

THE MEANING OF LIFE FROM THE CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW

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This address stems from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, situated in Constantinople, Turkey where, since centuries, the mystery of life has been sanctified and the message of the resurrection is being preached worldwide. I am originating from the place where everything is new and full of light, grace and blessing and man is full of life and eternity, the place where the value of life is being protected, and I feel it is a special honour and privilege for me to address my words to you, all those uneasy for the future of life on our planet seeking its preservation from extinction.

I would first like to transmit to all of you the blessing and the cordial regards of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios who, on behalf of his Church, that is the first, in order, Church of the Orthodoxy, is proclaiming the faith and hope for the continuation and preservation of the meaning of life on our planet, as well as the singularity of every human being, the crown of the Creation and the purpose of every ecclesiastic activity and is making an appeal to everyone's contribution for the protection of life.

I would like, then, to express my personal gratitude to all of you, especially to Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, for the extremely honorable invitation to address a few modest reflections to you, the exponents of biopolitics.

Our age is a time of imposed extrovertedness. Powerful currents are leading to the adaptation of all kinds of events and phenomena. The world places priority on those values assisting man in the attainment of happiness primarily through an increase in man's material means of survival and the acquisition of more means of self-gratification. This right is often exercised for the satisfaction of individuals or certain specific groups or communities. Besides, in our contemporary world, there exists the conviction that the satisfaction of human desires and rights will be attained through science and technology, in addition to the appropriate organisation of society.

However, it is a common discovery that the enhancement of the means to a commodious life through science and technology simultaneously leads to greater insecurity within the realm of Creation in general. At precisely this point in the personality of man and the world in general, religionöJudaism, Mohammedanism, Christianity, and especially the Orthodox Church comes to project the significance and value of life providing the hope of salvation from the impasse to which man has lead himself and his macro- and microcosm.

The Church comes to the defense of the values of man against the tendencies of depersonalisation, exhibited by techo-industrial progress, commits those present to accepting human imperfection and to allowing themselves to be taught by the past, and lends man ethical strength for the development of selfcontrol, humility, and liberation from egocentricity.

The Church appears, once again, to show that the positive values of love, friendship and creation, when used only for greater self-satisfaction and wellbeing, will cease being significant, until they acquire value in themselves for each person as a creature of God, and primary significance for the societal whole.

The Church comes to teach us respect for life, to make us observers and researchers of the majesty of life, to apprehend the wildflower of the meadow, the butterfly, and any little creature as being the presence of the Creator.

Finally, the Church reassures us that life is eternal and that every human existence is unique and its presence never to be repeated on Earth.

The Church preaches that the voice of life of every life, but especially human life is the melody of God's love for man, the perforation of the darkness of death. It is the prison of and victory over death. The teaching of the Church means spring; it is the divine image, the real countenance of God, the figuration of His love for the world. It is that which is the Spirit of God.

The significance of human life is discerned to an even greater extent in the Bible. In the Old Testament, in the narration of Creation in the Book of Genesis i.e. in the creation and birth of all the Lord God, having used the subjunctive "let there be..." for all creations, utters the famous subjunctive "let us make man in our likeness and image." In His image he created man, envisioning him to be like Him. And thus God makes and creates, being Life Himself, and granting man and creation the most valuable gift life. Let us all ponder the gravity and significance of this event.

In today's crucial age, during which the forces of death have launched a multi-directional war against life on a human and cosmic level through narcotics, abortion, the impulse to suicide and denial of life, war, the threat of nuclear holocaust, and through pollution of the bio-environment,

Orthodoxy by virtue of its long life and experience proceeds to give direction to life, to its significance, and to its salvation.

Life is a natural attribute of God, as He is a living God, a source of life and immortality. The world and man received the divine gift of life from God through creation, and until this day they continue to be because they adhere to and are invigorated by Divine Providence. "In God we live, and move and exist,"(Proverbs, 17:10) and without His care we would return to zero, to non-existence. As Cyril of Alexandria appropriately remarks, God, the creator of all "invigorates all to have life by nature."(John 9:1)

The universe is not a technical production created by God by chance, as usually happens with the technical products of man, but a living existence, vitalised by the invigorating force of life derived from God, the source of life. The maintenance of communication with God means life. Detachment from Him means death, a fate not due to God but to the voluntary distancing and severing from the vitalising grace and energy. Death is the destructive outcome of the hands of man, for "God did not make death, nor does He derive joy from the loss of living beings, because he brought all into existence, and saved all the creatures of the world."(Soph. Sol. 1,12-14)

With the passage of time, human beings "distanced life from the spirit", we have limited it to our feelings, our acrobatics, our fantasies, our idols of hedonism, our narcissism, and our systems and theories and machines. We have wrapped life into a condensed, chemical without exaggeration matter. Yet we continue to feed ourselves the futile hope that we are thus establishing our existence in this world and securing our position on this earth. In a word, we have introduced erosion into the world.

