergătoare (The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church-preparing documents)*, Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2016.

³ For those unfamiliar with the Romanian Orthodox Space, see, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h76rElHZ3CE>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.apologeticum.ro/2016/06/dovezi-clare-sinodul-din-creta-este-unul-talharesc-anathema/>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.apologeticum.ro/2016/07/comunicat-ierarhi-preoti-monahi-si-mireni-se-dezic-de-hotararile-sinodului-panortodox-din-creta/>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://www.flacaraortodoxiei.ro/2016/06/monahul-teodot-despre-sinodul-pan-ortodox-apostat.html>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016; <http://manastirea.petru-voda.ro/2016/05/28/comunicat-al-manastirii-petru-voda-despre-sinodul-din-creta-din-iunie-2016/>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016.

⁴ Father Constantin Rus, one of the most important Romanian Orthodox specialists in Canon Law says: „*However, it is a known fact that none of the ecumenical synods of the Orthodox Church could not be considered a priori as „ecumenical”. This appellation has been awarded at the following synods, to highlight the importance and the binding nature of their decisions for all Christians. The credential assessment of one or another synod was always done post factum. They have gradually become an integral part of the Orthodox tradition, after their receipt by the entire ecclesial pleorma*”. Constantin Rus „The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. A canonical evaluation”, in Casian Rușeț (coord.), *Statutul actual pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române-Simpozion Internațional, Caransebeș, 6-8 Octombrie 2015 (Today's statute for the organisation and the work of the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, Cluj-Napoca/Caransebeș, Cluj University Press/Press of the Caransebeș Diocese, 2016, p. 90; p. 285.

where they were also an active part. And which were the main points analysed by the Council. According to the document adopted by the participants, the main points of the assembly where:

1. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the nowadays world;*
2. *The Orthodox Diaspora;*
3. *The Autonomy and the way how it can be proclaimed;*
4. *The Holy Sacrament of the Marriage and the impediments of it;*
5. *The importance of the length and of its practicing today;*
6. *The Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Christian world.*⁵

During discussions, some contemporary subjects had important and substantial place. These subjects include issues of marriage and its orthodox understanding⁶ but also ecology as well.⁷ We would suggest

⁵ ***, „Enciclica Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe-Creta 2016” („The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of The Orthodox Church-Crete 2016”), translation in Romanian Language by Răzvan Perșa, Cristian Sonea and Paul Siladi, in *Tabor*, X (2016), no. 7, p. 5. Cf. <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>, accessed in 23. 09. 2016. See also: Andrei Andreicuț, „Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe” („The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church”), in *Renașterea (The Renaissance)*, New Series, XXVII (2016), No. 7 (315), p. 1.

⁶ Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009-Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe (The decisions of the pan-orthodox assemblies from 1923 until 2009-to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church)*, p. 58. One of the discussed problems, was the marriage between an Orthodox and a pagan, forbidden by the 72th Canon of the VIth Ecumenical Council and by the 14th of the IVth one. Constantin Rus „The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. A canonical evaluation”, pp. 198-199. Cf. Ioan Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe-note și comentarii (The Canons of the Romanian Orthodox Church-notes and commentaries)*, 3rd edition, edited by Sorin Joantă, Sibiu, Archidieceșan Press, 2005, pp. 93-94; pp. 155-156.

⁷ Where the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the most important Orthodox specialist, together with some writers like Pierre Rabhi (cf. Pierre Rabhi, *Manifeste pour la terre e l'humanisme (Manifest for the world and the humanism)*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2008; Pierre Rabhi, *Le Recours a la terre (Recours at the land)*, Lyon, Terre du ciel, 1995; Pierre Rabhi, *L'Offrande au crépuscule (Gift at the crepuscul)*, Lavalledieu, Candide, 1989; Pierre Rabhi, *Le Gardien du feu: message de sagesse des peuples traditionnelles (The guardians of the fire: the message of the intelligence of the traditional peoples)*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2003), his ideas being quoted by personalities like pope Francis (Pape François, *Le visage de la miséricorde (The face of the mery)*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2015). For more information about his conceptions, see: Patriarche œcuménique Bartholomé, *Et Dieu vit que cela était bon. La vision théologique de la création dans la tradition orthodoxe (And God saw that that was good. The theological vision about the Creation in the Orthodox tradition)*, translated in French language by Jean-Francois Colosimo, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2015; Olivier Clement, *Adevăr și libertate. Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarbul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I (Truth and freedom. Orthodoxy in the contemporary world. Dialogues with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeu Ist)*, translated in Romanian Language by Mihai Maci, Sibiu, Deisis Press, 1997, pp. 87-96. Cf. Elphidoporos Lambriniadis, „Ecological and Inter-Generational Solidarity.

