

# Life belongs to God



DOCTRINES OF THE SYNOD  
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN ROMANIA  
**CONCERNING BIOETHICAL ISSUES**



# **I. Biblical teachings about life**

◆ 1. God alone has life in Godself (John 5:26). Therefore, the Bible calls God “living” (Joshua 3:10, Psalm 84:2, Isaiah 37:17, Romans 9:26, 2 Corinthians 3:3), “for ever and ever living” (Revelation 4:9), and “immortal” (1 Timothy 6:16) God. And that is why Jesus calls Himself “the life” (John 14:6). The One, who has life in Himself alone, is the source of all life – including human life. According to Genesis 2:7, God breathed life into the human creature, and he/she became a living being. This act of God indicates the transcendent origin of human life. Human life is only possible by participation in divine life.

God, the Creator is not only the donor, but also the Lord of human life. Accordingly, He has infinite disposal above life. God defines the beginning and the end of life (Psalm 104:29-30, Luke 12:20). Further, God, the Creator is the owner of life (Numbers 16:22, 27:16, Ecclesiastes 12:7). By the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God redeemed humans who had come to the ownership of foreign – Satan’s and sin’s – power; and made people His own property. Thus, God is the owner and master of life, both by the reason of creation and redemption. Consequently, human life is set aside for God; in biblical terms: life is “holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

*By the act of creation, God is the donor of life, and by the act of salvation God is the Redeemer of life, hence, the sole owner and the absolute master of life. Therefore, by creating human life artificially (e.g. cloning) or by annihilating it artificially (e.g. euthanasia) one commits an action against the will of God and the sanctity of life.*

◆ 2. Human life is uncompleted. This is revealed by biological facts, as people – unlike animals – are not “ready” for their environment at the moment of their birth. Humans are born into this world for development. The primary natural environment of life is the family.

The Christian Reformed Church assumes responsibility for the life destined for development. Accordingly, we emphasize the importance of the family – as the protecting and nurturing community of fragile child-life. The Reformed Church, by its teachings and diaconal service, supports the mental, physical and spiritual development of life. Recognizing the incompleteness of life in respect for all humans, the Church teaches that hopeless life does not exist.

In the biblical sense, life means working (as opposed to the physical and mental inaction), moving towards a certain goal. Life is: living; it is a vital process (bios).

Scripture sees the quality of vital process in people’s proper attitude toward God and toward fellow human beings, and basically interprets it from the idea of grace (Habakkuk 2:4).

Forced immobility might still be an active life in prayer and counseling. Therefore, mere biological existence, the struggle for survival (Ecclesiastes 9:4) is not yet a complete life. Mankind lives to God and to God’s glory (Romans 14:7-8). The ultimate aim of living is eternal life.

*The quality of humans’ life is determined according how they relate to God. Since the ultimate goal of earthly existence is eternal life, therefore even the quality, valuable and meaningful life on earth is temporary and*

*transient. This biblical truth ought to be emphatically proclaimed by the Church especially against the strong and one-sided ties to earthly life.*

- ◆ 3. Scripture portrays human in the wholeness of body and soul. Man tends to unilaterally set body in the foreground. Scripture disapproves when saying that “people do not live by bread alone, but by everything, which comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4), or when Jesus (John 6:31-58) calls himself the “bread of life”.

*We condemn narrowing human life down merely to the body, which usually manifests itself in intensified materialism and overemphasized sexuality/physicality, because the suppression of mental and emotional demands leads to the impoverishment and the total value-mutilation of human life.*

- ◆ 4. The Hebrew word “*nefesh*” in the Old Testament meaning “I, myself,” indicates the individual force of life, i.e. the person. This notion firstly expresses people’s ability in their attitude toward themselves, secondly, it expresses human uniqueness – i.e. each life is unique – only death makes all lives equal (Job 3:19), thirdly, the aptitude to live in the direction of something or someone (to approach, to turn closer toward someone).

