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RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE AND POSTMODERN RATIONALITY IN BIOETHICS

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Review of Ştefan Iloaie, *Cultura vieţii. Aspecte morale în bioetică* (Culture of life. Moral aspects in bioethics) (Cluj –Napoca: Editura Renaşterea, 2009).

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A title that associates rationality with the religious discourse might seem surprising at first, the more, the article discusses the study of an Orthodox priest: Ștefan Iloaie – *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*. In the history of culture, the conflict between the celestial and terrestrial dimension of mankind, between spirit and reason was a permanent source of debate and controversy. At a first glance, this conflict might seem as if it was initiated by the very act of Creation: man is a created being but, at the same time, God created man in his own image. In other words, if the act of creation sets immutable limits, the same act grants the status of a creator that includes the irrepressible impulse for knowledge, for overcoming the limits that God dictated. It is quite clear that the creative impulses have materialized in scientific activities and arts, while religion oversees these activities and makes them part of the divine order of creation. Hence the premises were set for a permanent conflict which was later inflamed by the constant progress in science. The attitudes that collide are also well known: the advocates of science accuse the Church of being conservative and of trying to unjustly repress individual freedom, while the Church followers, accepting the progress in science, condemn the abuses of science that defies the primordial order in the name of a misunderstood freedom, with severe consequences for the future of mankind.

The recent discoveries in biotechnology and medical science are examples of decisive progress and inevitably they generate much debate. A new discipline, bioethics, has taken over and has subordinated these debates. The new discipline of bioethics has a vast area of research and the theoretical contributions it generated are very consistent. Obviously, it cannot be otherwise taking in consideration the fact that the scientific contributions in this case make the difference between life and death, in the most authentic meaning of the terms.

Among the most remarkable theoretic interventions in this area, is the study signed by Father Ștefan Iloaie, Ph.D., teacher and chancellor at the Orthodox Theology College, part of “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj Napoca. Bioethics seems to be one of the author’s constant preoccupations, since this book was anticipated by an ample study published in the *Journal for The Study of Religions and Ideologies*¹ and by other articles on the same subject published in the Romanian specialized literature. His mission and his theological education have a great impact on the author’s reflection therefore the volume we are discussing has a clear and coherent Christian vision on the theoretical aspects of bioethics. The central objective, set from the beginning, is to „present some of the fundamental concepts of Christianity, in its Orthodox specific, that can be applied to bioethics thinking and decision making”². The implicit premise is that the foundation of ethics lies in the Christian dogma, therefore the Church has the obligation and the authority to decisively intervene in the area of interest of bioethics. If bioethics is regarded as a discipline with an essentially mediating function („a connecting bridge between science –

especially medicine and biology - and the human system of values included and discussed in the moral domain”³), the author suggests that the Church must orient the debates and offer solutions. More precise, one of the fundamental ideas of the text is that the existence of bioethics is motivated by the desire to reconnect reason with faith, after the two were unfortunately set apart in the modern and postmodern age. The suggestion made here is somewhat surprising: by trying to fix the rupture that originated it, bioethics has to practically undermine its own justification and to work for its own extinction. The author however does not have high hopes: the moment when the scientific discoveries would be subordinated to the Christian vision on life is so far away that even the most optimistic of commentators can't foresee it.

No matter how far it would be, reaching that point is the major purpose of the religious discourse and of the Church's involvement in bioethics. In this sense, the contributions of the so called „secular bioethics” are severely criticized, because they „exclusively deal with the biological part of man and accept almost without any calculation the whole experiment practice, without having the preoccupation that this practice sometimes desecrates the human being, transforming it into a laboratory object.”⁴

This position comes to counteract a trend that has become increasingly clear and was diagnosed as such. It is an accepted truth that the beginnings of bioethics as a discipline were marked by the religious discourses that came in response to the new perspectives created by scientific research. In this regard, Ștefan Iloaie's opinion is doubled by that of Lehel Balogh: „The bioethical discourse came into sight in the 1950s, was ab ovo stimulated by religiously motivated thoughts, and emerged in the Christian context of human values and a distinctively religious understanding concerning the role of medicine.”⁵ The same researcher emphasizes that soon after the emergence of the new discipline, the relevance and the efficiency of the religious approach began to be questioned. This distrust can be justified by using two arguments. The first one refers to the diversity of religious perspectives, while drawing attention to the difficulty in identifying a single religious discourse in regard to the matters which bioethics deals with. Discussing the need to agree on common values and on a common language, Lisa Rasmussen comes across obstacles in the theological origins of bioethics. The author notes that „another aspect of the tension in bioethics results from its early history rooted in theology more than other disciplines. [...] But whose values count in an interdisciplinary, morally pluralistic field, especially one whose job is partly defined by public debate? This question has led some to assert the commonality of values and others to assert their diversity.”⁶

