

Opening of the Fourth Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate



The proceedings of the Fourth Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate commenced on Friday, 2 October 2026, in the Main Hall of the “THEOMITOR” Conference Centre of the Holy Metropolis of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, on the theme of “Declining Birth Rates”.

The Service of the Blessing of the Waters was celebrated by His Grace Bishop Isidoros of Andida, while the formal opening session was ably chaired by His Eminence Metropolitan Gregorios of Peristeri, Professor at the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The overall coordination of the speakers was undertaken by Archimandrite Romanos Anastasiadis. Following the Service of the Blessing of the Waters, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, Representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Mother Church and President of the Conference Organising Committee, read the venerable Message of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who emphasised, among other things:

“Declining birth rates are frequently attributed to economic hardship, changing social conditions and a misguided understanding of women’s emancipation. We do not deny the negative impact of all the above upon the reduction in the number of births and the consequent decline in population in certain countries, among them Greece. Nevertheless, we are deeply convinced that this dramatic contraction is, first and foremost, a spiritual problem, resulting from the ‘forgetfulness of the sacrificial ethos of love’ rather than from economic and other difficulties. For this reason, we paternally exhort Christian families to walk, with complete trust in the divine will, the path of lawful and God-pleasing marriage, cooperating with God not only in the begetting of children, but in the raising of good and virtuous children.”



His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia then delivered an address in his capacity as President of the Synodal Committee on Bioethics of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His Eminence warmly welcomed the conference participants and expressed his joy that the Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate constitutes a meeting point for theology, the humanities and the biomedical sciences, with the aim of providing responses to the great and pressing questions confronting contemporary humanity.

Addresses followed from His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, on behalf of the Holy Eparchial Synod; the local Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Prodhromos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos; the Honourable Member of Parliament for Rethymnon Mr Emmanouil Chnaris; the Regional Governor of Crete; the Deputy Regional Governor; the Mayor of Rethymno; and the Vice-Rector for Finance and Infrastructure of the University of Crete, Mr Georgios Stamatopoulos, on behalf of the Rector of the University of Crete. A message of greeting was also sent by the Member of Parliament for Rethymno, Mr Ioannis Kefalogiannis.

The first day of the Conference concluded with the introductory address of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, entitled: "For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15): A Theological Approach to Childbearing and Declining Birth Rates.

Employing a contemporary theological discourse firmly grounded in the wisdom of the Fathers of our Church, His Eminence emphasised that the Church cannot approach the demographic problem solely from the perspective of statistical analysis. Rather, the Church must approach contemporary people and the Christian family with a spirit of understanding and oikonomia, seeking the salvation of the human person and not merely the perpetuation of the human species.

The spiritual father is called, with love and respect for the freedom of the human person, to minister precisely to this mystery of salvation. His pastoral ministry must not be reduced to numbers; rather, he must inspire and guide people towards life and perfection in Christ within the blessed state of marriage.

A fruitful discussion followed, after which an official dinner was offered in honour of the President and distinguished participants of the Conference by the local Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Prodrornos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos. The Conference will continue tomorrow, 3 October, and will conclude on Sunday, 4 October, at the Holy Monastery of Saint Anastasia the Roman, where the relevant conclusions will also be formulated.



It should be noted that those present at this first formal session included His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete; His Eminence Metropolitan Prodrornos of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, Shepherd of the local Metropolis; Their Eminences, Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki and Metropolitan Gregorios of Peristeri; Their Graces, Bishop Methodios of Knossos, of the Church of Crete, Bishops Evmenios of Chora and Athinagoras of Canberra, of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia, and Bishop Isidoros of Andida, of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Also present were the distinguished civil authorities of the region, including the Regional Governor of Crete, the Honourable Archon Exarchos of the Great Church of Christ, Mr Stavros Arnaoutakis; Ms Maria Lionis, Deputy Regional Governor of Crete; the Mayor of Rethymno, Mr Georgios Marinakis; Deputy Mayors; heads of the Military and Police authorities and the Fire Service; the Dean of the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Professor Emmanouil Karageorgoudis; members of the academic and scientific community;























vema.com.au