

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND BIOS

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On behalf of His Holiness Alexei II, Patriarch of All Russia, I wholeheartedly greet all of you who have gathered at this very important meeting concerning the saving of our planet, in other words biopolitics. Human life begins with God and is a gift. God is the Lord, the master of life. This has to be better understood today, when new scientific horizons open up, and technology and biomedical research advance. Special attention is needed in research that can endanger human life. Christians need to acknowledge this new reality and evaluate the consequences.

Technological issues should not be discussed in isolation; they have to be combined with Christian ethics, which form the basis of European and world ethics. We as Christians believe that all which is technologically feasible should not be accepted without consideration. To choose whether or not to ethically accept certain technological possibilities, we need to consider the respect for and defence of the human personality. Science and technology cannot be the primary essence of human life; they exist to assist humankind. The point is that humankind devises them and it is, therefore, up to us to prove why technological progress exists and to set the limits for research and experimentation.

God is the master of life and has rights to life. These rights pertain to the defence of the precious gift of life. God told humankind to rule over the land and the animals, however, Christianity interprets this not as the right to command other living beings but as the right to work the land and to defend it.

In the present world, with the new technologies available, we interpret this as the responsibility to protect the environment. When God admonished Cain for having slain Abel, he admonished him for not having revered life. Respect for life must exist in the minds of all human beings. We do not harm life, ours or anyone else's, because life belongs to our God and Father. Life belongs to God, not to man. This is the sanctity of life.

Since no one can harm life, life is sacred. The Christian uplifting of the value of life lies in the faith that we as humans have many sins but that Christ, with his sacrifice and resurrection, saves us and all of Creation. As a result, Christian ethics cannot be undermined in nature and culture, and the progress of culture ought to be tailored to the sphere of the Holy Gospel. We cannot answer to all of today's questions with the words of the Gospel alone. That is why new technologies, including cloning and in vitro fertilisation, are resorted to. However, we should always follow the words of Christ and of the Apostle Paul (Gal. 5, 25), who said that "we should act with our soul." Once we decide to act with our soul, we must attribute a Christian ethical dimension to our actions. Then, the words of God will become the primary criterion in every scientific endeavour and in every policy.
