

The Confessor's Tongue for July 11, A. D. 2021

Great Martyr Euphemia; Great Princess Olga, Equal-to-the-Apostles

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Nihilism and Orthodox Faith

The high priest of Nihilism, Friedrich Nietzsche, defined his worldview thus: "That there is no truth; that there is no absolute state of affairs—no 'thing-in-itself.' This alone is Nihilism, and of the most extreme kind." "There is no absolute truth." This means there is nothing that is always true all the time for everyone. There is no ultimate reality or meaning to the universe. This way of thinking, which has emerged in the West beginning with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, represents a drastic departure from the view dating to the ancient Greeks and before that there is an ultimate truth to be known and that man can know it.

The worldview of Nietzsche may also be expressed by a phrase very common today: "All truth is relative." This popular translation of Nietzsche's definition of Nihilism reflects the way most of the Western world, including our own country, now thinks. It is all around us. People associate "truth" with "science" and the scientific method, which is inductive and provisional and cannot discover any immaterial reality. But thinking science is the vehicle of all truth that can be known by man, men assert that all truth is empirical. That, however, is an absolute claim which is not empirical. And when they say "all truth is relative", they are making an absolute claim. Both statements contradict themselves.

For Orthodox Christians, Truth is absolute. It reflects the way things are in themselves. But first of all, Truth is not a thing, but a living Person, the unique Godman Jesus Christ. This living Truth reveals the True Father and Spirit to us, the spiritual reality on which the material world depends. He reveals to us the truth about ourselves. He gives us to see ourselves as we truly are and what we are intended to be. He reveals the true nature, value, and meaning of every human action, word, and thought. The Truth, then, is revealed to man by God; it is not discovered by man's reasoning or scientific investigation.

For Western man who rejects Christ, life is a dark chaos of events, actions, words, and thoughts. How do they relate to one another? What are they? What do they mean? What value do they have? He cannot tell, for he rejects the notion there is any truth to be found about them. They simply are. They may be perceived differently by different people, but they have no ultimate meaning. People will work to give them relative meaning. This is what is meant by the now ubiquitous term "narrative".

Narrative properly is the act of telling a story, relating it to a listener. It still means to tell a story, but it has become the contemporary means of attaching meaning to human events, actions, and words. Because there is no Truth about human

events, actions, and words to discover, a narrative is the way Western man without Christ provides explanation for human action and gives it some relative meaning. That meaning cannot ultimately be true. There may be multiple meanings of an event, advanced by different people with different interests, each person or group trying to explain the meaning and significance of the event before it. These narratives compete to explain the event. Hence we now speak about "competing narratives", competing to explain the significance of the same event. None of them is "true" in the ultimate or traditional sense of the word; but they compete nonetheless to prevail as the accepted explanation. The prevailing narrative sets the way people think about an event. It has power to explain and power to guide further action. When there is no truth and only competing narratives, those narratives represent a struggle for power—whose narrative will prevail to explain the event and set the way normal people will think about it.

The picture is drastically different for the Orthodox Christian. The Truth is Light that shines in the confusing darkness of the welter of human actions, words, and thoughts and allows those who abide in His light to see things for what they truly are, to make sense of things. Human events, actions, words, and thoughts all have ultimate meaning, but this can only be seen in the Light of Christ, in relation to the Creator who made all things out of nothing and made man in His Own image. Christ is Truth. That which contradicts Him is untruth. Christ is Good. That which deviates from Him is evil. Christ is the standard for man. Christ is the judge of every human action, word, and thought. He is the One who reveals its true meaning and significance and value. This can be seen only in relation to Him: to Him from Whom nothing is hidden, to whom all is laid bare, who knows all things for what they truly are, and who judges all things.

Hence, we Orthodox Christians confess, we affirm, we proclaim that the Truth and Light have come into the world, the Godman Jesus Christ, who gives meaning to everything. Nothing is without meaning and significance. We are not in darkness, unless we reject the Light who has come to us. The phrase "all truth is relative" is a poisonous lie that leads man to hell. It is a way of thinking from which we must turn away. *Fr. Justin, reflecting on Fr. Seraphim's Nihilism.*

Embryonic Stem-Cell Research in the Perspective of Orthodox Christianity

Encyclical Letter of the Holy Synod of the OCA
October 17, 2001

Dearly-beloved in the Lord:

The current debate over research on embryonic stem cells raises in the starkest way a crucial moral question concerning the ultimate meaning and value of human life.