*In our age, various (economic, political, etc.) interest groups are attempting to manipulate people, to degrade them as their tools. Several commercials and the different types of ideological indoctrinations are all serving this purpose. Against the sophisticated influential machination only people who are capable of self-reflection can defend themselves, otherwise they become vulnerable and unguarded. Globalization in this sense is transforming individuals into shapeless mass beings. On biblical basis it is therefore our duty to emphasize that human creature is unique.*

◆ 5. Man is a relational being. According to ancient stories and Jesus' commandments we can classify relationships into the next forms:

- God-human (Genesis 2-3, Matthew 22:37);
- Community relations within the family (Genesis 1:27, Mk 10:6; Genesis 2:18.23; Genesis 9:20-29; Genesis 4);
- Relations to fellow human beings (Genesis 11; Mt 22:39).

According to Scripture, God created humans into males and females, He blessed them and said, "be fruitful and multiply". God makes us aware that women are both wives and mothers (Genesis 3:16).

The value of the blessing of having children is marked in the stories of the ancient fathers by the motif of fight and toil for childbirth.

*Experiencing the endangerment of families as institutions, the anti-family and community oriented individualism and the social isolation of people, the Church should emphasize that the human creature is a relational being. When one restricts the network of relations ordered by God, in fact mutilates his or her life. We emphasize that the acceptance of childbirth's blessing is inherent in family life. The selfish rejection of having children leads to the impoverishment of family life. We disapprove the living together of same-sex couples, because it contradicts the fixed order (man and woman) of creation and the command of reproduction.*

◆ 6. The dignity of human life is expressed in Psalm 8, when man is placed right near God (v. 5-9.). This refers to the task which was given to humans in the creation. One is responsible for his or her life received as a loan from God. This liability is expressed in the first description of the creation when it says that God made man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This accountability is triple:

- for the created world (Genesis 1:28);
- for fellow humans (Matthew 22:39);
- and responsibility for own-self.

Man may undertake and fulfill these responsibilities by the God-given soul (Hebrew: *ruach*), as man is a being endowed with will and expertise. Liability also means that one is “responsible”, accountable for his or her actions: not to him or herself (the conscience),

not to the environment (society), but to God. Humans cannot be the judges of themselves and of their actions.

*The dignity of human life manifests itself upon undertaking the conferred responsibilities. As responsibility comes from God, one must give account before God concerning what was entrusted to him/her. Because of the triple way of responsibility (too) we condemn the anti-family and anti-community individualism and disapprove that one justifies his/her own actions not to God, but to him/herself and in front of the public society. People of different ages usually want to accomplish all they are capable of, meanwhile compared to the rhythm of scientific discoveries and technological development, the pace of morality (ethos) is often cut off, so man is not always able to fulfill his/her monitoring role. The Church must proclaim: the measuring string (canon) of human actions is God's will revealed and sealed in Christ. In this sense science and its practitioners – particularly in respect of discoveries and inventions which can be used simultaneously in good and bad ways – morally cannot be “neutral”, since the discovery itself (the possession of knowledge) is an unavoidable moral obligation. In situations about which Scripture expressly does not provide guidance, Christians will listen to their own conscience. One's conscience, thoughts are directed by God's Holy Spirit,*

*with the conviction that in all decisions it will be assisted by the life-affirming message of the whole Scripture, prayer, church community and the church tradition consonant with the Bible.*

In connection with the general principles of bio-ethical issues we emphasize: what is legitimate, is not necessarily morally correct as well. The present teaching cannot consider all of the possible life situations – not even classify them. That is why we encourage Reformed believers to make their decisions according to the higher moral order which is displayed by Scripture and the Holy Spirit in their conscience.



