

**Christian Ethics in a Postmodern World**  
**-responsibility, rediscovery of Christian values,**  
**stating of what Christian Ethics has to offer Bioethics –**

*(Abstract)*

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Postmodernity is no longer news. Contemporary society generally lacks transcendent values and overemphasizes the importance of the world and the mundane, of the individual and of its autonomy, of individual freedom and moral comfort. All of these within an individualistic relativism to which we all participate to a lesser or a greater degree.

The generalized lack of belief in the meaning of life – and even more, the lack of a transcendent finality – represents a troubling characteristic of the world in a process of globalization, an effect generated by the lack of profound religiosity, by the replacement of authentic religiosity with surrogates, by moral libertinage, by indulging materialism and consumerism. On the other hand, the effects of secularization are not only positive: the exploration of physical and psychical universe has developed, the extension of human lifespan, the European society being the first open culture in history, but also negative: religious structures are denied, the human being wishes to define one's own religion apart from any ecclesial implication, some social activities are taken over from ecclesial structures by other lay institutions.

The identification of such a situation is truly challenging. It is a situation that imposes – from an ethical, theological and, in a broader sense, Christian view – the even more detailed clarification of these issues and the succinct formulation of landmarks that Christianity and Orthodoxy may propose to the contemporary world. This thesis identifies and approaches three aspects of this reality, while offering several possible answers from the perspective of Moral Theology and of Christian Ethics:

**1. The crisis of responsibility *and* the need for taking responsibility**

We live in a time when ethical responsibility is progressively degrading, it is emptied of meaning, it is considered to be outdated and as such, it is placed in the category of 'traditional' landmarks. In the context of rapid mentality change, it is necessary to rethink the value and the characteristic of moral responsibility of the person as well as of the community, within the Romanian ideological, cultural and social environment, still quite anchored in perennial values, but with clear tendencies of allowing these values to fade.

We feel the need of a greater undertaking of responsibility by each person, in actual situations: responsibility towards the human being and towards the world, towards moral, family and social duties etc., towards giving birth to children and rearing them, common responsibility of couples but equally communitarian responsibility towards the group, the community, the people. All of these should be accomplished in full conscience of the presence of God. Finding an authentic solution for the Romanian society, for its authentic values, for its awakening, is not possible without moral regeneration, which is equally the responsibility of the person, of the community and of the Church. All our actions involve responsibility, whether accepted or not. It is through this responsible act that man reaches salvation and creates values, thus answering to the divine love.

## **2. Postmodern Relativism *and* the (re)discovery of Christian values**

Under the influence of recent religious, cultural and social movements and phenomena, a series of characteristics became obvious, characteristics which prove to be relativizing from a religious and moral perspective. The sphere of values in general, and of moral values in particular, are among the first to experience the effects of postmodern phenomena, because religious axiologies are fading progressively - taken here in their traditional sense - and different changes appear in the manifestation of faith and in the communitarian and social actions of the human being, apparently in contradiction with those of previous generations. That is why we find mysticism instead of faith, autonomy instead of morality, exterior beauty instead of inner beauty, individuals instead of the people, and the self instead of God. We witness a general tendency of axiologies to become relative.

The human being naturally seeks value. That is why the restatement of human and human life value need to be restated, including values in general and moral values in particular. We need to emphasize the value of the person. We are progressively accustoming to seeing individuals separated from their relationships. There is a need in postmodern society to rediscover the ethical/moral value of our neighbor, of the family, of the young and the old, of the creation in its entire and our relation to it, of the body in its beautiful relation to the soul, and of life in its spiritual dimension.

## **3. The attitude towards body, life and death *and* the stating of what Christian Ethics has to offer Bioethics**

The bioethical reflection and call require ethics and other theological disciplines, but also other domains, so that the contemporary human being may find the most appropriate ethical answers concerning life and death. Problems of this nature are very much present in day-to-day life, ever since technological development has made possible the intervention of the human being on the level of most important and intimate aspects of life. Thanks to the uncontested realities of biotechnologies, we witness today a tendency to maximize the benefits of biological human life and to minimize the risks involved by any human intervention on that level. The technical aspect that procreation, abortion, fertility control, in vitro insemination, surrogate motherhood, genetic manipulation, organ transplant, cloning, and euthanasia have taken recently constitute major reflection subjects for Ethics in its encounter with Medicine, Philosophy, Biology, Psychology, Law etc. The central question is: what are the moral/ethical and spiritual values that need to characterize the human being – while having an unburdened conscience – in order to make the right bioethical calls pertaining to the supreme Good? That is why the presentation of a Christian perspective on all of these questions devolves upon Christian ethics, and Theology in general.

These issues – continuous preoccupations of the author – are landmarks and challenges for the Christian of the third millennium and, even more, for Theology in general and for Orthodox Christian Ethics in particular. Our quality as disciples of Christ depends upon the attitude towards all of these.