The second argument is common to all those who criticize religious discourse, regardless of the area it should intervene, invoking its

irrationality and the use of transcendental grounds that are impossible to verify with rational tools. This is an objection that Lehel Balogh takes into discussion:

„Those who want to eliminate religion from the public bioethical discourse argue and accept others as they were ‘methodological atheists’. That is to say: ‘Only those arguments that proceed as if God did not exist are to be admitted to public deliberation.’ [...] The secularization of bioethics goes hand in hand with the vain promise of ‘rationalizing’ and refining the public language from the ‘irrational’ religious deposit that has settled on it. Religion is often blamed by the nonreligious thinkers of using their prestige of traditions as unquestionable and virtually absolute.”⁷

These are theoretical positions that father Iloaie does not explicitly comment upon, but to which he implicitly replies through his firm statements. Regarding the first issue mentioned above, the consistent bibliography mentioned at the end of the book and the direct references found in the text prove that the author doesn't ignore the opinions formulated by the other Christian churches and he finds solid connection points between them and the Orthodox view. Authors like Father John Breck, Hermann Josef Frings, Hartwig von Schubert, Jean Claude Larchet, Ellio Sgreccia and so on are mentioned, alongside the papal encyclicals, in order to set up a unifying Christian perspective on the area of interest of bioethics. Moreover, in the same vein, it is interesting to note the way Ștefan Iloaie's reflection meets some conclusions formulated after a conference that reunited researchers from China, Europe and America in order to debate issues related to family. As we will underline later on, the Romanian author positions the whole bioethics problem in the horizon of family, suggesting that revaluing it could offer solutions for many of the current dilemmas. The same idea appears as a corollary of the mentioned conference. The authors who summarize the opinions of the participants⁸ underline that family is a cardinal moral institution of today's society, even if “there are profound moral, social and political disagreements regarding the normativity of the traditional family and its claims to authority and autonomy. [...] The question is whether family should be acknowledged as micro-sovereignties, as entities that cannot without loss of meaning be reduced to their members or absorbed into macro-community of the state.” The answer to this question is the one outlined by Ștefan Iloaie and it is suggested by the statement that a family cannot

be reduced to its members nor can it be seen as a simple component of the macro-state community. In turn, the authors quote S.A. Erickson who aims „to locate the authority for moral decision making far more in families than in individuals” so as to appreciate „why families deserve a far more central place in the hierarchy of moral authority.”⁹

The argument regarding the irrationality of the religious discourse is consistently fought against, even though no researcher that sustains it is invoked. There can be no irrationality in this discourse: on the contrary, in this care we are talking about rationality in its strongest meaning of finding the origin in the transcendent Origin. One of the strong points of the book is given by the harsh critique of today’s society found in a deep crisis after a long involution that has its origins in the Enlightenment period. The cause (or at least one of the causes) of this crisis is the separation of reason from faith, the same rupture that justified the appearance of bioethics. Father Ștefan Iloaie does not condemn reason, nor the desire for knowledge and the constant widening of the horizon mastered by the human mind. He condemns the petty purpose that subordinates reason and knowledge, more precisely, the fact that the two ignore their authentic meaning – to serve the spirit and the bring God closer.

„By the way he was brought into existence and because man was created/given with reason, man aspires to knowledge and truth, continuously creates and he constantly exceeds his work in the world. [...] The act of uncovering things, phenomena, meanings – at first understood as a spiritual knowledge of God hidden in things, of the world as a representation of His love, of the other like a brother who was created out of the same love – transformed later on: during the Middle Ages, institutionally and socially, from „a spiritual construction of existence” to a material and theoretical experience of knowledge. From the search of God, man transformed the meaning of knowledge in a search with God and close to our time he declared his search without God.”¹⁰

These are words that eloquently state the author’s position. This is a process of accelerated distancing of knowledge from its authentic meaning, until the point it stands against it: it serve the sterile vanity of the contemporary man who is ever so more preoccupied with his own being and the contingent reality, laying aside the transcendent laws that should be the object of knowledge. The innovations in science are feeding the infatuation of the contemporary man who intentionally forgets that

he was created and who exclusively undertakes the role of the creator¹¹; this infatuation is lamentable because the distancing from the principles of Life leaves humanity more fragile than ever, beyond all appearances.

