

Introduction

The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy is an interparliamentary body, established in 1993 upon the initiative of the Hellenic Parliament. Its membership today consists of the delegations from more than twenty countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Australia. The I.A.O. performs extensive work with the objective, among others, of “supporting human rights and religious freedoms not only of the Christians, but also of the adherents of other religions, both in the European countries and throughout the world, through interventions made to international organizations and to local State authorities”¹. More specifically, one of the key directions in the Organization’s work is defending human rights and traditional values in the field of bioethics. One of the eight committees of the Assembly mentioned on IAO’s website is the Committee on Bioethics.²

While writing this essay, our aim has been to explore IAO’s work in the field of bioethics and proceed to an estimate in terms of its continuation. First of all, we outlined the historical development of this work and summarized its main results. As the IAO has adopted two declarations on subjects related to bioethics, we analyzed their text compared to a range of secular and ecclesiastical documents dedicated to the same subjects. In conclusion, we tried to outline the future prospects for the continuation of IAO’s work in this field in the present-day circumstances.

Historical overview of IAO’s work in the field of bioethics

The main source used for exploring the history of IAO has been the material found in the official website of the Assembly, i.e. principally the minutes of the annual General Assemblies of the IAO, as well as the yearly Bulletins and the brief reports on the meetings of the International Secretariat.

The available information leads to the conclusion that issues of bioethics have been raised for the first time at the 8th General Assembly of the IAO (Patmos, 2001); however, the interest in such problems has probably not occurred by chance. In IAO’s Bulletin for 2001 it is mentioned that a scientist has been invited to the upcoming General Assembly, a graduate of Harvard University, archimandrite Nikolaos (Hatzinikolaou) (now metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki), Chairman of the special Bioethics Committee of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece³. And, indeed, the extensive paper presented by archimandrite Nikolaos at the General Assembly of 2001 has triggered a debate that lasted until the closing of the session and has been repeatedly cited during the following days of the Assembly. In his speech, he briefly outlined the key challenges for contemporary society raised by the rapid development of biological and medical sciences. In archimandrite Nikolaos’ view, the main risk engendered by the present-day conditions is that the traditional perception of human being as a God-made entity may be destroyed and replaced by the perception of man as an automatic machine consisting of interchangeable parts performing certain functions. The Orthodox Church definitely needs to formulate clearly its position on the matters related to bioethics as they arise in the course of the daily pastoral attendance.

¹ Excerpts from the “I.A.O. Founding Act”, <http://www.eiao.org>.

² About the I.A.O., <http://www.eiao.org>.

³ EIAO Bulletin, №3, 2001, p. 15.

However, this is not the only reason for the elaboration of the Orthodox perception in relation to the problems of bioethics. Eastern Orthodoxy is one of the main sources of the European mentality in parallel to the Western Christian traditions and suffers to a much lesser extent from the weaknesses of the latter. Thus, in the East, man is mostly examined as a personality connected to other people and to God with a relationship of personal communication, while in the West as an autonomous being whose relationship to society is interpreted in terms of his rights and obligations. Secondly, Orthodoxy suffers less from meticulousness as a pursuit to give exhaustive answers to the mystical questions of existence. For example, pursuant to catholic theology, the moment of conversion of the holy gifts during the Divine Liturgy is strictly defined and associated with a specific wording. The similarity is obvious with the efforts to identify the precise moment when the mystery of death or occurrence of a new human being takes place. On this point, in the speaker's view, Orthodox tradition can indicate a completely different mode of approaching the problem. The excessive severity of Western Christianity, strict observance of the letter of human wordings, is related to the meticulousness of thought. Finally, man in the West often considers God's will as an outside restriction imposed on his life and forcing him to submit thereto. On the contrary, Orthodoxy adopts an indicative perception of God's providence as instrumentally and intrinsically integrated in the fabric itself of the path of human life. Answering the questions, archimandrite Nikolaos underlined that such allegations should in no case be perceived as a statement of superiority of Eastern Christian views over the Western Christian ones. Each type of mentality has its own virtues that can complement one another and cover the relevant weaknesses. And this is one more important reason for which the Orthodox Church must express its view in the field of bioethics. The speaker pointed out that an inter-Orthodox conference would be required in order for relevant documents to be drawn-up.⁴

