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The Christian family guarantees management of the value of human life

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Abstract. The Orthodox Church has always taught that human life begins at conception when a sperm fuses with an egg to produce a living, genetically unique being. Just as the Church takes special care of helpless and defenseless human beings, so much more does she take care of human embryos and unborn babies, that is, helpless beings. By accepting and legislating the artificial interruption of pregnancy, paradoxically, hospitals and maternity hospitals, places meant to protect and give life, became cemeteries for those who were to see the light of day.

Keywords. abortion, the gift of God, the Orthodox Church, importance, pregnancy, life, and human beings

1. The mystery of the beginning, the sacred gift of God

What is the magic moment of the embryo coming to life? Which is the day, the hour, the minute, or the second of the period time in which the birth of the organs is complete? What factors determine the historical moment, for the embryo, in which its change into an animated being takes place? What concrete fact, in the evolutionary and slow path of the embryo, causes the great earthquake and descends the angel who rolls the stone from the door of the tomb and installs the soul in the body when it turns into a man? ¹

This is the main question that arises in the case of abortion, therefore I will try to base the Orthodox Church's conception on the data provided by science, i.e. contemporary medicine. The more we increase the distance between the beginning of human life and the moment of fertilization, the more the opening for abortions, infanticide, and embryonic experiments expands. ²

Most of the cells in the human body are "somatic" cells, each containing in its nucleus 46 chromosomes typical of the human being. Male sperm cells and female ovarian cells are embryonic cells or "gametes", each with 23 chromosomes. The union of these gametes (23+23) in a single zygote cell with 46 chromosomes arranged in 23 pairs, takes place through the fertilization process. Fertilization normally occurs at the end of the fallopian tube, near the

¹ **Blessed Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos**, *To the Orthodox family with humble love*, Lacu Hermitage, Holy Mount Athos, 2001, p. 111.

² **Prof. Dr. John Breck**, *The sacred gift of life*, transl. by P.S. Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul, Patmos Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 113.

ovaries. Semen stored in the female reproductive tract takes about 7 hours for its enzymes to penetrate the outer wall of the ovum. Three more hours will then pass until it fulfills its purpose in fertilization. Of the millions of sperm, only one will penetrate the egg's protection and make its way through the cytoplasm to join the haploid nucleus (which contains a single set of unpaired chromosomes). This will produce what is called "singamy": the union of two gametes to form a genetically unique individuality. The resulting diploid nucleus now contains a unique arrangement of genetic material (DNA) that determines the sex of the concept and creates the conditions for mitosis: the division of individual cells (blastomeres). The process begins with a double cell, a chronic triple cell, quadruple cell, then progresses through multiples of 2 (8, 16, 32, etc.) until the embryo implants in the uterine membrane by the end of the week a second pregnancy.

The time for this process is well determined: approximately seven hours from the intimate relationship to fertilization, another three hours until the sperm reaches the egg, and another twelve for penetration. The fusion of the two cells, singamy, takes another day. Therefore, the entire process leading to fertilization takes between 36 – 48 hours.³

The medical principle of our era is written in the Geneva Oath of 1948: "I will grant absolute respect to human life, from the moment of conception itself."⁴ The famous professor of genetics Jerome Lejeune, from the University of Paris, wrote: "Like all researchers who follow biological phenomena without bias, I am also convinced that the human being begins to exist from the moment of its fertilization. This means that eliminating a fetus, of whatever age, is equivalent to killing a human being."⁵

In the lecture held at the Academy of Ethical and Political Studies in France, on October 1, 1973, the same professor Lejeune said: "The beginning of the human being goes up to the moment of conception... The human being is then perfect and unique. It is one because it is always the same, in all its parts, and unique because it cannot in any way be replaced by anything else. This microscopic fetus on the 6th or 7th day of its life, which is only ½ mm high, is already capable of taking care of its destiny. He interrupts his mother's periodic cycle, thus causing the mother to protect him."⁶

After performing 60,000 abortions in just two years, the American obstetrician-gynecologist Barnard Nathanson, former director of a special abortion clinic in the USA, studied with the most advanced technical means the state of an aborted zygote at twelve weeks (three months). The ultrasound recording was made on a videotape, which he meaningfully titled: The silent scream, defining the perception by the fetus of the killer instrument of abortion through the following actions:

1. moves in a violent and agitated manner;
2. heart beats increase from 140 to 200;
3. open the mouth wide, as in a cry: the mute cry.

The conclusion is that "the fetus, at 12 weeks (three months) is a separate human being, with all specific personal characteristics".⁷

³ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

⁴ **Prof. Univ. Dr. Petrache Vârtej**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 559.