The chapter entitled „The Biotechnological Challenge” is a harsh indictment that addresses today’s postmodern society. We should take in consideration that the term postmodern is used quite often throughout the book with negative connotations. Also, we should note the important specification the author makes concerning the „postmodern man” concept: it is used in a restricted sense, as in „set apart from the relationship with God”¹². The implication of this emphasis is notable: the indictment isn’t directed at the postmodern paradigm itself, but towards the manner in which modern man understood it and used its orientations and opportunities.

If we evaluate this paradigm we’ll see that, in its essential lines, it does not offer the premises of the religious dimension’s devaluation. We described in another paper¹³ the specific postmodern paradigm, using Liviu Petrescu’s remarkable contribution¹⁴ and we will restate our conclusions. There’s the common prejudice that Humanism and Enlightenment were the starting point of a long process, through which the individual gained his freedom by overcoming the constraints that were thrust upon him, a process that continued and accelerated in the modern age. This is a misconception, as numerous researchers stated, because there are a lot of reasons that qualify it as an era of totalizing tendencies with negative impact on individual identity. Liviu Petrescu is extremely convincing in the study mentioned before. The first stage of modernism, early modernism, is dominated, in fact, by an emancipation imperative that imposes the scientific model of knowledge in all the sectors of human activity, favoring the objective and impersonal research of a reality seen as (nota bene!) a rigid structure organized by immutable principles. Late modernism comes with different shades, but doesn’t fundamentally differ from the previous stage: it is characterized by a pronounced tendency toward aggregation which is congruent, after all, with the previous orientation. The author does indeed detect substantial movements of subjectivity affirmation, but it should be underlined that these are nothing but forms of reaction to the pressures of the industrial society on the individual. However, these pressures are aimed undoubtedly to progressively restrict individual freedom and to annihilate the human personality.

Instead, postmodernism will undermine the notions of structure and totality, promoting visible trends of fragmentation, de-aggregation and trends of rehabilitation of the individual category. The subject is redefined in relational terms, which means it is located under the sign of possible, of freedom and self determination. We must draw attention to the fact that the manner in which the subject interprets the world and, at the same time, the manner in which he interprets himself in a continuous process is

what gives consistency and provides the very substance of his identity. The idea of a predefined identity is now replaced with the idea of an identity based on a permanent effort of self-definition and self-edification. Therefore, defining self identity, role and image management in society are more like obligations rather than privileges.

At this very point the postmodern paradigm could meet the Christian perspective. Christianity is essentially a religion of freedom giving each individual the possibility of choice. Science, on the other hand, continuously broadens the area of human freedom. Emphasizing this aspect, father Ștefan Iloaie immediately adds that the growth of freedom, as a consequence of the progress of knowledge inevitably brings a growth of responsibility. „If God gave today’s man, from this point of view, a greater power than the ones before him, it is equally true that He also gave him more responsibilities. The scientific and technological breakthroughs, as reason’s effects, give man the feeling of exterior power but they don’t erase the inner moral duty to apply these technological results in certain moral and ethical limits.”¹⁵

There are two complementary aspects that can be deduced from this. Firstly, the elementary, but often ignored truth is that freedom cannot be conceived in the absence of limits. It does not mean denying those limits, as it may seem on a first glance, it means accepting them and being able to express the self within them. Secondly, another popular misconception is cast aside – progress in knowledge is likely to simplify human existence. It is clear that it isn’t the case, that the improvement of life, as much as it is, is located on a strictly superficial level. Viewed from a deeper perspective, the current human condition is a lot more complicated because of the very breakthroughs man made, because he has to master a much larger area and has to respond to increasingly complex challenges. Bioethics, with its serious dilemmas, draws attention to these very challenges and to the need to deal with them with responsibility. We can mention here Steven P. Greggo who shows in his study a similar list of challenges, with different shades and with the underlining that the problems of bioethics are, first of all, moral:

“In a traditional Christian context, bioethical problems are only ostensibly moral. Decisions about how to respond to the Divine call to chastity, to the acceptance of numerous children as a gift, to the acceptance of unwanted children as a difficult gift, to the integration of one’s desire for health, fitness, and beauty into the overriding pursuit of holiness, to patience in personal suffering, to works of charity in caring for incapacitated family members, to hope for eternal life in the face of temporal death