The Committee on Bioethics of the IAO was set-up in the same year, consisting of: D. Samios (Australia), chairman, D. Alabanos (Greece), E. Papanikolaou (Greece) and N.S. Markovskaya (Ukraine)⁵. The Committee convened in September in Athens.⁶ According to the minutes of the General Assembly of the IAO in 2002, the conclusion can be drawn that, along with the Committee on Bioethics, one more Committee was set up in the same period – the scientific Committee on Bioethics of the IAO. Its members have been dr. I. Kriari-Katrani (Chairperson, Greece), archimandrite Nikolaos (Hatzinikolaou) (Greece), dr. A. Paulaskas (Lithuania), M. Cariolou (Cyprus), E. Stoicescu (Romania), as well as father Dmitry Smirnov (Russia).⁷ This Committee composed a document titled “Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics based on the Orthodox tradition”. Dr. Kriari-Katrani presented the declaration to the General Assembly of 2002, where it has been adopted as a resolution.⁸ During the same General Assembly, the Cypriot MP S. Fyttis briefly referred to the particularities of the problems related to bioethics in his country.⁹ The decision was made for the work of the Scientific committee to be continued. The work has indeed been continued and, at the following General Assembly, dr. Kriari-Katrani presented one more document – “Euthanasia: motions on the general

⁴ Minutes of the I.A.O. 8th General Assembly, 2001, Athens, 2002, pp. 35–48.

⁵ Ibid, p.112.

⁶ Minutes of the I.A.O. 9th General Assembly, Bucharest, 27-30 June 2002, pp.59-60.

⁷ Declaration of the basic principles of bioethics..., 2002. Euthanasia: motions on the general principles, 2003. — 14.

⁸ Ibid, pp.71-73.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 85-86.

principles”, which was also adopted.¹⁰ In addition to the two existing committees, according to what the IAO President V. Zorkaltsev said, there was a plan to establish a center on the problems of bioethics in the Secretariat of IAO.¹¹ Obviously, this plan has never been implemented, as such a center is not mentioned in the IAO documents, although, as we will see later on, the Secretariat of IAO would still perform some work in the field of bioethics.

Responding to the recommendation by dr. Kriari-Katrani, the Secretary General of the IAO S.-A. Papatthemelis stated that the subject raised “will never stop concerning us in the future, perhaps even more than it has been so far”.¹² Indeed, the interest in the problems of bioethics was still present thereafter, however the work of IAO in this field started declining gradually as of 2003. In the General Assembly of 2004, S.-A. Papatthemelis mentioned that the Scientific Committee on Bioethics had not convened in the prior year due to certain difficulties, i.e. because the Chairperson dr. Kriari-Katrani had been too busy. However, bioethical issues remained relevant and the plan was to go on with this work.¹³ In the following year’s budget, provision had been made for resources for the organization of seminars on topics related to bioethics¹⁴, but unfortunately it has not been possible to find out where and when they were held and what the outcomes have been.

At the following General Assembly, several speeches at the same time manifested a keen interest in problems of bioethics and stressed the importance of continuing the activities in this field. So, dr. G. Vatsikouras emphasized that committees on bioethics have been set up in the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of Greece and considered the importance of the “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” that had been adopted in the recent past, as well as the aforementioned IAO declarations. However, the Orthodox Church “is essentially unprepared to express a documented and credible proposition of its own on the pan-Orthodox level”. To this effect, in 2000, upon the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the decision was made to establish the Inter-Orthodox Committee on Bioethical issues. Dr. Vatsikouras also pointed out that further discussions should avoid a monologue by the Church, allowing, instead, for an open dialogue with scientists¹⁵.

The advisor to IAO K. Mygdalis described the situation about the work of the Bioethics Committees. He stated that the committees had not worked during the past year due to insufficient funding and emphasized the need for their work to be concluded: “If, for example, the Committee on Bioethics prepares a document on bioethics that will be considered to be of major value, which will be the outcome of the work of scientists, for which lots of hours and monies will have been spent, and this document is published in the Bulletin and the story ends there, allow me to say that the functioning of the Committees is useless. There has to be some continuity. And the Secretary General has raised this topic repeatedly in past meetings. For example, have your colleagues conveyed the decisions of the Bioethics Committee to their Parliaments? We asked for events to be organized by local Parliaments to display the Committees’ decisions. We kindly asked you to organize in your countries a one-day presentation, where a couple of members of the Committee would come in order to explain to an audience of your country the meaning of this decision of the

¹⁰ Minutes of the IAO 10th General Assembly, Vilnius, 26-29 June 2003, Athens, 2004, p.52.

¹¹ Ibid, p.23.

¹² Ibid, p.68.

¹³ Minutes of the IAO 11th General Assembly, Kiev, 24-27 June 2004, Athens, 2005, p.107.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.115.

¹⁵ Minutes of the IAO 12th General Assembly, Geneva, 23-26 June 2005, Athens, 2006, p.54.

