

5 Νοεμβρίου 2016

Euthanasia: the Church accepts it only from God! (Angelos Alekopoulos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



People are free and autonomous and can decide on matters pertinent to their lives and even as regards their death. According to the Church, people are an image of God, autonomous, certainly, but only in terms of their relationship with others. Our freedom has to do with our relations within society. The Church accepts euthanasia only when it comes from God, not from people themselves*



‘Our life is God’s greatest gift and the beginning and end are in His hands alone: “In the hand of God is the spirit of every person” (Job 12, 10). It is the locus in which our self-determination finds expression, where we encounter the grace of God through our free will and where our salvation is worked out. Any attempt to define the limits of life merely by human will, thought or ability strips it of its sanctity’[1].

From this point of view, and as regards the matter of transplants, the opposition of the Church begins when our freedom is ignored or our sanctity disdained. Nothing justifies forcing people to donate tissues or body organs before or after death. Nothing confirms ‘assumed consent’ for the donation of tissues or organs from our bodies, much less the presumption of agreement when there is no express statement to the contrary. The Church has to respect the wishes of the faithful, to bless those who want to become organ donors, but also to understand the hesitancy and reservations of those of another mind. Decisions of this sort are entirely personal matters. The basic criterion for the actions of the Church is, first and foremost, the salvation of the soul. Anything which damages the soul and affronts spiritual values should be rejected. The Church respects the freedom and unforced gift by the donor, but for the Church the gift of an organ without the conscious consent of the donor is one which carries no spiritual weight.

The positions of the Church as regards the taking of decisions about euthanasia and the interruption of life support are clear and are based on the value attributed to each person, on the strength of the Christian during an illness, on overcoming death and on the process of the departure of the soul. So it is the duty of Christians to face sickness with fortitude and in the expectation of eternity and the anticipation of the Resurrection, so that death is serene and peaceful. For Christians, illness, pain and death fall within the universal dimensions of history: sin, forgiveness and salvation. Human beings are at the centre of Paradise: Adam and Eve.

Each person derives his or her value, not from their personal interests or rights, but from the fact that they are made ‘in the image and likeness of God’. Intervention in our lives are permissible, provided they do not ignore this fact.

Note: this text is part of a doctoral thesis entitled 'Bioethical Problems in the Intensive Care Unit', by Angelos Alekopoulos, as part of the programme 'Studies in Orthodox Theology' at the School of Humanitarian Studies of the Greek Open University, with Dr. Nikolaos Koios as supervisor. Pemptousia is publishing it as a series of articles.

***This applies also to voluntary suicide through 'martyrdom'. The Circumcellions and others who actively sought martyrdom were condemned by the Church. WJL.**

[1] Special Committee on Bioethics of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece.