

Conclusions from the 2nd Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on Artificial Intelligence



On Friday, 29 November 2024, at the Conference Centre of the Holy Metropolis of Rethymno and Avlopotamos “THEOMITOR”, in a festive atmosphere, with the presence of the Representative of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, and the local shepherd His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, and Their Eminences, Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotika and Metropolitan Kyrillos of Hierapytna and Siteia, the local Archons, the Rector of the University of Crete, academics and a large audience, the work of the 2nd Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate began, with the topic “Artificial Intelligence and the Orthodox Church”.

The Blessing Service was performed by His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, and the ceremonial opening session was presided over in an exemplary manner by the Dean of the School of Theology of the University of Athens, Professor Mr. Emmanuel Karageorgoudis.

Initially, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Conference, read the Sacred Message of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Subsequently, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Synodal Committee on Bioethics, delivered a greeting, who also described in detail the theme of the Conference and raised the concerns from the perspective of Orthodox Theology. This was followed by greetings from His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, the local Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, Ms. Maria Lioni, Deputy Governor of Crete, on behalf of the Governor of Crete, Archon Exarchos of the Great Church of Christ, Mr. Stavros Arnaoutakis, Mr. Nektarios Papadogiannis, Deputy Mayor of Education, on behalf of the Mayor of Rethymno, Mr. Georgios Marinakis, and Professor of the Medical School, Mr. Georgios Kontakis, Rector of the University of Crete.

The first day of the Conference ended with the introductory speech of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, which took place through an impressive video presentation, where through a panorama of speech, image and sound the audience came into contact with the vast and, to a large extent, uncharted field of Artificial Intelligence. The carefully selected examples given by the speaker set out the general outline of the concern for the misuse of Artificial Intelligence applications, but also outlined the guidelines along which the Orthodox Church must move to face the challenges, certainly not with sterile denial but with fruitful logical arguments.



On Saturday, 30 November 2024, the proceedings of the Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate continued, with the presence of the President of the Synodal Committee, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, the local Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, a multitude of academics, clergy, members of monastic brotherhoods and interested parties from the local community and beyond. The proceedings of the Conference were preceded by a Divine Liturgy, in the Church of the Four Holy Martyrs of Rethymno, in memory of the holy glorious Apostle Andrew the First-Called and the Thronal Feast of the Mother Church of Constantinople, at the end of which His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia and His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, spoke briefly about the significance of the day and wished for the health and longevity of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

During the first session, entitled “Artificial Intelligence and Orthodox Theology” and chaired by His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Hierapytna and Siteia, the following people offered their presentations: His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotika, President of the Special Synodal Committee on Bioethics of the Church of Greece, Professor of the School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Mr. Miltiadis Vantsos, and Ms. Nino Sadzaglishvili,

candidate for a doctorate in Theology. Subsequently, after lunch, in the second thematic session entitled “Artificial Intelligence: Sociological and Philosophical Approaches” and chaired by Mr. Ioannou Lilis, Asst. Professor of the Higher Patriarchal Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete, the following spoke: Archon Didaskalos of the Nation Mr. Konstantinos Delikostantis, Professor Emeritus of the Theological School of Athens and Mr. Konstantinos Kotsiopoulos, Professor of the Theological School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Mr. Evangelos Protopapadakis, Professor of the Philosophy School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

This was followed by the third thematic session entitled “Artificial Intelligence: A Broader Challenge”, chaired by Dr. Konstantinos Zorbas, General Director of the Orthodox Academy of Crete, during which the following people spoke: Mr. Isidoros Siderides, CEO and co-founder of the Pobuca Company and Archon Dikaiophylax, Criminologist Mr. Athanasios Kechagioglou.

All speakers, with a rich and well-documented discourse, developed the extremely modern and relative topic of Artificial Intelligence, always with reference to Orthodox Theology and with interesting and multi-level extensions and references to the fields of Philosophy, Sociology, Ethics and Law.

Finally, it should be noted that following a proposal by His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, it was decided to request the blessing of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, for the organisation of the 3rd Bioethics Conference in Rethymno, from 29 to 31 October 2025, immediately after the festive events for the fiftieth anniversary of the Inauguration of the Holy Church of the Four Holy Martyrs of Rethymno.



On Sunday, 1 December 2024, a Poly-Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Church of the Four Martyrs of Rethymno, presided over by His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, and was concelebrated by Their Eminences, Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, and the Shepherd of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, Metropolitan Prodromos, presbyters and deacons, along with the participation of the Conference participants and many faithful believers.

After the Eucharistic Synaxis, the closing session was held at the Conference Centre, during which His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, read the Conclusions of the Conference, which, after a very interesting discussion, were enthusiastically accepted by the Conference participants.