## **II. Artificial abortion**

◆ 1. Biblical teachings about life oblige us that life, starting from the moment of inception should be protected with concerned respect. We honour mothers and motherhood by educating young people regarding parental vocation. It is our particular obligation to care for the unborn child's life, to educate parents in all proceedings involving the destruction of the fertilized oocyte and embryo, but especially the artificial termination of pregnancy. The fetus' life is as well a rather independent life, as such is being protected by God's law (the *Thou shalt not kill* commandment), as each person's life.

The Reformed Christian Church should be aware of its own serving mandate when embracing young couples involved in childbearing by active pastoral participation in resolving their conflicts.

◆ 2. Giving up inviolability of the fetus should be considered only in very exceptional circumstances, and only when those concerned have exhausted all other options. The Synod would like to make it clear to everyone that abortion is a sin, which induces severe pain and suffering for everyone involved: the physician, the family, all the relatives, the nation and the Christian church, but first and foremost the mother. The command of reproduction and multiplication is preceded by the blessing of God (Genesis 1:28). In this sense the irresponsible abortion is also an interruption of blessing.

The congregation is responsible before God to take share in the pain and suffering of those affected (in particular the mother's) when this difficult moral decision is taken.

◆ 3. According to the teachings of the Reformed Church the opinion that the one who is yet to be human can be regarded as man occurs from natural law, not from the Holy Scripture, thus the fetus is entitled to legal personality protection and other human rights. We concur in this regard with the secular law that this rule only applies to live-born offspring.

Calling abortion a murder act is not only a legal, but also Christian ethical overstatement. After all, if we accept on biblical grounds that God may require the sacrifice of life for life, then based on medical opinion the artificial interruption of pregnancy is justified in certain circumstances listed below:

- If by the further continuation of pregnancy the mother's life is in danger;
- If by the preservation of pregnancy, or giving birth, the mother's mental and emotional collapse is expected;
- If the unborn child is likely to become disabled;
- If the pregnancy is the result of rape, unless the mother is willing to keep her child;
- If the prospective mother is a minor.

The obligation of the Church in these limit situations is to stand next to the mother as pastoral counselor, to surround the affected women and couples as a healthy and inclusive community. They should be aware that in the Church they can always rely on the community's moral support and professional counseling.

However, we stress that in the five cases enlisted above, abortion can be accepted only under the conditions of repentance. The mother, who is strained to decide on abortion, cannot win inherent exemption from

the “Thou shalt not kill!” restriction. No matter the kind of sacrifice implied in the decision for the sake of the prospective life in any of these cases, the mother – whether she undertakes or refuses it – is entitled to respect for her personal sacrifice.

*The Reformed Church in Romania teaches that life should be protected from the moment of inception with concerned respect. God placed both the unborn and the born children in the sheltering community of the family and the congregation, so our Church supports Christian marriage and family. We call upon all the believers and the non-confessional society to honour mothers and motherhood, and educate the young for parental vocation. The special duty of Church members is to protect fetal life, which in case of acceptance involves God’s blessing, its rejection or destruction means the refusal of this blessing.*



### **III. “Merciful” death (euthanasia)**

The concept consisting of a composite of two Greek words (eu = good, Thanatos = death) has recently become an ethical issue since the legislature of some states authorized its practice.

Euthanasia is not only a bioethical and medical ethics, but also a legal issue. Considering the traditions of different cultures it has anthropological and ethnographic aspects as well.

Since God calls forth the man (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 36:10), and he determines the end of human life, Christian churches have a moral obligation to provide guidance in respect of “merciful” death.

In general terms, euthanasia means the removal of life-sustaining medical equipment, and the interventions that are intended to shorten the suffering of people approaching the end of their life, with the consent of those affected.

Although “merciful death” is practiced in many different ways, there are three main modalities which in any cases must be distinguished: 1. active euthanasia; 2. passive euthanasia; 3. turning off the life-sustaining medical devices.

◆ 1. Active euthanasia is any external interference which causes the death of the patient with the purpose of eliminating his or her suffering (e.g. the administration of “anesthetic injection”).