Committee, i.e. to promote it, to put it forward. Otherwise, dear Deputy, allow me to say such decisions are only intended for internal consumption, we just put them in a Bulletin and it is pointless. It is much preferable for the Secretariat to spend its monies for more general events of different nature, rather than operating Committees intended for internal consumption”.¹⁶

As of 2005, there is no more reference in the IAO documents to the work of the Scientific Committee on Bioethics. It has probably ceased its works due to the problems mentioned above. The Committee on Bioethics of the IAO is still mentioned in the list of the organs of the Assembly. In the meanwhile, its membership keeps changing. In 2005, the members of the Committee have been N. Kotsiras (Australia), N. Nakashitze (Georgia), K. Miltsev (Bulgaria), in 2006 – N. Kotsiras (Chairperson, Australia), K. Saklyan (Bulgaria), S. Zakarian (Armenia), in 2008 the new Chairperson of the Committee was elected – M. Vamvakinou (Australia). The last mention to the Committee on Bioethics is in the IAO Bulletin of 2010, with the following members: M. Vamvakinou (Chairperson, Australia), K. Saklyan (Bulgaria), S. Fanous Matta (Sudan), N. Kotsiras (Australia), L. Solis (Albania).

It is quite difficult to speak of the outcomes of the Committee’s work during that period, as the only source of information is the occasional mentions by speakers at the general assemblies. The latter lead to the conclusion that a significant part of the activities took place upon the initiative of the International Secretariat.

During the meeting of the International Secretariat in April 2006, the decision was made to hold an international conference on 17-19 October 2006, on the subject: “Orthodoxy – bioethics – legislative and scientific initiatives in Europe” in collaboration with the European Parliament and the European Commission in Delphi, Greece.¹⁷ However, in November 2006 it was decided to postpone it for autumn 2007.¹⁸ It seems that this conference was never held.

At the General Assembly of 2007, the alternate Secretary General of the IAO N. Nikolopoulos stated: “Following our communication with the Greek and the Russian Minister of Culture, it became feasible to hold such a meeting last May ... to this effect, we postponed once again the event on bioethics. Following a meeting between the Greek and the Russian Minister in Moscow, it has finally been decided to hold a working meeting in Athens, on July 3, of the Ministers of Culture for Russia, Ukraine, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Greece”¹⁹ It is not quite clear why the bioethical issues were discussed specifically in the context of the meeting of ministers of culture; it is, though, obvious that the members of IAO wished to take any suitable opportunity to draw attention on the contemporary problems in this field.

In 2009, the alternate Secretary General of the IAO Th. Tsiokas pointed out that the problem of bioethics is a current problem and that it is possible to “see scientific, theological and social views on these topics. I, thus, suggest, with the respective involvement of the competent Directorate of the European Commission”. The speaker suggested that a respective event be held in Piraeus or Delphi, Greece.²⁰ Most probably, this initiative has not been implemented, either.

During the same General Assembly, the contact person for the activities of IAO in Africa, Archimandrite Ioannis Tsafaridis, stated that the manual on bioethics which

¹⁶ Ibid, p.126.

¹⁷ Meetings of the International Secretariat, Athens, 2006, <http://www.eiao.org/default.aspx?pageid=647>.

¹⁸ Meetings of the International Secretariat, Moscow, 2006, <http://www.eiao.org/default.aspx?pageid=647>.

¹⁹ Minutes of the IAO 14th General Assembly, Astana, 20-23 June 2007, p.83.

²⁰ Minutes of the IAO 16th General Assembly, Belgrade, 24-28 June 2009, p.116.

had been sent three years before (i.e. in 2006) by the Secretariat “has been given to the Universities and several scientific bodies and is indeed being used”.²¹ Apparently, the archimandrite means the book by Apostolos Nikolaidis “From Genesis to genetics” published in 2006.

From 2010 to date, the Committee on Bioethics is not mentioned among the organs of the IAO. Furthermore, we have not managed to find information about any work by IAO in the field of bioethics during this period. However, in the speeches delivered during the General Assemblies, one can often find references to the major importance of such problems, e.g. the status of the embryo, euthanasia, cloning etc. in contemporary society.

Therefore, the entire history of IAO’s activity in the field of bioethics can be divided in three periods:

1. 2001-2003. Period of establishment and active functioning of the Committee on Bioethics and the Scientific Committee on Bioethics. The following documents have been composed: “Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics based on the Orthodox tradition” and “Euthanasia: motions on the general principles”.
2. 2004-2010. Period of declining activity. The work of the Committee on Bioethics is continued, as well as the activity of the International Secretariat on bioethical issues.
3. From 2011 to date. There is no information on any activity by IAO in the field of bioethics, although the members of the Assembly maintain their interest in the relevant problems.

[Analysis of the resolutions prepared by the IAO committees](#)

The work of the IAO committees has produced two documents – “Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics based on the Orthodox tradition” and “Euthanasia: motions on the general principles”, which were adopted in 2002 and 2003, respectively. However, at the end of the 1990s – early 2000, major work has been performed on respective documents in the local Orthodox Churches; thus, it is impossible to properly assess the IAO resolutions without comparing them to the products of this work. It would be interesting to consider the pan-Orthodox facts, however in this essay it seems reasonable to limit ourselves to the documents of the Russian and the Greek Orthodox Church.