– all these are decisions about how to accept one's personal cross.”¹⁶

Accepting to bare your own cross... Bioethics implies in the most stringent way possible the idea of limits and the complementary idea of personal freedom. At this very point Ștefan Iloaie finds the flaws of the contemporary man: he incorrectly relates to the limits that have been imposed upon him because he sees them as being unfair, binding and he is incapable of controlling his destiny, which, as it was previously stated, is no longer the subject of an exterior authority. Unfortunately, the author observes, in too many cases the newly required freedom didn't bring an increase in responsibility, but its opposite. The rehabilitation of the individual category and its reinforcement in the detriment of structure were caused by the disappearance in the postmodern age of what Jean Francois Lyotard calls the legitimating “meta-narrative”.¹⁷ This meta-discourse had the role of orienting the functions of society on all its levels¹⁸ and, in this case, the role of offering landmarks for the thought and behavior of every individual. Obviously these guidelines were binding and they severely limited individual freedom, but, at the same time, they offered a reassuring sense of security because one didn't feel so acutely the burden of destiny or the burden of freedom. Ștefan Iloaie considers that the disappearance of these strict guidelines wasn't compensated by the increased effort of building these guidelines by mobilizing the intellect and the spirit. Man has not accepted with responsibility the gift of freedom, but he speculated it pettily, gradually strengthening the belief that the absence of borders is the confirmation of his omnipotence.

“The increasing autonomy of man before the supernatural power, provided by the technical revolutions creates the false symptom of unlimited power in mastering the natural phenomena, hence even the supernatural. Everything seems to comply in front of human reason, to unfold and never to be bound again, to be placed at the feet of man-scientist, to be used accordingly to his own criteria [...]. The attempt to keep everything under control, to provide an organized life right down to the smallest details are reducing man's freedom of action – all in the name of freedom – and are offering the false image of man as a master and ruler of the world and, more recently, of life.”¹⁹

At this point the author signals the inherent paradox of the postmodern perspective: the irresponsible management of freedom

results in the restriction of it. Meanwhile, the absence of guidelines determines a relativization of values and life itself²⁰ and consequently it causes a growing sense of confusion. In order to outline the profile of contemporary individual, Ștefan Iloaie finds it necessary to use researches outside the religious area and it is not at all surprising that he repeatedly appeals to H.R. Patapievici along with Martin Heidegger and David Le Breton. It should be noted that, by putting together these authors, the author is not only designing his critical view on the postmodern society (which is dealt with by H.R. Patapievici²¹ and David Le Breton²²) but also on the modern society with the help of Heidegger²³. The postmodern individual is a superficial person, who feeds on the illusion of his unlimited force that makes him ignore the increasing number of his weakness. Which is worse is that he tends to ignore his immutable limits that are inherent with his condition of created being.

Returning to the essence of Ștefan Iloaie's book, the intensity and the diversity of the debates in bioethics are generated, on one hand, by the seriousness of the issues and on the other had by the deficiencies of the contemporary mentality. Separated from faith, anchored only in the contingent reality, reason is incapable of answering some questions that go beyond the sphere of that reality, as Noël Simard²⁴ states (a Catholic priest with a vision somewhat similar to that of Father Ștefan Iloaie). The latter builds his statement from the chapter "Between Birth and Death. The Value of Human Life" around the three major issues that subordinate all the debates in bioethics: life, suffering, death. For each and every one of these a clear delimitation is made between secularized bioethics' perspective and the religious one. The first perspective offers solutions that only appear to be rational and efficient, because it puts the debate on the superficial level of immediate interest. "The interrogations and so called answers referring to the ethical problems that are connected to the unbalanced application of scientific and technological discoveries in medicine"²⁵ are the result of the relativization we mentioned before, of the confusion and of the illusion that are specific to the secularized mentality. The author considers to be unacceptable the misjudgment that life belongs to us and that we can do whatever we please with it. Moreover, the misjudgment is extended to the life we give to others in the forbidden attempt "to assist God". Assisted birth is not permitted, whether we are talking about in vitro fertilizing, the use of surrogate mothers or the use of sperm from other men, outside the couple. Also undesirable are the attempts to schedule the birth of a child or to prevent unwanted pregnancies through the use of contraceptive methods. The latter, like abortion (considered firmly to be a crime) are condemned from the point of view of secular ethics with an argument hard to refute: all of these methods, both those that lead to artificial procreation and those that prevent natural procreation lead to the "dehumanizing of women"²⁶, to the increasingly pronounced tendency to treat women as objects of male

sexual pleasure or as mere object of procreation. Nonetheless, the effects that these procedures have on women's health are mentioned in this context. There's a sub textual appeal to women for a better appreciation of the body, derived from the religious perspective, since the body is a shelter of the soul.