that bioethical issues didn't get their appropriate treatment at the work of the Synod. The explanations about it can be classified as being part of a bigger chapter that contains the opinion of the Church about some important social problems. Until now, only the Russian Orthodox Church has adopted an official position about this category of subjects.⁸ For the other Orthodox Churches, we have only the opinions of some important theologians,⁹ assumed by the Churches in a silent way.

The Bioethics and the Dignity of Man

This is the reason why, starting with this Synod, the Orthodox Church has now an official opinion about some social problems. Thanks

Initiatives of The Ecumenical Patriarchate”, in Ingeborg Gabriel, Helmut Renockl (ed.), *Solidaritat in der Krise. Auf der Suche nach neuen Wegen*, Wien-Wurzburg, Echter Verlag, 2012, pp. 113-120.

⁸ The opinion of the Russian Orthodox Church about the social problems, reflected in the documents from 2000 and 2002, can be founded in: Radu Preda, *Ortodoxia & ortodoxiile. Studii social teologice (The Orthodoxy and the Orthodoxies. Social-Theological studies)* coll. „Universitas”, Series „Theologia Socialis” 10, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, pp. 151-160; Ioan Ică jr, Germano Marani, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii. Fundamente-documente-analiză-perspective (The social taught of the Church. Fundaments-documents-analyses-perspectives)*, coll. „Civitas Christiana”, Sibiu, Deisis Press, pp. 185-268. See also: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Fundamentele concepției sociale a Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse reflectate în documentul sinodal din anul 2000” („The fundamentals of the social conception of the Russian Orthodox Church reflected in the Synodal document from 2000”), in *Tabor*, IX (2015), no. 4, pp. 37-41. Of course, the opinion of the Russian Orthodox Church, influenced also Synod's decision on this topic.

⁹ For example, in the Romanian Orthodox space, they can be considered important for the social doctrine of the Church, theologians like Radu Preda, Archbishop Irineu Pop, Ștefan Iloaie, Maria Aluaș and s. o. Some important titles for this topic are: Radu Preda, *Biserica în stat-o invitație la dezbatere (The Church in the state-an invitation to the debate)*, Bucharest, Scripta Press, 1999; Radu Preda, *Comunsimul-o modernitate eşuată (The communism-a failed modernity)*, coll. „Universitas”, Series „Theologia Socialis”, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon Press, 2009; Ștefan Iloaie, *Relativizarea valorilor morale-tendențele epocii postmoderne și morală creștină (The relativization of the moral values: the tendencies of the post-modern ethics and the Christian morals)*, coll. „Moralia”, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2009; Ștefan Iloaie, *Cultura vieții-aspecte morale în bioetică (The culture of the life-moral aspects in bioethics)*, coll. „Bioetica”, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2009; Ștefan Iloaie, *Morală creștină și etică postmodernă-o întâlnire necesară (The Christian Morals ant the post-modern ethics a necessary assembly)*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2009; Ștefan Iloaie, *Responsabilitatea modală personală și comunitară-o perspectivă teologică (The moral responsibility-personal and communitarian, a theological perspective)*, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2009; Irineu Pop-Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața morală a creștinului (The image of Christ in the moral life of the Christian)*, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2001; Irineu Pop-Bistrițeanul, *Morală creștină (The Christian Morals)*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Publishing House, 2002.