⁵ **Jerome Lejeune**, *Abortion in the view of Christian morality*, by Pr. Prof. Dr. Sorin Cosma în rev. B.O.R. Nr. 7-12/ July-December, Bucharest, 2003, p. 297

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 297

⁷ **Jerome Lejeune**, *Abortion in the view of Christian morality*, by Pr. Prof. Dr. Sorin Cosma în rev. B.O.R. Nr. 7-12/ July-December, Bucharest, 2003 p. 296.

The Orthodox Church has always taught that human life begins at conception when a sperm fuses with an egg to produce a living, genetically unique being.⁸

In a press release of the National Bioethics Commission within the Romanian Patriarchate, it is mentioned: "Revelation (recorded in the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition) gives us sufficient evidence that what was conceived in a woman is a human being (not simply a product of conception), which does not exclude God's care and which must enjoy the respect due to dignity human. As the Church has a special concern for helpless and defenseless human beings, she cannot fail to be concerned about the most helpless human beings, human embryos, and unborn babies."⁹

The psalmist David said in this sense: "Lord, you formed me in my mother's womb" (Ps. 138,13). And God would say to Jeremiah: "Before I was conceived in the womb, I knew you and before you came out of the womb I sanctified you" (Jeremiah I.5). Job said: "Your hands made me and built me" (Job 10,8-9). The Law of Moses gave special care to the mother and the baby (Ex. Exodus, 21, 23-24, 9,6).

From the history of the visit of Theotokos to St. Elizabeth, we note two very important things:

a) Elisabeth shows special respect towards the One conceived in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary;

b) It is confirmed that the baby in the mother's womb participates, in its way, in the events in which the mother participates; The evangelist tells us that as soon as Elizabeth received Theotoko's greeting, the baby jumped in her womb (Lk. 1:44), which proves that, before birth, the baby already perceives the presence of God.¹⁰

We express this truth liturgically, we celebrate the conception of Saint John the Baptist (September 24), the birth of Theotokos (December 9), and the Savior Himself (Annunciation, March 25). Orthodoxy concludes, therefore, that abortion performed at any time of pregnancy is a form of homicide and draws the blame on the one who commits it as much as on the mother.¹¹

2. The voice of the law. "The woman will be saved by childbearing"

The legislator is not, should not be simply the expression of the general opinion and especially of an unclear general opinion. He is also a pedagogue. It must not limit itself and express only the existing situation but must show what is right and point towards it.¹²

The Church is the guardian of the supreme Moral Law, it cannot be careless when it sees crimes being legislated. Custodian of the precious inheritance of God-Man, its Founder, according to which man has the highest dignity in the material world, it is not possible for her to look on without protest at the increasing extermination of thousands of innocent creatures¹³.

Church legislation took an attitude towards the sin of abortion from the beginning. Thus, the Synod of Elvira (306) through canons 63 and 68 excommunicates the woman who

⁸ Prof. dr. John Breck, *Op. Cit.*, p. 125.

⁹ The press release of the National Bioethics Commission within the framework of the Romanian Patriarchate approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the meeting of March 5, 2003 in www.patriarhia.ro.

¹⁰ The press release of the National Bioethics Commission within the framework of the Romanian Patriarchate approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the meeting of March 5, 2003 in www.patriarhia.ro.

¹¹ Prof. dr. John Breck, *Op. Cit.*, p. 127.

¹² Blessed Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos, *Op. Cit.*, p. 84.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

had an abortion, stopping her from communion until her deathbed. Somewhat later, church legislation becomes more lenient regarding the punishment given for abortion. Canon 21 of the local Synod of Ancira (314) specifies: "Women who are promiscuous and kill their fetuses and engage in the preparation of means of abortion, the decision from before stopped them until the end of life, and this decision is generally taken, but, finding something to treat them more gently, I decided that they should spend 10 years in penance, according to the steps decided". As we can see, the canon derogates from the existing customs, changing penance from life imprisonment to 10 years.¹⁴ Canon 2 of Basil the Great, validated by the VI Ecumenical Synod and in which the Church's thinking is officially expressed, says: "Whoever spoils the fetus, by craft, suffers the penalty of murder¹⁵... and those who receive embryo-killing poisons".¹⁶

Sanctioning abortion has been known since ancient times, among the Assyrians and Egyptians. Jews, Persians, abortion being prosecuted, and those who provoked abortion were severely punished. Although the Greeks and Romans had a liberal attitude toward abortion. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, stopped the doctor by oath to prescribe abortifacients.