From the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, human life begins at conception (meaning fertilization with creation of the single-cell zygote). This conviction is grounded in the Biblical witness (e.g., Ps 139:13-16; Isaiah 49:1ff; Luke 1:41,44), as well as in the scientifically established fact that from conception there exists genetic uniqueness and cellular differentiation that, if the conceptus is allowed to develop normally, will produce a live human being. (1) Human life is sacred from its very beginning, since from conception it is ensouled existence. As such, it is "personal" existence, created in the image of God and endowed with a sanctity that destines it for eternal life.

Conservative, pro-life voices throughout the country have enthusiastically praised President Bush's recent decision regarding scientific research using human embryonic stem cells (ESCR). That decision would allow research on some sixty lines of existing stem cells, developed from human embryos which were destroyed as the cells were harvested. It would prohibit creation of embryos for research purposes, and it urges further study into the feasibility of utilizing adult stem cells to achieve the same therapeutic ends envisioned for embryonic stem cells. These limitations, it is argued, would ensure that extra embryos resulting from in vitro fertilization techniques would not be subjected to manipulation by researchers, nor would embryos be created, by cloning or any other means, for the specific purpose of serving as research subjects.

We, the Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, applaud the President's initiative in seeking a reasonable compromise between assuring protection of human life at every stage of its development, and exploring the potential therapeutic benefits to be derived from pluripotent stem cells. We are gratified that he has expressed unambiguous opposition to human cloning. We cannot, however, condone the manipulation of embryonic cells in any form for research purposes, including lines developed from destroyed embryos. Rather, we can only express dismay at the fact that the debate over this issue has avoided major considerations regarding the very meaning and value of human life.

President Bush's proposal to use only the existing sixty lines of stem cells (2) because the embryos had already been destroyed (i.e., killed) falters on the precept enunciated by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:8, "We may not do evil so that good may come." The very act of destroying those embryos is evil, and we may not profit from evil even to achieve a good and noble end.

Although the President's Solomonic decision appears to serve pro-life interests, in fact it unwittingly opens the floodgates to ever more utilitarian manipulation of human life. Research on

existing stem cell lines should be prohibited for the simple reason that those embryos should never have been created in the first place. The moral line has been crossed, and Mr. Bush's proposed limitations do little to prevent an inevitable descent down an increasingly slippery slope.

Our opposition to ESCR is based on the following considerations, which are political as well as medical and theological.

In the first place, debate on this issue has too often overlooked the fact that among the most vocal proponents of embryo research are pro-abortion activists, supported by much of the media. If the government refuses to fund such research, it would thereby tacitly acknowledge that human life begins at conception. This flies in the face of abortion legislation such as *Roe v. Wade* and would inevitably undermine the view that an embryo is merely a clump of tissue and can therefore be aborted on demand with no moral consequences. The real issue underlying the debate, then, is less the development of potential therapies than the preservation of so-called "abortion rights." (3)

Second, enormous pressures to legalize and federally fund embryonic stem cell research is coming from the biotech and pharmaceutical industries, because of the promise of nearly limitless profits. The "new medicine" based on stem cell therapies is largely driven by the marketplace. As with AIDS medications and other recently developed therapies, market forces will determine who has access to them, and at what cost.

Third, it should be noted that in the recent past (1992) scientists were touting the exceptional benefits of fetal tissue, particularly in the treatment of illnesses such as Parkinson's disease. To date, such therapies have been a disappointment. Some Parkinson's patients, in fact, have suffered irreversible damage due to the introduction of foreign cells into their brains. And no new medicines of significance have been produced using fetal cells. Claims that embryonic stem cells will produce a panacea are likely to be equally exaggerated.

Fourth, the slippery slope of ESCR is dangerous and potentially irreversible. Already an Australian company, in November 2000, received a patent to create chimeras: animals with body tissue and organs produced using human stem cells. And in February 2001, a team of San Francisco researchers announced that they had created a strain of mice, one quarter of whose brains were composed of human cells. In just thirty years the utilitarian slope has taken us from legalized abortion to partial-birth abortion, to physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, in addition to acceptance of fetal tissue therapy and destruction of embryos to harvest stem cells. Unless moral persuasion can reverse the trend, the slope will lead to a tragic devaluation of human life.

Fifth, ever since the Holocaust the principle has been universally accepted by the scientific community that no experimentation should be undertaken on

human subjects without the subject's informed consent. Obviously, such consent cannot be granted by an embryo (nor, by the way, by a two-year old). Neither the mother nor anyone else has "proxy" rights in this regard over the life and well-being of a Child *in utero* or *in vitro*.