to the Gathering of the Bishops, we also have an official opinion of the Orthodox Church about the evolution of the world and the technology. There is mentioned that the development of the science and of the technology, the human life is radically changed nowadays,¹⁰ and the Church is interested in this topic, Her interesting being part of the bigger strategy of changing the world.¹¹ In this part of the document published by the Synod's authority, there is emphasised the opinion of it about the bioethics. They say: „*Over the last years, we observe an immense development in the biological sciences and in corresponding biotechnologies. Many of these achievements are considered beneficial for humankind, while others raise ethical dilemmas and still others are deemed unacceptable. The Orthodox Church believes that the human being is not merely a composition of cells, bones, and organs; nor again is the human person defined solely by biological factors. Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and reference to humanity must take place with due respect. The recognition of this fundamental principle leads to the conclusion that, both in the process of scientific investigation as well as in the practical application of new discoveries and innovations, we should preserve the absolute right of each individual to be respected and honored at all stages of life. Moreover, we should respect the will of God as manifested through creation. Research must take into account ethical and spiritual principles, as well as Christian precepts. Indeed, due respect must be rendered to all of God's creation in regard to both the way humanity treats and science explores it, in accordance to God's commandment (Gen 2:15)*”.¹²

¹⁰ „*Throw the contemporary development of the science and technology, our life is radically changing. And the things that are bringing changes in the human life ask him to have discernment, because, beside the important benefits, like the improving everyday life, the successful treatment of some serious diseases, and the exploration of the space, we also haft to deal with negative consequences of the scientific progress. The dangers are: the manipulation of the human freedom, using of the man as a simple means, gradual losing of the valuable tradition and the threatening or the destruction of the environment*”. ***, „Enciclica Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe-Creta 2016” („The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of The Orthodox Church-Crete 2016”), p. 10; ***, „ Mesajul Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe” („The message of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church”), in *Renașterea (Renaissance)*, New Series, XXVII (2016), No. 7 (315), p. 2; <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>, accesed in 23. 09. 2016.

¹¹ Because, as some Greek theologians says: „*As a historical matter, the Orthodox Church has taken seriously its biblical commission to act as a transformative agent in the world, and the record of the Orthodox Church is replete with original, creative, and sustained activities that fit neatly within the intersecting social science and policymaking taxonomies of humanitarianism, human security, and development*”. Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Nathanael Symeonides, „Orthodox Christianity And Humanitarianism: An Introduction To Thought And Practice, Past And Present”, in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, XIV (2016), no. 1, p. 1.1

¹² <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>, accesed in 23. 09. 2016. Cf. ***, „Enciclica Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe-Creta

So, the dignity of the man and the sacred meaning of the life is not considered to be in contradiction with the evolution of the bioethics. The Church, which is agreeing the fact that the development of the science is important for the evolution of the entire society. Besides that, she is underlining the fact that, in all the situations, there is a huge necessity of the discernment, for avoiding the biological disasters. The divine criteria that determinate the way of thinking and acting of the Orthodox Church¹³ must be, in their its opinion, also important criteria for the world.

Unfortunately, despite the importance of bioethics for nowadays society, in the papers of the Synod from Crete, it is only a little topic in a bigger list of subjects. Some Christian theologians like Hans Kung, which is expelled from the Catholic Church, is trying to justify euthanasia nowadays.¹⁴ Some scientists are amused with the idea of transplanting human organs to the animals.¹⁵ Organ transplantation increased the traffic of organs on the black-market¹⁶. In that sense it is understandable that the Orthodox Church speaks about respect of human dignity. Debate between Church and scientists needs to be grounded on Christian anthropology which has been proven in works of some

2016” („The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of The Orthodox Church-Crete 2016”), p. 10; ***, „Mesajul Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe” („The message of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church”), p. 2.

¹³ Cf. Constantine Scouteris, „Bioethics in the light of orthodox anthropology”, in *Icoana credinței. Internațional Journal of interdisciplinary scientific research*, II(2016), no. 3, pp. 56-62. Cf. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., „The Recent History of Christian Bioethics Critically Reassessed”, in *Christian Bioethics*, XX (2014), no. 2, p. 148.

¹⁴ For a presentation of his ideas, see: Hans Kung, *My Struggle for Freedom. Memoirs*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 2003 (Ottawa, Novalis, 2003; London, Continuum, 2003); Idem, *Disputed Truth. Memoirs*, vol. II, London, Continuum Publishing House, 2008; Hans Kung, *La mort heureuse*, trad. Jean-Louis Schegel, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2015.

