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# Theological Considerations on Abortion

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## Abstract

The faith of the Orthodox Church is that in the moment of the union of the two seminal cells, that of the man and that of the female, it takes place also the receiving of the soul, fact that determines that the *egg-cell/zygote* to be a human full person. Any attempt to the unborn children's life it is a crime, and the ones who decide and voluntarily participate to suppressing the intrauterine life (the mother, the father, the medical personnel) are murderers. The present study tries to express the unequivocal position of the Church concerning the infanticide, no matter the names the medical language presents the abortion with: voluntary, involuntary, hormonal, or therapeutic. At the final of the study we are going to present some theological considerations upon the post-mortem destiny of the embryo.

## Keywords

Canons, embryo, hormonal abortion, involuntary abortion, prayer for the aborted children, therapeutic abortion, voluntary abortion.

## I. Introduction

Etymologically, the term *abortion* comes from the Latin *aborior* and it means *to die*. Consequently, the *abortion* represents the ceasing of the life conceived in the mother's womb either spontaneously (involuntary abortions) or voluntarily, by the violent intervention of the physician or of another person, at the request and with the approval of the mother.

*Abortion* means *child-killing* regardless the moment it is performed on, in the first day (by contraception), at two weeks (by contraception and sterilet), at two-three months (by surgical abortion, legally), or latter (therapeutic abortion). The abortion violently interrupts the life of a person created and animated by God ever since the moment of the conception. Physician Vasile Luca wrote that the abortion is one of the most horrific crimes: “From this moment (of embryo’s forming), no practice is any longer contraceptive, any prophylaxis becomes then a small assassinate, motivated by the smallness of the victim, a simple cell in the beginning, a microscopic cellular mass later. ... This assassinate is graver for it is premeditated and the victim is taken by surprise, it is more odious for the victim is hit in darkness and for the victim cannot shout out or cry for defending his right to existence, for imploring mercy from the mother who kills him”<sup>1</sup>.

## II. Historical Aspects

Researchers think that the *primitive societies* didn’t practice abortion. The progress in knowing the woman’s body meant also the debut of the contraceptive and abortive practices. By and large, the antique world condemned the killing of unborn children and established legal punishments for the child-killer mothers:

- The Assyrian legislation stipulated that the woman who voluntarily makes an abortion “*will be impaled and she won’t be buried*”<sup>2</sup>;
- The Manu’s laws from India assimilated the abortion to the homicide and provided the same punishment<sup>3</sup>;
- In the Ancient Greece the abortion was a frequent social practice upheld by the philosophy of those times, for instance by Aristotle’s thinking<sup>4</sup>, who considered that the male child could be considered as

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Vasile LUCA, “Avortul provocat”, in: *Medicina pentru toți*, nr. 69, Editura Medicală, București, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață al federației Organizațiilor Ortodoxe Pro-Vita din România*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> “*The number of births must be limited. And if some couples conceive upper this limit, then they must do abortion, before the sensation, namely the life, to occur in that child.*”

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person only after six weeks from conceiving and the female child only after eighty or ninety days. Until then, the abortion was fully legal because out of the mother's body was extirpated not a child but a "heap of amorphous flesh" without a rational soul and having only a vegetative life<sup>5</sup>; Hippocrates left to the medical world, that oath through which the medical personnel tied their activity to serving the life and excluding abortion (the killing of the child) from the first moment of the conceiving: *I won't give anybody poison if I am asked, neither will I have the initiative of such a suggestion; likewise, I won't give any woman a abortive pesar* (a ring like instrumentm made out of rubber, metal, or plastic, which sustains/ties the internal organs, o. n.);

- In Ancient Rome the abortion was practiced clandestinely, and the legislation was very tough on the ones who were practicing the child-killing; the abortion was considered as *extraordinary crime* and due to that, Emperor Valentinian for instance (Fourth Century) decreed the death penalty for the woman who committed the crime of abortion, and Emperor Justinian (Sixth Century) adds in legislation the right of the man who could repudiate his wife in such a situation;
- In Romania, before 1989, the provoked abortion was punished by law, with imprisonment; on 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1989, the abortion was legalized, a fact that opened the way that in only 10 years (1990-2000) to be killed through abortion approximately 11 million children; in today's Romania the legislation says that the woman (the mother) is the "owner of the embryo" having the right of life and death upon it; mass media succeeded, through a very well made ideological program, to reeducate the society regarding the sexual values; during the last 20 years (after the year 2000) it has been ascertained a very steep growth of the use of the hormonal contraceptives in all the social environments. The consequence has been the exponential multiplying of the early (hormonal) abortions, and to that it has been added the huge number of abortions through classical methods of curettage. The Orthodox Church affirms the gravity of the sins of contraception on abortive purpose, by considering it equally grave as the pregnancy's abortion

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*It could be determined by the criterion of the sensation, namely of the life, if this thing is allowed or not, by the divine law.*", ARISTOTEL, *Politica*, VII,16, 25, translation by Alexander Baumgarten, Editura Iri, București, 2001, p. 429.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației în învățătura Sfinților Părinți*, translation by Marinela Bojin, Editura Sofia, București, 2003, pp. 123-124.

is. Consequently, the mechanical barriers (the sterilet and some contraceptive pills, including RU 486) through which one aims to impede the pre-embryo's implantation on the uterus's walls – which are considered as abortive practices – as also some contraceptive medicines, which have unsuspected consequences upon the woman's body, they are considered as heavy sins targeted by the canonical conscience of the Church.