Sixth, ESCR relies on cloning to produce multiple copies of the cells under investigation. Cloning in animal experiments has a failure rate on the order of 95%, and mice and other animals produced through cloning have been born with serious genetic defects. The cloning of human embryos for research purposes presents similar dangers, and for this reason alone it should be permanently banned.

Finally, it has been proved recently that adult stem cells, together with those harvested from placentas and umbilical cords, hold as much if not more promise than embryonic stem cells. In May, 2001, the prestigious scientific journal *Cell* published a report showing that adult bone marrow cells have an extraordinary capacity to differentiate into epithelial cells of the liver, lung, GI tract and skin. The report noted that "This finding may contribute to clinical treatment of genetic disease or tissue repair." (4) In August, 2001, researchers reported finding adult stem cells in mouse brains that were used to produce muscle cells; and a Canadian team isolated "versatile" (pluripotent) cells in mice that produced neural, muscle and fat cells. This means that in the relatively near future it should be possible to harvest stem cells from a patient's skin, multiply them by cloning, and use them for therapeutic purposes, including the growing of new organs.

In conclusion, we firmly reject any and all manipulation of human embryos for research purposes as inherently immoral and a fundamental violation of human life. We call upon the President and the Congress of the United States to restore and maintain a total ban on ESCR. Furthermore, we encourage the scientific community to reject pressures for ESCR exerted by the pro-abortionist lobby, the biotech and pharmaceutical industries, and to devote their energies and resources to discovering, harvesting and utilizing non-embryonic stem cells, including those derived from adults, placentas and umbilical cords.

Above all, we urge our faithful, together with the medical community and political leaders, to return to the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath: *primum non nocere*, "First of all, do no harm." Embryonic stem cell research results in unmitigated harm. It should be unequivocally rejected in the interests of preserving both the sacredness and the dignity of the human person.

With love in the Lord, the Source of Life,
+ THEODOSIUS
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada
+ KYRILL
Archbishop of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania

+ PETER
Archbishop of New York and New Jersey
+ DMITRI
Archbishop of Dallas and the South
+ HERMAN
Archbishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
+ NATHANIEL
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate
+ JOB
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest
+ TIKHON
Bishop of San Francisco and the West
+ SERAPHIM
Bishop of Ottawa and Canada
+ NIKOLAI
Bishop of Baltimore

¹ J. Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), chp. 2, "Procreation and the Beginning of Life," pp. 127ff.

² According to numerous reports, this figure is exaggerated. There may exist throughout the world today only some thirty lines that can prove useful for research purposes. As a result, many scientists are calling for expanding these proposed limitations or for dropping them altogether.

³ This same motivation explains the proliferation of terms to specify discrete stages of life growing in the womb: pre-embryo, embryo, fetus. The reality is that at every stage from conception to birth it is a matter of a human child. Its life is no more potential² or less human at these stages than is the life of a newborn, a two-year-old or an octogenarian.

⁴ *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 3 (2001), 443.

Prayers for Repentance

The prayers that follow are most suitable for our sinful times. May God grant us true repentance.

Prayer for Deliverance from the Antichrist

St. Anatoly the Younger of Optina (+1922)

Deliver me, O Lord, from the deceptions of the God-hating and evil antichrist, whose coming is at hand, and shelter me from his snares in the secret desert of Thy salvation. Grant me, O Lord, strength and courage to firmly confess Thy Most Holy Name, that I may not abandon Thee because of fear of the devil, and that I may not deny Thee, my Saviour and Redeemer, nor Thy Holy Church. Grant me, O Lord, tears and lamentation for my sins, and spare me, O Lord, in the hour of Thy Dread Judgement. Amen.

Prayer of Repentance to Jesus Christ

Based on a 15th-century Greek Prayer

Master, Lord Jesus Christ our God, the only merciful One and quick to forgive, the Fountain of mercy and the overflowing Wellspring of love for mankind; Who didst not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Receive me, Thou Who didst command Peter, the first among Your disciples and Apostles, to forgive sins until seventy times seven, showing Thine immeasurable goodness and love for mankind, and mercifully and patiently opening the door of repentance to all who have sinned, granting them time to return to Thee and banishing despair.