Suffering caused by disease is dealt in the same manner, with some natural nuances. In Chapter 2.2., dedicated to this issue, the author firstly underlines that a lot of the sufferings of contemporary man are artificial and they originated from the desire to avoid, at any cost, pain, whether physical or mental, such as the suffering caused by the sterility in a couple or the one caused by an incurable disease of a loved one.

“In fact, postmodern man is suffering because he feels alone and helpless from a transcendent he gave up on through his attitude and his convenience. Scientific and technological discoveries/findings applied to the body and having amazing success in the areas of developing, preserving and extending life turned biological pain in spiritual pain. If, at least in part and having religious support, the first one was, for a while, bearable, the second grinds consciousness, it sits on unstable moral grounds, it increasingly raises new doubts, and it enters a vicious circle of endless interrogations.”²⁷

We must point out the clear delimitation the author makes between pain (biological in origin) and suffering, located in the spirit. This division expresses in fact the Christian perspective on illness and disease, as father Iloaie describes it. Like birth and death, disease should be regarded as a limit and should be accepted as such. Obviously, the Church does not reject the scientific progress in medicine and its use in order to fight against disease and the pain it causes. “Of course health and wellbeing are desirable as man's specific elements in the fullness of the relationships between body and soul, situated in a relationship of faith with God and love for the others.”²⁸

However, the problem arises when the concern for the body is exclusive or privileged in relation to the concern for the spiritual dimension. Scientific achievements have generated and are maintaining two complementary illusions, which the author denounces as such: the first one targets the possibility of prolonging life, with the increasingly vigorous hope that it will become unlimited. In this respect, the author states that organ banks already exist and that they provide “spare parts” [horrible dictu!] for those who are rich enough to periodically renew their

body. The illusion that medicine can fight against physical pain to the point of total elimination is imposing with the same strength. The traditional myth of youth without old age and life without death seems to gradually lose its mythical characteristic and it seems to be establishing itself as an achievable goal.

The excessive or exclusive preoccupation for the body and the oblivion of the spirit is immediately connected with the increasing number of mental disorders. The same religious perspective that the author promotes urges him to indicate that the origin of these disorders is spiritual in nature. "Spiritual pain is increasingly felt in our societies. Deprived of the religious and authentic dimension of divinity, of moral landmarks to fill him with gratitude and meaning [...] postmodern man is individualized, he shuts himself out from others, and starts to look for his purpose in the wrong places and sometimes he goes searching for himself but he fails to discover himself."²⁹

The words stated above suggest the best solution for all diseases man faces, physical or mental. Accepting the premise of the indestructible unity between body and soul, the individual is urged to find support during this confrontation in the Christian teaching, which underlines the virtues of suffering: it reveals the vulnerability of the body and hence its dependence on divine will is a reminder of the inherent limits of the created being and it is also a revival of the relationship with God and with others. Equally important and just as beneficial is the introspection caused by suffering because it has an obvious cleansing function if it is seen and valued as a possibility for finding the divine dimension of living. In this sense, the crucifixion of Christ and the Resurrection, after being purified by suffering are unique examples by their power of suggestion.³⁰

Death, as a supreme limit of the human condition and as a major preoccupation of bioethics, is also tackled with in this volume. Scientific discoveries have as an adverse consequence the inappropriate attitude of contemporary man before this limit. This attitude is reflected by the fact that man tends to eliminate death from language and from thought. One almost never passes away at home surrounded by loved ones, but in the hospital, therefore the old and suggestive saying "to die of a good death" loses all significance. "The refusal of the thought of death is applied against the reality that man is going to die, that this is one of the few certainties in life."³¹