In the Middle Ages, there were very strict laws regarding the practice of abortion. Thus, in the "Caroline Criminal Constitution" promulgated by Charles V, the one who caused the abortion was punished with death, and the woman's punishment was left to the discretion of the judge. With the Napoleonic Code of 1810, abortion was given the title of "crime" or "misdemeanor".

Until the First World War, abortion was sanctioned in all criminal codes, but, with all these measures, the number of abortions increased or remained the same, the number of those discovered being insignificant compared to the real one (Cristea Al.) Contemporary legislation against illegal abortion is restrictive in all villages and all religions condemn abortion as a crime.

In our country in 1957, by decree no. 463, abortion on demand was legislated. Decree no. 463 of 1957 was repealed, and decree no. 770/1966, which prohibited abortion on demand, supplemented by article no. 27 of January 1974. In December 1989, following the Revolution, decree no. 770/1966 was repealed and abortion on demand was legislated, thus allowing the woman to decide for herself on the product of conception.¹⁷

By accepting and legislating the artificial interruption of pregnancy, paradoxically, hospitals and maternity hospitals, places meant to protect and give life, became cemeteries for those who were to see the light of day. To kill an unborn child means for a woman to kill something of herself, it means to kill her love and holiness.¹⁸

3. Special situations

Rape and incest are often cited as justifications for abortion. Both acts are, by their very nature, brutal and dehumanizing. When a woman becomes a victim of rape or incest, she should immediately seek medical treatment to stop conception. I have shown that 36 hours must pass from sexual intercourse to fertilization. This opens a window of more than one day to make

¹⁴ Prof. Dr. Sorin Cosma, *Op. Cit.*, p. 302.

¹⁵ Saint Basil the Great, *To the Orthodox family with humble love* by Blessed Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos, Lacu Hermitage, Holy Mount Athos, 2001, p. 108.

¹⁶ Prof. Dr. Sorin Cosma, *Abortion in the view of Christian morality*, by Pr. Prof. Dr. Sorin Cosma în rev. B.O.R. Nr. 7-12/ July-December, Bucharest, 2003, p. 302.

¹⁷ Prof. Univ. Dr. Petrache Vârtej, *Op. Cit.*, p. 559.

¹⁸ Prep. Cristian Nicu, „The role of the Church in preventing and combating abuse in the family”, in the *Annales of the Faculty of Theology, Târgoviște*, 2003, p. 529.

such an intervention, without the risk of aborting a fruit of conception, recognized by the Church as a human person, a human individual.¹⁹

If the pregnancy is the result of rape, then the child should be allowed to be born and, if the mother cannot accept responsibility for it, the child could be put up for adoption.²⁰

In the case of therapeutic abortion, when the pregnancy puts the mother's life in danger when the choice must be made between the mother and the child, the Church thinks believes that priority must be given to the mother, due to the central place she occupies in the family.

If the genetic investigation discovers an abnormal unborn child, the recommendation is to give birth to the child, respecting its right to life, but the decision will be made by the family after they have been informed by the doctor and the priest of all moral and maintenance implications. All this must be resolved from the perspective of the redemptive significance of the presence of a disabled being in the life of each person and the life of the community.²¹

Conclusions

In His unspeakable wisdom, God decided that a baby, before seeing the light of day, should spend nine months in its mother's womb. This breast is his shelter and food, the pavement, and a means of defense against any danger. The mother's body, the maternal breast, is, without a doubt, the safest place that can protect a human being. It is also the temple of the love of the two spouses. Because, like divine providence, this breast offers, as the prophet Isaiah expressed it, "a place of escape in trials, a harbor in the time of the storm and a shadow in the full heat" (XXV). But the mother, who was entrusted with the protection of the child, betrays this duty, which comes to her through marriage, by killing her smell.

The killing is carried out precisely in this place, where the hand of God is present, in a special way. The Holy Fathers of the Eastern Church say that, through the willful abandonment of the child, sin penetrates the treasures of life. Even from a rational point of view, raising a question like this "are we or are we not yet in the presence of a human being?", means to prejudice the question. The fact itself concerns the truth that God himself intends to create a human creature, and that this creature, born in the mother's womb, is by abortion deliberately deprived of life, and this is nothing but assassination. Any crime is an insult to the person and the human body, but none compares to infanticide, which drains the treasury of life, destroying the family and ruin.

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¹⁹ **Prof. dr. John Breck**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 126.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

²¹ The press release of the National Bioethics Commission within the framework of the Romanian Patriarchate approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the meeting of March 5, 2003 in www.patriarhia.ro.

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