In the Russian Orthodox Church, the most important document concerning the issues under review is the “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” (hereinafter “Bases”) adopted by the Archierarchical Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000, which includes, among others, chapter 12 on “Bioethical problems”. The Bioethics Committee of the Greek Orthodox Church was established in 1998. It is chaired by metropolitan Nikolaos (Hatzinikolaou) and one of its members is dr. I.Kriari-Katrani, both mentioned above in relation to the work of the Scientific Committee on Bioethics of the IAO²². The official resolutions issued by the Committee are the “Basic Positions on the Ethics of Transplantations” (1999), the “Basic Positions on the Ethics of Euthanasia” (2002) (hereinafter “Basic Positions”) and the “Basic Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction” (2006). It is particularly interesting to compare the “Basic Positions” with the respective document

²¹ Ibid, p.160.

²² Hellenic Republic. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. Bioethics Committee.

http://www.bioethics.org.gr/05_frame.html.

adopted by the IAO in 2003. Unfortunately, what is missing from this list is the declaration of the basic principles of bioethics; however, the last two documents contain a series of positions that could be listed as such.

Moreover, in the same period, a range of important documents were adopted by secular organizations. First of all, the Convention of the Council of Europe (CoE) of 1997 on “Human Rights and Biomedicine”, as well as the “Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights” adopted by UNESCO in 2005. The reference to these documents is essential for us to understand the particularity of the Orthodox approach to bioethical problems versus the secular one.

[Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics based on the Orthodox tradition](#)

The document consists of 21 articles in 5 pages without any supplementary structure. This latter makes the text particularly hard to interpret and is definitely its weakness, especially as the other documents mentioned above do have such a structure. The document has been published in six languages (English, Russian, Greek, Spanish, French, German), while the comparison among the translations sometimes produces unexpected results. In more detail, let it be noted that the Russian version that has been published is of unacceptably poor quality²³, and for this reason we have mostly relied on the English version. As a matter of fact, even this one is quite incomplete at certain points, and in such cases we had to use the Greek version.

The text starts with a positive assessment of modern science, stressing, though, that a range of its achievements deeply affect the sacredness of human being (articles 1-3). A series of values are listed thereafter, which may be affected in case of abuse of biomedical technologies, in specific: man as a value, social balance, traditions, human dignity and personal freedom (articles 4-5). Article 6 is the allegation, which can be regarded as one of the objectives of the declaration: politicians are required to make sure that scientists will define safe boundaries in order to prevent the potential destructive consequences arising from the application of biomedical technologies. Thereby, articles 1-5 could be considered as something like an introduction or a preamble. A series of questions arise in relation to this part of the text. Firstly, we can only guess whom this document is addressed to, whereas, e.g. UNESCO’s Declaration clearly specifies whom it is addressed to. The aforementioned ecclesiastical documents also specify their audience as the clergy and the faithful of the Orthodox Church, as well as those interested in the stance of the Church. We can conclude from article 6 that the Declaration is addressed to scientists, while from articles 14-17 it results that statesmen, entrepreneurs and mass media are also among the supposed addressees. The conclusion here is that the audience consists of people with different worldviews. In this case, the call to always take into consideration at an ethical assessment of scientific achievements the “respect of God’s creation” (article 9b) is baffling. How is it possible for an atheist who does not believe in God’s creation to respect it, all the more so “always”? The same article contains the phrase “In addition, they (i.e. scientists) must not forget that they are part of nature and not its ruler”. Obviously, not all scientists would interpret such a statement correctly. As a matter of fact, though, this phrase is found only in the English version, while it is simply absent in the other languages.

²³ E.g., the beginning of article 2 which reads in English: «The issues of bioethics affect the sacredness of man in an extremely pervasive way», reads in Russian: «Вопросы биоэтики касаются святости человека удивительно пронизательным образом».

Secondly, the modality of the text is completely unclear. Does it aspire to have a lasting meaning over time or is it an invitation to discussion? Is it something that should simply be taken into consideration or is it obligatory and must be strictly followed? How do the authors suggest that this Declaration be treated? While, in the other texts under review, their modality is clearly defined.

Furthermore, the list of values to be defended is perplexing. Are traditions values? If yes, should one defend the traditions of female circumcision, idolatry etc. that exist in a range of societies? Most probably, the same thing is mentioned in Chapter 12 of UNESCO Declaration, but in a more appropriate manner. Meanwhile, the other values mentioned are of a completely secular character. How these are associated to the Orthodox tradition indicated in the document's title has not been defined.

Articles 7-8 state that Orthodox tradition is characterized by a special anthropology, namely, every human being is an image of God (in the Russian text – «προοβραζ Βορα»! (model of God!)) and has a destination – to reach likeness with God and union with Him. Moreover, man is not considered only as an individual, but also as a person who is united with other men and God through certain bonds. This is where the description of the principles of orthodox anthropology ends, leaving a clear sense of incompleteness, even in relation to the aforementioned speech of archimandrite Nikolaos in 2001, all the more so to the documents of the local Churches. There is no reference whatsoever to life as a gift of God, where its sacredness and integrity stems from, to the immortality of the soul and the value of the body that must be resurrected, to Church as a divine-human organization and to the other elements of the Orthodox faith that are directly related to bioethics.