Consequently, bioethics is confronted with a first problem – the possibility of prolonging life through organ transplant or, more recently, through organ cloning. In this chapter (2.3) one can see that father Ștefan Iloaie's pleading is unequivocal: any kind of intervention over this incomprehensible mystery is unacceptable. The contemporary mentality is blamed again because it is exclusively concerned with the body and this life, and it ignored the spirit and the soul's salvation through suffering and death, understood as a resurrection. The indissoluble connection between

life and death is again emphasized because death completes life, if it is accepted with faith. The concessions that can be made under strict conditions are mentioned only in the next chapter (chapter 3), in which the author resumes the discussion from the perspective of the decisions of the Orthodox Church Holy Synod. First of all, the transactions in which poor donors are exploited for the use of rich recipients are to be avoided, even though these transactions seem to take place despite the legal frame. In the case of brain dead donors, the immense responsibility is shared between the doctor who declares the death and the family of the deceased, in the case the deceased person didn't sign any donor forms during his/her lifetime. Regarding the recipient he or she must be animated by the interest in salvation and by the desire to do good and not simply by the desire to prolong life. "Otherwise, the execution of a transplant – be it the most successful – is nothing but the prolonging of suffering and the postponing of death, a temporary delay nevertheless."³² Finally, the living donor is regarded as a true Christian, who loves his others and who sacrifices himself from love and not for other reasons. By resorting to the Synod's documents the author sets straight other legal and scientific details that are implied by a transplant.

The second issue is the possibility of causing death under certain circumstances. Regarding this matter the religious perspective father Iloaie advances leaves no room for concession. First of all abortion is regarded as a crime as long as the Church considers the embryo a being created by divine grace. The arguments of those who support abortion in some cases are well known by the author. The selfish interests of parents or financial status cannot stand before the religious perspective as the author states from the first chapter. The Church's position is equally firm in more complex situations such as the pregnancy resulting from a rape, the identification of disabilities in the fetus or worse the possibility that the pregnancy or the birth giving could affect the mother's life. In any case, abortion still remains, as the paragraph title says, a crime against humanity. Still, after a sustained denunciation against abortion in all circumstances, after the statement that it is not accepted not even "to save the mother's health"³³, an exception accepted by the Church is mentioned – in the case that the mother's life is actually put at risk. The explanation is given by the responsibilities the mother has toward the rest of the family.

The issue of euthanasia, which as we know raised a lot of debate, is treated without any compromise. Using the same technique of implied polemics (no other opponent is precisely mentioned), Ștefan Iloaie fights against those who are in favor of a so called "dignified death", seen as a solution for those suffering from incurable diseases or for those who are kept alive with the use of machines. This solution cannot be justified in the view of the Church with any argument, no matter how solid, because it implies once again the forbidden freedom of ignoring the limits of human

condition. Both passive euthanasia (by interrupting the treatment that keeps the patient alive) and active euthanasia (the deliberate ending of life through a lethal instrument at the request of the patient or of the family) are rejected without the right to appeal. Again, the author's argument finds a solid support in the Synod's documents, which are reproduced in the appendix for the information of those interested.

It's noticeable that the issues debated are interconnected and their implications are tangent or overlapping. Abortion implies both the issue of life as an ultimate gift and the issue of death, as a final limit. Artificial fertilization deals with the problem of birth but also with the suffering of not having children. Finally, euthanasia or organ transplant bring in discussion the attitude toward suffering and toward death. In short, all of the cases bring into light the limits of the human condition and all of them require a firm option with the most serious consequences. As it has been previously stated the postmodern society increases considerably the individual freedom, through the manner it re-evaluates the concept of identity and through the extraordinary progress in science. However, the dissolution of the guidelines from the previous paradigm hasn't been compensated; therefore the feeling of alienation and confusions is more and more common. Ștefan Iloaie's firm opinion is that under these circumstances the solution for the severe dilemmas of bioethics can be found by appealing to the Church and the traditional values it shelters, or at least brought closer. One thing is certain: the Christian perspective the author advances in this book offers a coherent discourse that adequately answers the gravity of the issues which are interconnected as we previously demonstrated. Through its complex and profound implications, the Christian perspective for calmly and responsibly accepting the limits imposed on man practically answers all the debates of bioethics, even if at times specific nuances will be needed.