◆ 2. The development of medical science provided the possibility of passive euthanasia. Accordingly, passive euthanasia means the refusal of life-saving medical interventions and of life-sustaining medical devices. In this sense, before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the deaths, which today can be considered passive eu-

thanasia, were natural deceases, because the devices which today are able to keep the patient alive for decades were inexistent at that time.

◆ 3. Turning off the life-sustaining medical devices is not the first, but the second human intervention. The first procedure is when the patient, who otherwise couldn't survive, is artificially kept alive with the help of medical devices. When this kind of artificial life-sustaining becomes meaningless or hopeless, there occurs the second intervention: turning off the life-support devices. In such cases the liability is primarily upon those who applied the first intervention – the artificial extension of life.

*According to the teaching of the Reformed Church in Romania, since man is God's creation, He determines the beginning and end of human life. Therefore, the sacred, for-God created man cannot dispose either the beginning or the end of his or her life. Man is God's image, and as such, man can be the ruler of the world. As God's creature, he/she has an integral life and personality, as the image of God, he/she is a responsible being with determination. Consequently, life is not under the authority of something (e.g. medical technology), but it is nourished by God's providential love. Taking away life represents an act against God's will (Genesis 5:17; Ezekiel 18:31-32, Matthew 1:28, 1 Peter 1:6 to 9). In consequence nothing can be perpetrated against humans that contradict the "Thou shalt not kill!" commandment.*

- ◆ 1. Thus, we do not accept the active forms of euthanasia (e.g. a lethal injection), which directly leads to the death of the patient in an active way.
  
- ◆ 2. We do not reject, however, the so-called “Passive euthanasia” (as the conscious refusal by the prior informed patient of the treatment and resuscitation), but we interpret it as the human and Christian right of accepting the natural death according to which Christian people are longing to face God’s majesty at the time designated by God to them. (Romans 14:8; Philippians 1:23 b). The moment when the will of the patient is enforced, should be preceded by a decision of a medical concilium.
  
- ◆ 3. We advise the relatives of the patient to entrust faithful Christian professionals with the decision of ending vegetative “life-long” treatment, or switching off medical devices. In this respect, in our view the primary duty of doctors is not to keep the sufferer alive at all costs, but to alleviate tribulation. The Reformed Church advises the physicians to keep the patient alive until they undoubtedly perceive: not agonies but life is extended. The decision on turning off devices that sustain life functions or terminating treatment should be made by praying for God’s help. After such a decision it is the responsibility of the Church to assist in enduring the burden of the suffering and pain of those affected.



## **IV. Transplantation**

Transplantation is the surgical removal and replacement of inoperable organs, parts of organs or body tissue by an organ part (segment) or tissue obtained from a donor.

Following the transplantation the chances of survival of the patient are considerably increased, consequently the patient will often become relatively healthy and able to work for many more years. The Reformed Church affirms this life-saving procedure and considers it God's gift in the hands of healing science.

The so-called xeno-transplantation (i.e. tissues, organs deriving from animals planted into humans) is a newer alternative of medicine, and its ethical implications should be subsequently examined.

According to her creed, the Christian Reformed Church emphasizes the importance of five life terms. The Reformed Church inculcates the respect of these five criteria to doctors participating in the transplant, to the recipient patient and family, as well as to the donor and his/her family.

◆ 1. As life belongs to God, its extinguishment by human intervention is prohibited. Therefore, determining the donor's death should occur on the basis of statutory medical and legal consideration.

◆ 2. Life is an incomplete, evolving process, with the aim of eternal life. This means two things: a) do not give the life of the sick or disabled up; b) on the other hand, do not stick to life at all costs led by rampant vitality. To this end, we wish to make an impact on the receptor patient's moral and religious conviction: to

be aware that his or her healing is going to be promoted at the cost of mutilation of the living (or recently still living) donor's body.