The four paragraphs of article 9 set out the “principles of respect” that should always be taken into consideration at an ethical assessment of scientific achievements: respect for time, respect for God's creation, respect for human variability, “imperfections” and disabilities, as well as respect for human life. The quite mysterious “respect for time” has the following meaning: we should not rush to apply scientific knowledge on humans as long as the potential consequences of such an application are not clear. Paragraphs 2 and 3 actually make the same allegation: the inadmissibility of eugenics and other manipulations with man's genetic material for reasons other than therapeutic; however, this is documented in paragraph 3 with the respect for man, and in par. 2 - for his Creator. Finally, paragraph 4 argues that every human being [gr. ὑπαρξίη] is a unique, irreplaceable, unrepeatable, with free will, sacred (in the Russian text – «святая»! («holy»!) being [gr. οντότητα] that forms a social entity from his/her conception [gr. από την πρώτη της στιγμή, russ. с начала жизни] until his/her last breath. We see here a clear slip of the English text that leads to tautology (being constitutes a being); we can also see the indication about the moment of conception, which does not exist in the Greek, neither in the Russian text. However, what is most puzzling is the words “until his/her last breath” that appear in all versions of the text. One could think that the members of the IAO scientific committee considered the stopping of breathing to be the criterion of death based on Orthodox tradition! Is it indeed permissible to use so ambiguous expressions in an official document?

Articles 10-12 refer to man as part of society. In this context, the principles occur of responsibility towards the environment, towards the future generations (meaning the inadmissibility of gene therapy methods that may have an impact on man's descendants) and the principle of respect for man's autonomy. The latter also includes the need for informed consent and protection of personal data. Let it be stressed that all these issues are thoroughly discussed in the aforementioned secular documents.

Hence, protection of future generations and the environment is mentioned in articles 16 and 17 of the UNESCO Declaration and article 13 of the Convention of the Council of Europe, the principle of consent is thoroughly discussed in articles 5-7 of the UNESCO Declaration and articles 5-9 of the Convention of the Council of Europe and integrity of private life is referred to in article 9 of the UNESCO Declaration and article 10 of the Convention of the Council of Europe.

In parallel, ecclesiastical documents pay very little attention to such issues. The “Bases” (article XI.3) do make a reference to the issue of doctor-patient relationship, but, in our view, it is very difficult to conclude from its words what the position of the Church is e.g. on the principle of informed consent.

Articles 13-14 refer to the need for informing the wider social strata on bioethical problems and ensuring transparency of the decisions made in this field. It is claimed that this is particularly indispensable in the Orthodox countries, as “social perception” is typical there. However, this is even more typical for many other cultures and is not a distinctive feature of Orthodoxy. These issues are also covered in articles 18-19 and 23 of the UNESCO Declaration and article 28 of the Convention of the Council of Europe.

Article 15 states that professional bodies should elaborate guidelines on bioethical issues. The same is stated in article 19 of the UNESCO Declaration.

Article 16 refers to the responsibility of the mass media.

Article 17 largely repeats the principle of “respect for time” that has already been outlined and states that financial reasons should not play a major role in projects related to bioethics. It could be correlated to article 20 of the UNESCO Declaration and article 21 of the Convention of the Council of Europe.

Article 18 states that it is unacceptable that the interests of the developing countries be overridden in the field of biotechnologies. The same is stated in articles 21 and 24 of the UNESCO Declaration.

Article 19 refers to the monitoring of genetically engineered food.

Article 20 suggests that potential “biological crises” management scenarios should be formulated.

Finally, article 21 refers to the inadmissibility of using biotechnologies for manufacturing weapons.

Thereby, the “Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics based on the Orthodox tradition” gives the impression of a preliminary working draft rather than a final document. The extremely poor quality of the text, especially in the Russian language, the substantial differences among versions in different languages and the lack of structure are obvious. The audience, the objectives and the modality of the Declaration have not been defined.

Nevertheless, the key question arising after reading the text is – what is the particularly Orthodox element contained in its positions? Let us recall that in his speech in 2001 archimandrite Nikolaos had formulated a range of quite interesting ideas about the new elements that Orthodox worldview can offer to the world in the field of bioethics. Of all those, it was only the thought on the correlation between individual and person that has been reflected in the Declaration. Furthermore, many important positions of the Christian dogma directly related to bioethics have not been accommodated in the text. Actually, the religious character of the document has only been manifested in articles 7-8 and in the fact that God is mentioned in article 9. All other positions are of a completely secular character and, most importantly, clear parallels are drawn with the respective secular declarations. On the other hand, the authors’ position is not clear vis-à-vis such fundamental principles of secular ethics,

such as human rights and freedoms, priority of individual humans' interests and welfare over the interests of science and society etc.