At the same time, this perspective is coherent and efficient because, as we have previously shown, it places the debate in the horizon of the family, thereby rendering the social dimension of the problem as long as at this historical stage, society can't be conceived in the absence of family. Chapter 1.2., "The Christian Family and the Temptations of the Contemporary World" is an eloquent plea for this institution and for the values that go with it. Obviously, the author doesn't ignore the fact that this institution is going through a crisis and it's being undermined by some tendencies in contemporary life, such as selfishness and individualism, exaggerated self love and the search of sexuality, the emergences of surrogate types of families (cohabitation), the deterioration of the relationships within families and the multiplication of extramarital affairs, the obsession for welfare that destroys families. All of these and other aspects of the same nature require the urgent intervention of the Church, for the Church sees the family as a deeply religious institution and it can't be reduced, as we stated before, to the superficial relationships

between family members or exclusively to its social dimension. “Identified with the very act of creation, for it was founded soon after it, family received the status of a mystery and it has become a place of communion between man and God, a spiritual experience that transforms the biological and a complete way of human cohabitation, a space of education and perpetuating of religious, cultural and traditional values.”³⁴

Thus defined, family becomes a small scale concentrated copy of the Christian community, a space where faith and love come together to blossom in the sphere of the body and the sphere of the soul. Moreover, if we look at it this way, family becomes, as Ștefan Iloaie plastically describes it, “home of bioethics”. It is shown that any of the situations discussed by bioethics has implications for all family members, therefore the decisions has to be made with both faith and love. By associating it with faith, it is underlined that love should be understood in its genuine meaning, the one that transcends the contingent and should be thereby dissociated with the immediate interests of those involved or of the relatives. After all, the immediate interest are those that make matters worse, while love and faith, put together, simplify them and give coherent answers. Obviously, these are answers that find their justification in the transcendent, not at an immanent level.

On a previous page we mentioned that this is the point where the religious discourse is accused of irrationality. We also stated that father Ștefan Iloaie’s discourse is not condemning science and reason, but the attitude of those who inadequately use them by strictly separating them from science. Let us go over the opinion of those who consider rational the exclusive use of reason as an instrument of solving all the issues related to human life. We will rather stop at the initial statement according to which the act of anthropogenesis is only the superficial cause of the conflict between reason and faith, therefore the conflict is an artificial one. Looking at things in depth, a clear delimitation between religion and reason is impossible to make, but rather an optimal use of rational resources by the religious thinking can be established. Extending Ștefan Iloaie’s vision it won’t be difficult to support the fact that the strictly rational approach (in the narrow sense of the term) is unproductive from exactly the rational point of view and constantly uses arguments considered to be irrational. For instance, abortion due to so called financial reasons is irrational because, after birth, the child could be given away to a specialized institution. The real reason behind abortion would be the hidden desire to avoid (irrational) remorse caused by the (irrational) maternal instincts deeply affected by the child abandonment. Using a surrogate mother has, again, little to do with reason: firstly, rationally speaking, the child won’t belong to the adoptive mother, it would be forever the child of the biological mother, due to inextricable genetic links; moreover, the method aims to satisfy the maternal instinct, which is, as we say before, irrational. The love that determines the

relatives of a sick patient to decide for euthanasia isn't rational either, such as many of the aspects supported by the followers of secular bioethics. It is surprising to observe that, at a closer look, bare rationality stops at a superficial level and that the deep arguments of secular bioethics rest on values that do not fall under the sphere of this type of reasoning.

Instead, as Ștefan Iloaie's study shows, religion exploits more efficiently the resources of reason, understood in its genuine meaning and dissociated from the particular immediate interests. Authentic reason draws attention to the fact that abortion can have severe consequences on a woman's health and that the terminated pregnancy might be the only one given to a certain couple. The same reasoning would urge to more caution regarding sexual life and would emphasize that reason has nothing to do with libertinism. In the same context, the sexual emancipation of women implies a rational paradox, because its effects are more for the benefits of men. From the perspective of authentic reason, we will find that the inequality between rich patients and poor patients who need a transplant or between rich and poor couples who want a child through artificial methods is perfectly unjustified. Finally, in order not to extend the demonstration, genuine reason, like spirituality, can be nothing but comprehensive, coherent and consistent due to the original impulse towards knowledge and creation that originated them. One cannot invoke reason to justify particular solutions that serve individual purposes. One must turn to faith and reason, alike, in order to establish general principles and the exceptions that confirm their operation, as the religious discourse does.

