



Metropolitan Irinej of Bačka speaks on "Posthumanism" in the Field of Bioethics



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Archbishop of Novi Sad, Metropolitan Irinej of Bačka (Serbian Orthodox Church), shared his reflections on pressing challenges to Christian consciousness, particularly those related to bioethics in the context of modern scientific research and technological development. His thoughts were expressed in an interview with the Belgrade publication Pečat. Below is a translation of this excerpt into English.

– Modern humanity is grappling with bioethical questions—from artificial insemination and surrogacy to surgical and hormonal gender reassignment and euthanasia. At one time, the publishing house of the Diocese of Bačka released the Russian Orthodox Church's document, The Basics of the Social Concept, which, among other issues, thoroughly examines these problems. What can the Serbian Church say to contemporary people about this? Where do the paths of "posthumanism" in bioethics lead us? What are the

consequences of blind obedience to the idea of Progress?

– The paths of bioethical "posthumanism" which you have succinctly and comprehensively outlined (artificial insemination, gender reassignment, euthanasia...), are nothing more than the dead-end roads of antihumanism. These paths lead humanity and the planet Earth to destruction and death. In fact, this is the very goal and agenda of the new, self-proclaimed "global elite," which shamelessly proclaims every day that there are too many human beings in the world and that humanity will simply "consume" all resources unless its numbers are reduced to the so-called "golden billion," led, of course, by this very "elite" (who else?). Whoever instills in them the confidence in their right to such monstrous thoughts and diabolical plans—unprecedented in world history—remains silent. But we Christians unmistakably know who this is: it is the devil, the murderer of humanity from the beginning (John 8:44).

Your first question, where the paths of "posthumanism" or "transhumanism" lead us, you have masterfully complemented with the next: where does blind obedience to the idea of Progress take us? At first glance, this perspective seems strange, prompting a counter-question: what does this dangerous, frightening, and extremely perverse ideology—or rather, historical chimera of a meta-historical reality, where things still exist but humanity no longer does—have to do with the deeply humane and, one might say, purely Christian, as well as universally monotheistic, idea of progress? This idea envisions movement toward the Eschaton, toward the End as the Goal and fulfillment of the meaning of history, understood as a meaningful, purposeful journey from the starting point Alpha to the endpoint Omega.

In my opinion, this connection undeniably exists! For if we perceive and understand progress, elevated to the pedestal of Progress, in a "principled," "generalized," "secular," ideologically and religiously "neutral" sense, outside of its organic ontological connection with Christ and His Church, then it is no longer progress or Progress but merely "progress in the mill of death," as it was characterized almost a century ago by St. Justin Popović of Čelije in his extraordinary theological-philosophical treatise of the same name, imbued with a fiery prophetic spirit.

This remarkable and stunning text seems to have been written precisely for the terrifying—perhaps, God forbid, even fatal—turning point in world history that we are now experiencing. Therefore, with your permission, I will quote several important thoughts and conclusions from it for the readers of Pečat.

The holy elder Justin begins with somber reflections on Earth as the only "planet of death" and humanity as a tragic being, a prisoner of death. "It is tragic to be human," he writes, "infinitely more tragic than to be a mosquito or a snail, a bird or a snake, a lamb or a tiger," because humanity "remains perpetually imprisoned in the dark dungeon of death, where there are neither windows nor doors." And he continues in ever harsher terms: "Born into the world, a person is, from the very first moment, a candidate for death... The womb that gives birth to us is nothing more than the sister of the grave..."

Death is the first gift a mother gives her newborn child."

"In every human body lies hidden the most terrible and incurable disease—death." In this context, he quotes the righteous Job: To the grave I say, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'You are my mother and sister' (Job 17:14). Following this diagnosis, he poses an unrelenting question: "Is progress possible, is it logical, is it justified, is it necessary in a world where death is the most insurmountable necessity?" This question translates to: "Does such a world, such a life, such a humanity have any meaning?"

And he immediately answers: "If the meaning of life is possible in the mill of death, then progress is also possible." He then goes on to demonstrate the absolute helplessness of human science, philosophy, culture, and even religion in its various historical forms in the face of the insatiable, all-consuming evil called death. With bitterness, he asks a rhetorical question: "Progress? Oh, what is all human progress if not progress toward death, progress toward the grave?" And he answers it briefly and clearly: "Where there is death, there is no real progress."

From this, it follows that true progress exists only where there is no death. The Risen God-Man, the Lord and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, is the Conqueror of death through the Event of His Resurrection and, therefore, the Giver of the meaning of life and the Giver of the gift of the only true progress—the progress toward life, eternal and incorruptible (cf. Heb. 7:16), in communion with the Living God, the progress "from glory to glory" in the Kingdom of God (2 Cor. 3:18).

From here, the holy Abba draws a distinction between the humanistically (sometimes he writes: hoministically) formed "European," "Western," "modern" man, on the one hand, and, on the other, the man of Christ, the man "in Christ." Consequently, he also distinguishes between false, humanistic progress and true, theogumanistic or theanthropic progress—progress toward Christ, then in Christ, and finally, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). He illustrates his assessments and predictions about humanistic progress with a dialogue between Alquist and Helena in Čapek's tragedy R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots):

"Alquist: Does Nana have a prayer book?

Helena: Yes, a thick one.

Alquist: Does it have prayers for different occasions? For storms? For illness?

Helena: And for temptation, for floods...

Alquist: But none for progress?

Helena: I don't think so.

Alquist: A pity."

The opposite of this "progress," the saint continues, is the "God-Man progress—from man to the God-Man, from death to immortality." According to him, in contrast to "scientific evolutionism" (oh, how proud that sounds!), which ultimately considers man to be nothing more than "a transient animal among animals," there is also a Christian evolutionism: "birth in Christ, transformation in Christ, resurrection in Christ."

In the anthropological-soteriological vision of the mystagogue of Ćelije, for our Holy Local Church and for our Serbian people, the greatest teacher of the path leading to life—and through life—from birth in Christ to resurrection with Christ was, and forever will remain, Saint Sava, "the greatest architect of God-Man progress in the history of our people." Saint Justin concludes by writing: "For Saint Sava, progress consists of the following: to acquire the Lord Christ, to live in Him, through Him, and for Him..." I dare to add to this that behind Saint Sava, we see a vast constellation of holy fathers and teachers of the Orthodox Church and His holy Apostles, and at the center among them—the One who, uniquely in history, names Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (cf. John 14:6)—the God-Man Jesus Christ.

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