In spite of this, however, the importance of the Declaration discussed should in no case be underestimated. The point is that the respective documents of local Churches are addressed a priori to the audience within the church. This affects deeply their style, subjects and nature of arguments, which differ enormously from the respective secular documents. In the IAO Declaration, there is an obvious effort to create a bridge between these two worlds, to highlight the general principles and goals, to achieve understanding and constructive collaboration. Unfortunately, the weaknesses mentioned above do not allow us to consider that this goal has been achieved. However, the document we reviewed has a major value as a unique endeavor.

[Euthanasia: motions on the general principles](#)

The next Declaration of the IAO consists of 15 articles in three pages, again without any supplementary structure. There is no preamble defining the target-audience, the goals and modality of the text; therefore, all remarks on the respective weaknesses formulated while reviewing the previous Declaration are also true in this case. The second document, though, creates a much more favorable impression in terms of the quality of the text. The Russian translation, in spite of certain stylistic flaws, fully corresponds to the English version. We have only noticed one important slip: the two last sentences of article 1 have been included in article 2 in the Russian version.

Articles 1-2 underline the importance of the problem of euthanasia and give the definition of this term. A distinction is made between active and passive euthanasia. In comparison to articles 1-3 of the "Basic Positions on the Ethics of Euthanasia", we can see that the definition of euthanasia has been better elaborated and there are no polemical attacks about the rationalism and eudemonism of modern society that are reasonable when addressing members of the Church but irritate a broader audience without any reason.

Article 3 lists the possible reasons for requesting euthanasia. It is pointed out that they all influence the clarity of the patient's judgment. This topic is also discussed in articles 23-25 of the "Basic Positions" and article XII.8 of the "Bases". In relation to the "Basic Positions", we can again point out that the text is less emotionally colored and more balanced.

Article 4 identifies the dangers behind the concept of euthanasia: the dissemination of the idea that only healthy people deserve life, the acceleration of the person's death in order to avoid financial costs for society or family thereof, fewer incentives for the physician to fight for the patient's life, injury of the physician-patient trusting relationship. All these dangers are also discussed in articles 26-29 of the "Basic Positions" and some are also mentioned in article XII.8 of the "Bases". Moreover, the "Basic Positions" speak of the danger of "death trading", i.e. transportation of terminally ill patients to countries where euthanasia is permitted. For some reasons, the IAO document makes no reference to this phenomenon.

Article 5 claims that life constitutes a priceless gift of God and that its limits may not be determined by humans. This Christian truth, undoubtedly, is also proclaimed in article XII.8 of the "Bases" and article 4 of the "Basic Positions". However, taking into account the fact that the IAO Declaration is probably addressed to a broad audience, this claim here acquires an unspecified status. Do the members of the Committee consider that all addressees of the Declaration must believe in God as Creator, do they suggest that these words be taken into account as the Christians' view or do they have some other purpose? The answer is not clear. In addition, this is

actually the only point where religious concepts are used. Meanwhile, unlike the previous document, this is not a weakness, at least formally, as there is no mention whatsoever that the Declaration expresses the particularly Orthodox stance. Articles 6-9 set out the physicians' obligations to the terminally ill and patients who are dying. The physician should try to alleviate suffering using all accessible means, even if this may hasten the death process. Artificial support of life is not always considered as desirable and mandatory. It is suggested that the right to life may, in a range of cases, conflict with the principles of dignity and autonomy of the individual. In case the artificial prolongation of life results only to prolongation of pain and there is no hope for recovery, it is not unethical to stop using aggressive means to preserve life. In this case, the decision-making should involve the relatives of the patient and, possibly, an inter-disciplinary committee. The same thoughts are presented in articles 14-15 and 47-50 of the "Basic Positions", while the second half of article 9 repeats almost verbatim article 47 of the "Basic Positions", and article 7 actually quotes article XII.8 of the "Bases". The general meaning of the thoughts described is that, in a range of cases, passive euthanasia is permitted.

It is worth paying particular attention to article 8, which quotes the respective part from the Hippocratic Oath in one of its ancient versions and proclaims that "any physician who encourages end-of-life decisions should be considered as in violation of his/her oath". This allegation is highly questionable, as not every physician today necessarily swears an oath and modern versions of medical oaths do not always contain words similar to those cited.²⁴ This is why such accusations usually just irritate contemporary physicians. Meanwhile, article 19 of the "Basic Positions" also invokes the Hippocratic Oath, but it does so in a much more balanced manner. Article 10 supports the right of the family members to be with the person who is dying.

Article 11 encourages the creation of auxiliary centers and voluntary groups, including those of the churches.