If we remove the false conflict we mentioned before, reason associated with faith can provide solutions in bioethics through such principles – this is the fundamental thesis that binds together Ștefan Iloaie's discourse. Reason itself claims the involvement of religion and faith in matters of such gravity: it imposes on the lucid conscience that health and happiness would lose meaning without suffering, that eternal youth would be a punishment in the absence of old age, as life would lose all meaning without death and freedom would lose its value in the absence of transcendent limits. This type of subtle, consistent and comprehensive reasoning cannot accept the idea of its exclusiveness in any domain, and much less in the area of bioethics. Separated from the spirit, rationality itself acknowledges its failure. After all, only a passionate advocate of rationality, such as Ivan Karamazov, could have spoken the words that definitively recorded this resignation: "If God does not exist, everything is permitted"...

Ștefan Iloaie's study offers a coherent and persuasive perspective over the complex issues of bioethics. The author proposes, through a solid theoretical construction, anchored in the principles of the Orthodox

Church, pertinent answers to the severe dilemmas that this discipline is confronted with and, implicitly, debates the increasingly significant current trends that tend to minimize the involvement of religion in bioethics, leaving aside the fact that this is a discipline that belongs to the "culture of life".

Notes:

¹Ștefan Iloaie, "Biotechnology and faith. Relativism in the postmodern moral. A christian – Orthodox approach", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 8, issue 22, (Spring, 2009): 38-52

² Ștefan Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică* (Cluj –Napoca: Editura Renașterea, 2009), 12

³ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 11

⁴ Constantine V. Skouteris, „Progress in biotechnology and in the human being”, *Revista de bioetică și teologie*, 1 (2007): 43-44, apud Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 22

⁵ Lehel Balogh, „The public debate on religiosity of the public debate of bioethics in the USA”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 8, issue 23, (Summer 2009): 3-12

⁶ Lisa M. Rasmussen, „Morality, Religion and Metaphysics: Diverse Visions in Bioethics”, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Vol. 25, no 4 (2000): 367-377

⁷ Balogh. „The public debate on religiosity of the public debate of bioethics in the USA”, 6

⁸ Mingxu Wang, Ping-Cheung Lo, Ruiping Fan, „Medical Decision Making and the Family: An Examination of Controversies”, *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*, Vol. 35, Issue 5, (Oct. 2010): 493-498

⁹ Stephen A. Erickson, „The wrong of rights: The moral authority of the family”, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Volume 35, Issue 5, (Oct. 2010): 600-616

¹⁰ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 51

¹¹ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 52

¹² Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 51

¹³ Cristian Radu, „Valențele unei sintagme: eră a comunicării”, *Revista Transilvană de Științe ale Comunicării*, vol. 1, no 1 (2005): 103-118

¹⁴ Liviu Petrescu, *Poetica postmodernismului* (Pitești, Paralela 45, 1996), 154-170

¹⁵ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 57

¹⁶ Stephen P. Greggo, „Applied Christian Bioethics: Counseling on Moral Edge”, *Journal of psychology and Christianity*, Vol 29, No 3 (2010): 252-262

¹⁷ Jean Francois Lyotard, *Condiția postmodernă. Raport asupra cunoașterii* (traducere și prefață de Ciprian Mihali, București, Editura Babel), 67-72

¹⁸ These are levels that Alvin Toffler names *technosphere*, *sociosphere* and *infosphere*, and all of them are marked in the post-industrial society by a visible evolution toward disaggregation and individualism. See Alvin Toffler, *Al treilea val* (prefață de Ioniță Olteanu, traducere de Georgeta Bolomey și Dragan Stoianovici, București, Editura Politică, 1983), 212-270

¹⁹ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 62-63

²⁰ Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 63

²¹H.-R Patapievici, *Omul recent. O critică a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»* (București, Humanitas, 2002), 132

²²David Le Breton, *Antropologia corpului și modernitatea* (traducere de Doina Lica, Timișoara, Editura Amarcord, 2002), 89

²³Martin Heidegger, „Ultimul interviu”, în *Filozofie contemporană* (traducere de Alexandru Boboc și Ioan N. Roșca, București, Editura Garamond, f.a.)

²⁴Noël Simard, „La bioéthique et le droit canonique”. *Studia Canonica*, vol. 42, no 1 (2008): 59-85. The author points out, through the manner in which he systemizes the issues raised by bioethics, the fact that these issues are related to birth, suffering and death and therefore cannot be adequately solved without the implication of the Church through decisions stipulated in canon law.

²⁵Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 79-80

²⁶Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 70

²⁷Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 98-99

²⁸Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 121

²⁹Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 123

³⁰Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 105-107

³¹Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 129

³²Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 150

³³Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 164

³⁴Iloaie, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, 30