Lord Jesus Christ, Guide of the erring, Correction

of the fallen, Hope of the hopeless, Comfort of the oppressed; receive me as I return to Thee with tears and sighs, as I repent for my transgressions and ask for forgiveness. Bow down to my prayers and supplications. Show mercy to me as the merciful One, have compassion on me as the longsuffering One, have pity on me as the Lover of mankind, and forgive me for all that I have sinned against Thee. Receive me, Thy servant, as I thank Thee for not letting me perish in my transgressions. I ask Thee for the loosening of my trespasses, and for perfect redemption and forgiveness from Thy goodness. From now on I bow down before Thee and I entreat Thee with compunction: strengthen me in Thy faith, in the hope that lasts, and in Thy love. Guard me unmoved by the plots and assaults of the evil one, so that wickedness does not throw me into the depth of destruction, and so that I do not become the prey of the enemy.

My God, uphold me to do Thy will and to fulfill Thy commandments. I turn only to Thee, Master Christ, for in Thee I live and I move. Only through Thee do I exist, even though I have sinned more than all. Purify my mind of the passion for material things, of idle thoughts, of impure and evil memories and thoughts which grip me, choke me, and envelop me now. Wash me thoroughly of sin's defilement, and purify me of all sinful stench, of impurity and defilement of soul and body. And grant me steadfast quiet and deep stillness of thoughts; so that through all these things, delighting in Thy blessings, in Thy longsuffering and abundant goodness, and obtaining Thy divine mercy, I may thank Thee, praise Thee, and glorify Thy Most Holy Name, and that of THY Father Who is without beginning, and Thy Most Holy and good and life creating Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

From the *Aphantisma*,

published in 1799 by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite

O Holy Spirit, Who alone art good, all holy, and life creating, I fall down before Thee, guilty of every evil deed and worthy of every punishment. I beg Thee, my Lord and my God, the always existing and unending Life, the true and unwaning Light; do not let me be destroyed by the adversary to the very end, but reign in me, O Thou the all-powerful and incomprehensible Power; the full, unlimited, and unsurpassable Dominion; complete Goodness and Cause of all that is good and beneficial; Who restoreth all of creation to life; through Whom the weak are strengthened, from Whom cometh our second birth, our second formation, and all of our knowledge; through Whom we are illuminated to see the Lord, our Redeemer and Saviour; through Whom all things live and breathe.

Ineffable Wisdom, Knowledge higher than sense perception, incomprehensible Brightness, full Life, full Power, full Glory, the God of all, the caregiving and merciful One: Grant me to be wholly Thine and

from now on to live according to Thy will. Raise my members crushed by sin. Enlighten my heart darkened by evil desires, and resurrect my soul slain by sins. Make the towering waves of passions subside. Deliver me from the enemy who overpowereth me within and without. Deliver me from all evil works, forgive all mine iniquities, and fill me with Thy perfect love.

Inscribe the name of Thy servant in the Book of life and grant me a good end, so that being victorious over the devil, I may worship before the throne of Thy Kingdom without shame. O Master, make my heart Thy good soil, so that it may receive the good seed and Thy Gift may bedew in it the dew of eternal life. Return, O my soul, to thy rest through fasting! Return, O my soul, to the gates of heaven through suffering and pain! May my soul find itself, O Lord, in Thine ineffable light together with all Thy Saints. Therefore, Master of all, the infinite and inconceivable One, listen to me, Thy vile and unworthy servant; help me to follow and remain on the narrow and difficult way, so that I may become worthy of attaining to Thy promises, and I may cry into the exultation of heaven: Glory to the immortal Father, and the immortal Son, and the immortal Holy Spirit; great honor and worship is due to Them, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer for the World

St. Silouan of Athos (+1938)

O Lord, set us right, as a tender mother corrects her little children. Give every soul to know the joy of Thy coming, the power of Thy help. Refresh the suffering souls of Thy people, and teach us all to know Thee in the Holy Spirit.

The soul of man languishes on earth, O Lord, unable to find strength in Thee through the mind because she does not know Thee and Thy goodness. The cares of this world overshadow our minds, and we cannot comprehend the fullness of Thy love. Do enlighten us. To Thy compassion all things are possible.

Thou didst proclaim in Thy Holy Gospel that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall live. Make our dead souls hear Thy voice this day, and come to life.

Tell the world, O Lord: "The sins of all men are forgiven," and they will be forgiven. Hallow us, O Lord, and all men will be made holy by Thy Spirit, and all Thy people will glorify Thee on earth, and Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, for to Thee all things are possible.

Upcoming Events 2021

25 July, Sunday: 20-year Anniversary Celebration at St.

Maximus and the Big White Barn in Decatur.

29 July, Thursday: Parish Game Night, 6:00 p.m.

1-14 August: Dormition Fast

10 August, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!