Article 12 refers to the need for specialized professional training of individuals who provide care to terminally ill patients and people who are dying.

Article 13 supports the patients' right to receive information on scientific research that might be used in the future to facilitate their condition.

Article 14 suggests that medical associations should be encouraged to state their opinions on the subject under review.

Finally, article 15 invites the mass media representatives to approach patients, their families and physicians with respect, and abstain from efforts to impress.

Thereby, the second document we reviewed constitutes a quite complete, balanced and accurate description of a specific view on the problem of euthanasia. Although there are obvious parallels with the "Basic Positions", it is a self-standing text that has its own style and, with the exception of certain points, is totally acceptable to the secular audience. Along with that, it fully expresses the position of the Church. These exceptional and significant features allow for this document to be used as a basis of dialogue between the Church and society on the subject of euthanasia. Our only regret is that this Declaration by the IAO has remained unknown to the wider public.

Meanwhile, we have to express a range of reservations at this point. Firstly, in our view, the religious reasons of the positions that were expressed, and indeed in association with the respective values of secular ethics, should be defined more

²⁴ B. Hurwitz and R. Richardson. Swearing to care: the resurgence in medical oaths // *BMJ*. 1997, December; 315(7123): 1671-1674.

clearly. Where this association is not possible, categorical assertions should be avoided and the Church’s position should be presented as a position that deserves understanding and respect.

Secondly, the issue of passive euthanasia, probably, requires an inter-Orthodox discussion. And the “Basic Positions” clearly allow it: “The doctor should neither be led to nor consciously act to prolong artificially the natural limits of life through exaggerating therapeutic means. For these may result in the loss of the patient’s dignity, which in turn may affect his immediate environment financially as well as psychologically” (article 49). However, article XII.8 of the “Bases” contains quite vague words in relation to this: “The prolongation of life by artificial means, in which in fact only some organs continue to function, cannot be viewed as obligatory and in any case desirable task of medicine. Attempts to delay death will sometimes prolong a patient’s agony, thus depriving him of the right to «honourable and peaceful» death”. The interpretation of this phrase radically depends on which specific “organs” are implied. One option is that it refers to a person whose kidneys or lungs do not function, and a completely different one is that it refers to the death of brain. Meanwhile, the Ecclesiastical-public council of biomedical ethics of the Russian Orthodox Church “is against euthanasia in any form”.²⁵ Thereby, we can say that on the issue of passive euthanasia the IAO Declaration expresses the official view of the Church of Greece, but not of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Estimate on the prospects of further action by IAO in the field of bioethics

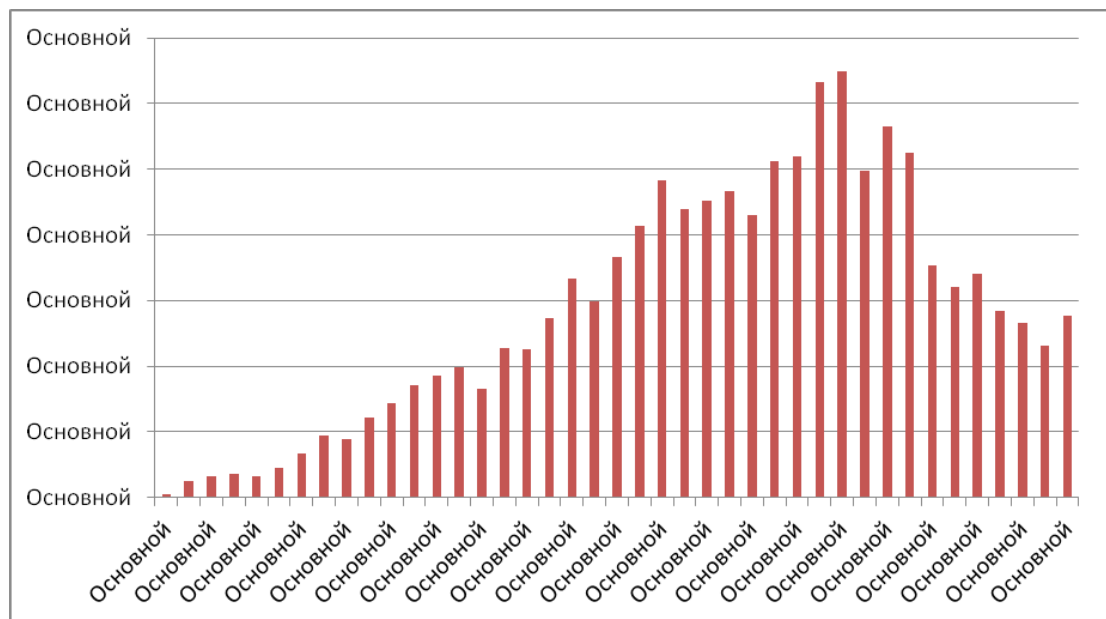


Fig.1. Change in the share of scientific articles that contain references to bioethics, by year of publication, according to the data of PubMed database. It shows the number of articles corresponding to the query “bioethics AND human” per thousand articles corresponding to the query “human”.