With the entrance of erosion and death due to sin in the world, creation "sighing and suffering" has been wholly subjugated by them, awaiting salvation along with humanity.(Prbl. Rom. 8-21,-23)

The salvation of life from wear and death and the return into real life were undertaken by Christ, the son of the living God, the son of man, who recreated life, and led to the union of divine and human nature, the divine Logos, the Living Bread, the one who descended from heaven, the Truth and the Life, the Bearer of Life, the Giver of Life to the World, he who came for the salvation of the world, "so that everyone who believes in Him will not be lost, but will have eternal life," as preached by John the Evangelist, who heralded Christ as the life of the world.

Unfortunately, instead of binding with God so as to pass through death into life by the grace of the Spirit whose life-giving force on man and creation is particularly stressed by the Orthodox Church, humans remain distant to God and the Church, thus destroying our life, the life of our fellow man, and the world as a whole. The protection of life in all its expressions will only then become possible when man rediscovers his spiritual balance and re-establishes harmonious relations with God and with his neighbour. It is only proper, then, that it is repeatedly pronounced that biopolitics and all the related problems of life are primarily mental and spiritual problems.

The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of life, the personal resurrection of everyone of us. The resurrection was not only a sign of his strength. He was not resurrected for humans to admire him through the centuries, but so that we may also be resurrected with him, and that the life in the tomb should become a life of resurrection; so that we may approximate the "likeness and image of God"; to discard the affliction of erosion and suffering on which, unfortunately, we have built our lives; to liberate us from futility and boredom; to give meaning, in our daily lives, which we arduously try to make true with pretensions; but from nothing and lies only nothing can arise. He who created life is He who maintains it, not we. We cannot be the keepers in His absence. When his providence is absent we are only left with desertion.

Humanity takes its course in history. Christ entered, passed through and surpassed history and gave life the value of infinity. He enriched human life with the truth; he has beckoned us to rise from our graves like Lazaruses, to cease viewing phenomena and apprehend true life.

The Church, the body of the living Christ knows better than anyone the value of life sprouting from God and triumphantly valued through the crucifixion and resurrection of God. It is for this reason that the Church tirelessly preaches not the flight from the world and hopelessness, but the dynamic metamorphosis in Christ, and the renewal of all as a prelude, engagement and commencement of the eternal biosis with him. The value of present life is not limited to the grateful and thankful enjoyment of material goods. If our hopes were only limited to this, we would according to St.Paul the Apostle be "the basest of all humans."(Cor. 15:17) Our hopes in Christ progress further, as stated by Megas Vasilios, "and all our deeds should be in preparation the other bios."(To the Young, 2).

This possibility of preparing, the great opportunity of entering into the new life, the life springing from the tomb of Christ victor over death constitutes the greatest valuation of the present life, and the strongest proof of its great importance.

The spirit transpires wherever it chooses. Life is the light, the love of God. It transcends unlimited distances of space, time and memory. It provides joy, happiness, serenity and care. This spirit of life, of true life, of life in Christ "opens the senses to refined sensitivities, dripping freshness which mingles with the breath and liberates it. It does not harden human beings, but sweetens with the aura of gentleness. It gives birth to transparency which soaks into man."

The primary mystery of life, the resurrection of Christ who "by dying conquered life and accorded life to the dead" is the pinnacle of the mystery of the new life of Christ. It is the recapitulation of life, a life completely purified "to its last essence", calling humans to co-exist with it. The Groom of the Church is the Life "which transgressed centuries of darkness in order to bring the eternal Day."

This perspective and hope holds together and binds in life for centuries and up to the present and will continue to support in the spirit of humility over the centuries the Orthodox Ecumenical Throne which I have the privilege to serve in devotion of life and deaconry through many temptations and human suffering, and through evangelism and in witness of the knowledge of God and in his name.

These thoughts and views are not solely my own but the preaching of the Church of God and the revelation of the wisdom of the Church to which we, as Christians, belong. The theanthropic body of Christ which is a "temple of God", the source of life, from which all of the creation, all human beings, everyone of us separately, as a unique and separate existence in the world, and which we receive the "Body and Blood of Christ" in eternal life, as a valuation of this present, transient life which is the bread of the eternal life.

References

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2. Meliton, Metropolitan of Chalcedon, presented in the Patriarchal Church on Palm Sunday in 1970.

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