◆ 3. Viewing the depressing shortage of organs we emphasize: all people concerned are morally responsible for that age, life expectancy, quality, social status, ability to pay, etc. not affect, or not unilaterally affect the equitable distribution.

◆ 4. In patients remaining on the waiting list due to organ shortage one ought to enhance not only the hope of finding a donor, but the hope of eternal life as well. The latter, in secular terms means that human dignity is part of our lives in disease, in dying as much, such as at the time of health.

◆ 5. Since the use of a part of a corpse to save another life is not a crime, but the manifestation of self-sacrificing love, the Reformed Church advocates organ transplantation. We advise members of our church to contribute according to their conscience, that in case of their death their organs should be used for transplant. We likewise encourage the grieving families to offer the organs of their deceased loved ones for this purpose in good conscience, as it will serve the God-given life.

The human is capable of self-reflection; he/she received consciously livable life from God. This should not be manipulated in any circumstances. It is seriously wrong to interpret the issue of organ offering or reception as a purely legal matter.

The legislation that does not regulate the issue of organs trade, in fact promotes manipulative practices,

and ultimately will manipulate the patient and the donor, relatives and even the whole society.

Either as a donor, or as a host we manipulate ourselves, if – instead of voluntary contributions – we follow the selfish idea: “My body is mine!” It might be a manipulation as well (but not necessarily!), if the same doctor is involved in the determination of brain death (where the doctor should protect the life dignity and rights of the donor), who is also member of the organ transplants groups (who should represent the rights and dignity of the host person).

Man is a relational being, whom God ordered for community life. In our life all social and emotional bonds are inherent, as well as all solidarity relationships based on these ties. (Matthew 22:39; John 15:13). As organ transplantation is a gift of God, in the idea of neighbourly love it should be not only benevolent but also free of any charge.

*The Reformed Church in Romania is grateful to God for that the organ transplant – as a life-saving instrument – is in the service of healing. Biblical teachings about life regarding organ transplantation draw attention to that the rules of the order established by God must prevail both in the process of healing and the determination of the healing priorities.*



## V. Cloning

Cloning is the process of creating identical copies of living organisms by human intervention in asexual manner. This asexual propagation technique used for botany has been known and practiced for centuries by humanity in agriculture in order to produce the desired harvest. The Greek word *clone* stands for the graft suitable of plant propagation.

Artificial cloning can be performed on several organizational levels, for quite different purposes in accordance with the specific level. A part of these experiments aims the cloning of human cells or even the whole embryo exclusively for medical purposes. Therefore, the legal and ethical aspects of cloning cannot be discussed uniformly, but – according to their different purposes –, should be treated as separate cases.

Successfully performed experiments demonstrate that mammalian live offspring can be produced by cloning. Thereafter, the news of experiments attempting at human cloning has spread. The new entity as result of the “man copy” process will be a genetic reproduction of the donor.

Thus, a woman might give birth to her own grandfather, replace her deceased partner or child with a clone. This idea is supported by members of certain sects, as well as by those infertile or same-sex couples who are wishing to create in this way genetically related (or equivalent) infants.

This procedure has neither medical, legal or Christian moral justification.

*The Reformed Church in Romania approves any medical or scientific experiment that – by cloning human cells and tissues – provides hope of healing of diseases that are so far incurable, however, firmly condemns even the thought of cloning the entire human being.*



## **VI. Marriage, family, sexuality**

◆ 1. Based on the Scriptures, the Reformed Church in Romania (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:32) views marriage as a lifelong covenant among man and woman according to the order of God's good creation.

Although the institution of marriage and family seems to be shaken from time to time, our Church insists on the Christian church's household order defined in the New Testament. Accordingly, family life is based on marriage, which might be blessed by God with children, thus providing for married couples the creator-blessing of passing life further. This biblical order is confirmed by the experience that the long-term love relationship among the male and female being will evolve in its full potential by monogamous marriage. This creates a spiritual, emotional, legal and financial security both for parents and children.