²⁵ Церковно-общественный совет по биомедицинской этике. Заявление «О современных тенденциях легализации эвтаназии в России». http://bioethics.orthodoxy.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=14

The decade 1990-2000 and the first half of the decade 2000-2010 were characterized by an increased interest in the bioethical problems. A range of important documents were adopted in this field during that period, both secular and ecclesiastical. The beginning of the decade 2000-2010 coincides with the IAO's active work on bioethical issues. Two unique documents were adopted, several conferences were scheduled, as well as meetings on a high government level. However, after 2003 these activities have slowly started to decline, and now we must actually recognize the total absence thereof. We must take note that most projects have been left unfinished. As shown in fig. 1, the interest in this subject also declined in the scientific community: the share of publications related to bioethics dropped almost 2 times compared to the early 2000s. Could this mean that all key issues of bioethics have been resolved or that their practical importance has decreased? We think such a conclusion would be too hasty. First, although the share of publications mentioned above has indeed declined, however it remains important as before: one in every thousand articles on subjects of medicine or biology, where there is reference to humans, is related to bioethical issues.

Second, at the moment, secular experts do not have a uniform approach to the resolution of ethical problems. As long as this situation remains unchanged, we shall not be able to say that bioethical issues have lost their relevance. Indeed, new challenges appear at times in this field, which cannot but be of concern. For example, the idea of the utilitarian philosopher P. Singer on "after-birth abortion", i.e. the possibility to kill the newborn baby, which was formulated already in 1985, started being strongly debated during the last two years²⁶, while the most divergent views are being expressed on this subject.

A great article dedicated to the review of modern ethical models cites a range of approaches: utilitarianism, deontological ethics, social ethics, egalitarianism, liberalism, contractualism, personalism and casuistry.²⁷ Meanwhile, no mention is made of the importance of religious ethics in today's world. And this is one more distinctive feature of the situation: the ecclesiastical documents dedicated to bioethical issues, generally, either entirely disregard the secular values or enter a strong controversy therewith, whereas the secular documents either disregard in the same way the Church's position or perceive it exclusively as an effort to impose some "hard to carry" and silly "loads"....

However, there is no complete unity on all issues under review, not even within the Orthodox Church. We have already mentioned above the problem of passive euthanasia. Another example is the stance vis-à-vis in-vitro fertilization. The Orthodox Church of Greece, by condescension, allows its application, insofar as the "surplus" embryos are not destroyed.²⁸ The "Bases of the Social Concept" of the Russian Orthodox Church do not provide clear guidelines on this point; however numerous clergymen tend to proclaim the total inadmissibility of in-vitro fertilization for an Orthodox Christian.²⁹

As stressed above, in 2001, upon the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, it was decided to establish the inter-Orthodox committee on bioethics. It was not before

²⁶ A. Giubilini and F. Minerva. After-birth abortion: why should the baby live? // J Med Ethics. 2012 Apr 13.

²⁷ C. Petrini. Theoretical Models and Operational Frameworks in Public Health Ethics. // Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2010 January; 7(1): 189–202.

²⁸ Basic Positions on the Ethics of Assisted Reproduction, article 77 h).

²⁹ Иерей Алексей Кнутов. Важные уточнения к Основам Социальной концепции РПЦ (по поводу искусственного оплодотворения). 16 июня 2010 г., 2010/ . <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/881322.html>.

2008 that the Committee was formally established³⁰ and it convened for the first time only in 2011, while, according to the words of Seraphim, Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola, “having convened, the Committee only made a decision on the first issue to be considered at its second meeting, which will be held next year”.³¹

Amidst this situation, the IAO holds a unique position. On one hand, its members are representatives of all local Orthodox churches, thus it is able to hold truly inter-orthodox discussions. On the other hand, its ranks include people who hold senior offices in secular governments of several countries; thereby, it is able to organize a constructive dialogue between the Church and the rest of society. We can perceive the declarations voted by the IAO in relation to bioethical issues as a unique effort to create the basis for such a dialogue. We just need to agree with the emotionally colored words of K. Mygdalis articulated in 2005, which were mentioned above, and express our deep regret because the work to this direction has not been completed. We just need to express the hope that the fourth period will start in the near future, in which all those promising projects of the first period will be continued, and the IAO will be able to make use of its unique position to help the Church and society respond to the major challenges of our times.

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³⁰ Предстоятели Православных Церквей высказались... 2008.

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³¹ Экзарх Южной Африки митрополит Серафим ... 2011, <http://www.pravmir.ru/ekzarx-yuzhnoj-afriki-mitropolit-serafim-vykazal-nedovolstvo-rabotoj-mezhpravoslavnoj-komissii-po-bioetike/>

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