

## Editorial

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This special issue of the journal showcases the contributions of Orthodox theologians and researchers, both domestic and international, who are dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by advancements in the biomedical field and the current cultural context. As readers will discover, most of these studies focus on pressing bioethical issues related to the beginning and end of life, as well as ethical dilemmas that may arise during life, such as our relationship to the outcomes produced by artificial intelligence. We believe these studies will offer fresh and comprehensive Christian perspectives, fostering a better understanding of the moral and bioethical challenges we face.

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In his study, **Sorin Bute** starts by presenting the evolution of the Christian faith in the context of modernity and pluralism, emphasizing the impact of this change on universal values. The author argues that the disappearance of Christian universalism and the emergence of a diversified interpretation of reality have led to a pluralist ethic, which makes moral decision-making more difficult. He also proposes that Christian bioethics should define its meta-bioethical foundations and combine noetic and rational methods in order to properly address contemporary bioethical dilemmas. In this way, Sorin Bute analyzes the dual methodology of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, highlighting the link between charismatic and scientific theology, based on the distinction between the created and the uncreated. He emphasizes that this relationship is not separate, but interdependent, in which knowledge is realized through both reason and divine experience. Fr. Sorin Bute states that in Orthodox bioethics, the sanctity of life is the priority, seeking not only rational arguments, but a life in

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communion with God. Thus, Orthodox bioethics promotes a transformation of human nature and moral paradigms, through metanoia and asceticism, in order to allow the correct discernment of good and evil.

**Petru Cernat's** study examines the impact of modern reproductive technologies on human life and relationships, emphasizing the Orthodox Church's need for a pastoral response. Referring to the Orthodox Church of Greece's document on medically assisted reproduction, he notes that artificial fertilization techniques may offer hope to infertile couples but also raise ethical and spiritual concerns, potentially transforming a sacred act into a mechanical one. The Church acknowledges the desire to have children as natural and sacred but warns against the absolute pursuit of this desire, which may contradict divine will. The study shows that while the Church does not explicitly recommend assisted procreation, it seeks to offer compassionate guidance, supporting adoption and fertilization methods that respect human dignity and avoid the creation of surplus embryos. Father Petru Cernat also references recent documents from the Russian Orthodox Church, which permit in vitro fertilization (IVF) under specific conditions, excluding practices that produce surplus embryos or involve gamete donation, thus reinforcing traditional family values. The study further explores the moral dilemmas surrounding cryopreserved embryos, questioning the Church's stance on their potential adoption.

**Magdalena Burlacu's** study raises the question of the presence and use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the challenges it poses to human spiritual life. The author notes that the documents issued so far on the regulation and ethical standards for the use of AI in various domains have not considered the assessment of the potential effects that algorithm-based systems may have on the right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion. In addition, notes Magdalena Burlacu, the analysis of a European Union report on the link between artificial intelligence and human rights seems to confirm that attempts to regulate and validate the use of AI in spiritual life would be ineffective or at least delayed. In this regard, Magdalena Burlacu's article has the merit of raising the issue of the need to draft and adopt a set of recommendations and regulations on the use of artificial intelligence in the sphere of spiritual life. As the author points out, the formulation of basic ethical guidelines on the use of AI in religious life is even more urgent as the generation of a religious service by ChatGPT and the creation of a digital pastor accessible on ChatGPT Plus may lead to confusion in the understanding of such notions and realities as that of human consciousness. On the other hand, Magdalena Burlacu's study also answers other questions as to whether AI can be considered the image of God. The author's answer, based

on the principles of Christian anthropology, is negative and shows that AI does not have the capacities corresponding to direct human experience. AI has neither the experience of the soul nor of the body. In the last part, the study analyzes several ethical principles able to guide Christian communities regarding the use of artificial intelligence. The author argues that these principles must be clearly defined and responsibly applied.

**Sorin Vulcănescu's** article begins by highlighting the Christian perspective on death as a transition toward resurrection, rather than the end of existence, emphasizing that God created life, not death. The author goes on to discuss two primary approaches in confronting terminal illness: palliative care, intended to ease pain and support the patient, and assisted death. However, Father Vulcănescu argues that palliative care is a superior alternative, aligned with Christian values. His study presents palliative care as a real and dignified solution, contrasting it with euthanasia, which has strayed from Christian roots and become increasingly secularized. Palliative care is presented as an alternative that offers physical, psychological, social, and spiritual support to terminally ill patients and their families without hastening death. Its main purpose is to reduce suffering and facilitate a dignified death through a holistic approach that considers the patient's emotional and spiritual needs. This holistic model asserts that spiritual health positively impacts the patient's overall well-being, enhancing immune function, pain management, and quality of life. Palliative care integrates spirituality as an essential component of the support provided to terminal patients and their families, helping them find meaning in life and manage the existential stress associated with severe illness. The author points out that the Church plays an essential role through clergy who provide spiritual assistance, prepare patients to accept death, and support their families through mourning. He further notes that recent studies indicate that spiritual support brings benefits such as improved quality of life and reduced care costs, highlighting the importance of recognizing this type of support within medical institutions

In the first study of the *Varia* section, **Dejan Donev** focuses on the personality of Fritz Jahr, highlighting his contribution to the field of Bioethics. The author argues that Jahr can be called the "father of bioethics" as he was the first to propose the term "bioethics". Thus, in a 1926 study reflecting on the life sciences and the teaching of ethics, Fritz Jahr put forward the thesis that humans would extend their moral duties from their fellow humans to animals and plants. Jahr formulates the bioethical imperative and argues in support of it, citing St. Francis

of Assisi, Richard Wagner and Eduard von Hartmann, among many others. Dejan Donev emphasizes that the bioethical imperative is a transformation and extension of the Kantian categorical imperative. If for Kant, the foundation of the categorical imperative was the sacredness of the moral law, for Jahr, the bioethical imperative is based on the principle of the sacredness of life, in the sense of compassion towards all forms of life. The author also points out that the source of the bioethical imperative is to be found not only in Kantian moral philosophy, but also in the Bible, as an addition to the fifth commandment, which forbids killing. Dejan Donev also notes that although Jahr's vision of bioethics did not enjoy real success in his time, it is nevertheless much broader than Potter's, including human environments and the human biotope, for example communities and teams in factories and offices.

**Claudiu Boia's** study analyzes the Nazi occupation of Greece and its impact on Mount Athos, highlighting the monks' request for protection addressed to Adolf Hitler. The author emphasizes that the Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian monks demanded German intervention to restore their historical rights, in the context of the injustices suffered by non-Greek communities. Although Hitler refused to change the status of Mount Athos, many monks continued to believe that it would ensure their protection. The study also explores the logistical difficulties faced by monasteries during the occupation. An important part is devoted to an examination of the 1941 Nazi expedition to Mount Athos by Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), which aimed to appropriate cultural property in occupied territories. Coordinated by Professor Franz Dögler, the expedition included specialists from various fields who documented manuscripts and relics from Athonite monasteries. Despite their intentions of inventory, the monks received the delegation with hospitality, even asking for a portrait of Hitler. The result of this mission was the publication of *Mönchsland Athos*, which reflects both the scholarly value and Nazi propaganda.

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My thanks and gratitude go to the contributors who responded positively to the invitation to submit an article for this thematic issue. I wish them continued success in their research. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Fr. Prof. Univ. Cristian Sonea, Executive Editor of this Journal, for the opportunity to propose and coordinate this special issue of *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Theologia Orthodoxa*.