We believe that multifaceted development of children is mostly provided in harmonious family atmosphere. Therefore, family is the foundation of the full and healthy social life, the real basic cell and seed of the church and society as well. It is the family where children will learn the most important rules of social coexistence, acceptance of one-another, of tolerating each other in love. Every human community that overshadows family, thus only focusing on building the individual, willy-nilly fosters the alienation of people from each other. By this, Christ's command referring to the acceptance of fellow human beings is made pointless or even ridiculous.

◆ 2. We believe that sin has corrupted our whole human nature. The relationship of man and woman is no exception of this (Genesis 2:24 to 3:21). Consequently marriage can get in crisis, it may be formalized and may unravel.

Although sexuality is God's gift, it can easily become an instrument of self-interest. The unscrupulous living of irresponsible relationships and selfish desires might cause countless individual and collective harm. Therefore, God's Law is suppressing sexuality: "Do not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). The positive content of this commandment is that both in marriage and beyond it we ought to live chastely (Heidelberg Catechism, 109).

Although sin is inherent of all humanity, from time to time one or another kind of transgression is more conspicuous in the life of a particular society. We should believe by no means that people of preceding ages have been better, and of our age are more guilty, since according to the Word, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans 3:12). Along with this, it is our duty to draw the attention of our people and our church on crimes such as: free sex, pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, any forms of sexual exploitation and the irresponsible management of the consequences. The promotion and dissemination of the listed is damaging especially the development of children's personality, is infecting the public morals, and can be a starting point to the many forms of crime.

Let's face with repentance, that the virtues of chastity and fidelity cannot be displayed according to God's will even by our church in this world (Matthew 5:13-16:27-32, Mark 10:2 to 12 etc.). We proclaim that

God's holiness will judge and unmask sin, but in the same time God's love calls everyone to repentance and conversion. For those in repentance we proclaim God's grace as the opportunity for a fresh start, and we urge them to live a pure and blameless life in this present world (John 8:11 b, Titus 2:11 to 14).

◆ 3. We relate similarly to the phenomena of our time, which wishes to indicate the opposite-sex common-law marriage and the long-term same-sex relationship equivalent to marriage.

It is known to us that there are fellow human beings who due to inherited or acquired inclination are drawn to their own sex, thus being unable to live in marriage according to the order of creation. We are not rating morally the tendency itself. We accept these brothers and sisters with pastoral tact; we deal with their deep human dramas with tolerance and confidentiality. It is our responsibility to defend them against violators of human dignity, all forms of discriminatory behavior.

However, since homosexual practices are condemned by both Old and New Testament, and are considered equal weight transgressions with adultery (Leviticus 18; 20:10 to 22 and Romans 1:26-27), our church cannot accept such interactions, and finds the ecclesiastical blessing of these relationships impossible. It also follows from all this that such a way of life or its propagation is incompatible with Reformed ministry and pastoral teaching vocation, as well as with training and preparing for these professions in any church service.

The Reformed Church in Romania does not want to interfere in the State legislation concerning the legalizing of same-sex couples coexistence. However,

– for the protection of the family and marriage – if the legislation will approve the living together of the same-sex couples of equal value with marriage, and consent them the reception of children for adoption – the church will defy.

*The Reformed Church in Romania according to Scripture states that the God-created and -redeemed life belongs to God, people owe God to keep their body and soul clean. It teaches that human both inside and outside the sacred marriage should live clean and disciplined. It takes position against any sexual deviation, such as: free sex life, adultery, prostitution, pedophilia, sexual exploitation – considering all these as transgressions. It will not pass judgment on homosexuality as inclination, but does not consider same-sex active sex life as marital relationship, holds it as sin and rejects homosexual coexistence in all its forms and its consequences (e.g. adoption of children), and such relationships would not receive the blessing of the church.*

*We brought forth this teaching of our Synod obviating the confessional heritage of – the “education for better” – with the freedom of conscience bound by the Word: “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)*