In conclusion, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, on behalf of all the

participants, thanked His Eminence Metropolitan Prodromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos and all those who contributed to the conduct and hosting of the Conference and conveyed the paternal and Patriarchal wishes of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Local Metropolitan and the participants. On behalf of the conference, the Metropolitan Prodromos expressed warm thanks to His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia for his decisive contribution to the excellent organisation and the very successful conduct of the work of the 2nd Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and in general for his contribution to the Orthodox Church. Afterwards, everyone sat down to a formal meal at the Bishop's residence , which was served with the kind care of the local Metropolitan Prodromos.

The Conference conclusions

The organisation of this Conference expresses the continuous interest of the Holy Great Church of Christ in scientific and technological developments and how they directly affect the life of the Christian plentitude and raise serious ethical, political, anthropological, social issues and at the same time declares the desire of the Mother Church to participate in the dialogue of Science and Theology. The proposals of the eloquent speakers and the fruitful relevant discussions were based on this perspective. On this basis, the following conclusions are proposed for further reflection and discussion:

Artificial Intelligence constitutes the leading modern technological achievement, the applications of which touch almost all aspects of human life, and it is certain that it will give new impetus and applications to scientific achievements, which constitute the most decisive turning point in the history of human civilization.

The Church characterises the capacity for scientific research as a “God-given gift to human kind,” as is characteristically noted in the Holy Bible: “And he hath given men skill, that he might be honoured in his marvellous works.” (Sirach.38:6). At the same time, however, it “points out the dangers inherent in the use of certain scientific achievements” (Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Modern World, VI, § 11). The progress of science and technology must not be at the expense of the human person and his freedom. Despite the fact that the Orthodox Church is not “technophobic”, it points out the dangers inherent in the abuse or misuse of Artificial Intelligence, such as dependence on technology, desocialisation, arrogant self-perception and mentality, weakening of faith, etc. The desire to acquire absolute knowledge, without God, led the First-created to the Fall and the ambition of perfect construction led the builders of the Tower of Babel to confusion and failure.

From the outset and having before us what was presented at the Conference, there does not seem to be any fundamental and essential connection between Artificial Intelligence and the “nous”, as understood throughout time by the thought and theology of the Fathers or “the nous of the Fathers”, according to the phrase of the Holy Quinisext Ecumenical Council (Canon 16). Patristic thought considers the nous as the purest and most refined “part” of the human hypostasis, in which the “in the image” is located. According to Orthodox Theology and anthropology, the powers and manifestations of the nous should not function only to promote scientific and technological knowledge, but should be coordinated with the ascension and elevation of humankind to “in the likeness”. The nous must transcend the level of logical processing and “computational intelligence.” The nous and heart constitute the vital centre of human existence in its relation to God.

In the face of the connection between Artificial Intelligence, transhumanism and “digital super-religion”, the eschatological perspective of man, which is theosis by Grace, was emphasised. The Church brings the message of life in Christ, teaching that the perfection of humankind is not a matter of science and “computational intelligence” but of participation in the mystery and the sacraments of the Church through which we acquire the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).



The operation of Artificial Intelligence in sensitive areas of human life (e.g. health, work, education, administration of justice, etc.) must be supportive. The mechanistic and algorithmic perception of things overlooks important, spiritual, social, historical and cultural parameters of human life, established values and ideals, which have preserved spiritual civilisation and with which the future of humanity is connected.

In the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence, a turning point will be its upcoming ability to program itself. The related problems can be addressed by a spiritual approach, which is nourished by unwavering fidelity to the Gospel teaching, the Apostolic and Patristic Traditions regarding humankind, our divine origin and our eternal destiny in Christ. Theology highlights the content and truth of the Christian image of the person and its relevance in view of the signs of the times and emphasises the need to recognise limits and stable values on the basis of which Artificial Intelligence must also operate.

Despite its contribution to facilitating many practical aspects of our lives and its impressive advances, Artificial Intelligence is unable to provide answers to the fundamental existential and major social issues that plague humanity. In the Tradition of the Orthodox Church there are no ready-made solutions to

contemporary problems, but there are fundamental theological criteria on which answers to the borderline issues of human life can be built. The spiritual treasury of Orthodoxy is an inexhaustible source from which we draw inspiration and direction in the face of the great challenges of our time.

The living faith in Christ supports humankind's effort to respond to the contradictions of our earthly life. Where the person becomes autonomous and self-interpreted, there their existence shrinks and their creative powers dry up. Science and technology cannot replace this transcendental reference to humankind.



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