¹⁵ That happened, for example, in United States of America. See: Viorica Bindea, „Se întâmpla în 2008 (It happened in 2008)”, in Mircea Gelu Buta (coord.), *Medicii și Biserica (The doctors and the Church)*, 8th volume-„Perspectiva creștin-ortodoxă asupra prelevării și trasplantului de organ (The Christian-Orthodox perspective about the prelevation and transplantation of organs)”, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2009, p. 222.

¹⁶ Cf. Dominique Martin, „Professional and Public Ethics United in Condemnation of Transplant Tourism”, in *American Journal of Bioethics*, X (2010), Issue 2, p. 18; Maria Aluaș, „Trafficking in organs and transplant tourism. Ethical and legal issues in the Romanian context”, in Ioana Vasii, Florin Sireteanu (eds.), *Crimes, Criminals and the New Criminal Codes. Assessing the Effectives of the Legal Response. In Honorem Professor George Antoniu*, Cluj-Napoca, Accent Press, 2014, pp. 170-178.

orthodox authors like H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr.,¹⁷ father John Breck,¹⁸ or Stankey Harakas and many others.¹⁹ In our opinion, this fact shows a regrettable negligence, that may cost the Orthodox Church and can contribute to the regression of the dialogue between the secular sciences.

In conclusion, we may say that, the bioethics problems have been scarcely mentioned at the Pan-Orthodox Synod that took place in June 2016 in Crete. From this fact we can conclude that unfortunately bishops didn't find importance in these issues. They've been rather concerned to solve problems from other areas than to analyze the work of some theologians specialized in these topics promulgating the document dedicated especially to this subject. Despite of all that, we could be certain that meeting at Crete with Church's official document of the Synod (Sections: *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* and *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*), at least initiates the discussion and dialogue between science and theology. It is also obvious from the document that Church isn't against bioethics and science in general. What statement reveals is obvious necessity to further work in this field. The Church invites and requires reflections from the

¹⁷ Presented in books like: H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *Fundamentele bioeticii creștine-perspectiva ortodoxă* (*The fundamentals of the Christian Bioethics-the Orthodox perspective*), translated in Romanian Language by Mihai Neamțu, Cezar Login, Ioan Ică jr., Sibiu, Deisis Press, 2005.

¹⁸ Cf. John Breck, Marian Florin Pușcaș, Savatie Baștovoi, *Ce este moartea?* (*What is the death?*), coll. „Bioetica (Bioethics)”, Cluj-Napoca, Patmos Press, 2003; John Breck, *Darul sacru al vieții* (*The sacred gift of life*), translated in Romanian Language by Irineu Pop, coll. „Bioetica (Bioethics)”, Cluj-Napoca, Patmos Press, 2001; John Breck, *Trepte pe calea vieții: o viziune ortodoxă asupra bioeticii* (*Stages on life's way: Orthodox thinking on bioethics*), translated in Romanian Language by Geanina Filimon, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2007; John Breck, „Fundamentele teologice ale eticii ortodoxe creștine” („The theological fundamentals of the Christian Orthodox Ethics”), in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Bioethica*, LIII (2008), no. 2, pp. 13-38.

¹⁹ Like, for example: Ana Smith Iltis (coord.), *La temelile bioeticii creștine: eseuri critice asupra gândirii lui H. Tristram Engelhardt jr.* (*At the foundations of the Christian Bioethics: critical essays about the thinking of H. Tristram Engelhardt jr.*), coll. „Bioetica (Bioethics)”, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2011; Sorin Cosma, *O abordare creștină a bioeticii* (*A Christian approach of the Bioethics*), Timișoara, Marineasa Publishing House, 2007; Andrei-Claudiu Hrișman, *Bioetica și omul viitorului* (*The Bioethics and the man of the future*), coll. „Quaestio”, Târgu Lăpuș, Galaxia Gutenberg publishing House, 2012; Konstantinou Skouterē, „Bioetică socială și bioetică creștină” („Social and Christian Bioethics”), in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Bioethica*, LV (2010), no. 2, p. 9-14; Mircea Gelu Buta (coord.), *Medicii și biserica* (*The doctors and the Church*), 8th and 9th volumes-„Bioetica creștină și provocările lumii secularizate” („The Christian Bioethics and the challenges of the secularised world”), Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2010-2011.

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ones which work on this domain should be very careful in order to avoid the problems and disasters that could affect the entire world.