### III. Biblical, Patristic Aspects

“If two men, fighting each other, they will hit a pregnant woman and that woman will abort the unformed child... they will pay whatever is due; if the child is fully formed, then it will be given soul for soul, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand...” (*Exodus* 21, 22).

This text specifies that in the embryo's evolution, there is a first stage the embryo is *unformed* (undifferentiated) in, and there is a stage the embryo is *fulfilled* in or has a human form<sup>6</sup>. The difference between the punishments in the two stages, in case the life of the unborn child is lost, it suggested the idea that after “the child is fulfilled” suppressing his life would constitute an abortion.

The Fathers of the Church, on the basis of the Scripture, they considered that the life from the woman's womb is sacred ever since the moment of the conceiving and that there is an absolute value in itself and by itself, and that it cannot be questioned either at conceptual level or by any justification trying to affirm that its suppression is right. Any attempt to the unborn child's life it is aimed by the biblical commandment: “You shall not kill!” (*Exodus* 20, 15). Thus:

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<sup>6</sup> Philo from Alexandria takes from Aristotle the distinction between the *unformed, undifferentiated embryo*, and the *formed embryo, to whom all the limbs are at their places having own characteristics*. The difference of the compensations it is given by the fact that in the case of the undifferentiated embryo “the nature that was (only) about to forge the most wonderful of beings, the man, it has been impeded to finish its work”, whilst in case of a formed embryo it is asked for the punishment of death “because a man has been killed in the nature's workshop, which hasn't reckoned that it is the time to bring him in light, like the finished statues wait for being brought outside and sent when they ought to be”. Under the influence of Aristotle, Philo considers that we have to do with a full person only in the situation of the fully formed child and, consequently, to that point we cannot talk about abortion, according to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 156-157.

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- *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* writes that: “you will not kill child in womb, neither the born child you will not kill”<sup>7</sup>; the magic medicines and witchcraft and the diverse practices trying to impede the birth, they belong to the *deaths’ way*, and the killer parents are *destroying the creature of God*<sup>8</sup>;
- *The Epistle of Barnabas* repeats the same urge: “you will not kill child in the mother’s womb and you will not kill the child after is born”<sup>9</sup>; “The way of the darkness is crooked and full with curse, because it totally is the way of the eternal death as punishment; on it there are the things which kill the souls: the witchcraft, the magic, the ones “who do not know their Creator, the killers of children, destroyers of the creature of God”<sup>10</sup>.
- Athenagoras the Athenian, while defending the Christians against the pagan accusations that they would have been anthropophagi, he shows that the Christians, far from being murderers, they consider as wrong and they punish even the women who help committing an abortion: “how could we commit such killings, when even the women who help the mothers to commit abortion, we call them killers and we say that for this deed of theirs, they will be held accountable before God? Even on the unborn child from the mother’s womb, who we really consider a living being, we say that God takes care of him, and then could we kill somebody well on in years? As nobody of us throws away a barely born child – because of who does such a thing he truly is an infanticide -, the less it has been heard that somebody amongst Christians to kill a Christian after that one has reached a grown up”<sup>11</sup>.
- Clement the Alexandrine condemns “the women who use poisons, in order to throw their unborn child out, in order covering up the fornications”; “They get out, thus, a completely death matter, but they throw out in the same time with the unborn child also the love of people”. To

<sup>7</sup> “Didahia (Învățătura celor 12 Apostoli)”, II, 1, in: *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, translation by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> “Didahia...”, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> “Epistola lui Barnaba”, XIX, 5, in: *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, translation by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> “Epistola lui Barnaba”, XX,1-2, pp. 136-137.

<sup>11</sup> ATENAGORA ATENIANUL, “Solie în favoarea creștinilor”, XXXV, translation by Teodor Bodogae, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, p. 383.

him, committing abortion it means “killing with bad means, the human fetus, created to be born, by the godlike care taking”<sup>12</sup>.

- Saint John Chrysostom, when speaking about the habit of some people who have embraced the Christendom, to visit the brothels even after Baptism, he highlights that in addition to the fornication they also add the abortion, that is a bigger crimes than the killing is: “for you cast the seed in a soil that doesn’t want to bring fruits and within which the grain doesn’t sprout, and within which there takes place killing before birth? Because of you, the courtesan is no longer only a courtesan, but you make a killer out of her; (...) (the abortion) it is a crime way more horrible than the killing, a crime I don’t even know how to call it. This is because is not killed the born creature, but the birth itself is being impeded. What you despise the gift of God for? What you transgress the nature’s laws for? What does urge you to such a deed...? What do you bring death where there must be life for? Out of the woman given to you to give you sons, you are making a death tool?”<sup>13</sup>
- Tertullian calls the abortion as *homicide* because there is no difference between taking the life of the child from the womb and taking the one of the already born child: “we cannot afford ourselves to extinguish the life of the child conceived in the mother’s womb, even before the blood to be kneaded in him like man. Impeding the birth is an anticipated homicide; because what difference could be between kidnapping the life of a born soul, and killing him at birth? The unborn one is a human being too, following to grow up, like the fruit is in the seed too.”<sup>14</sup>
- Saint Ambrosias of Milan, he writes about the custom of some rich people who were practicing the abortion on the form of the abortive contraception, in order to avoid the sharing of their wealth between children: (these ones) “abort the fetus from womb and by using killer potions they extinguish the promise of the descendants in that part of the body meant to give birth, by kidnapping the just seeded life”<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, “Pedagogul” II, X, 96.1, in: CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, *Scrieri, partea întâia*, translation by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 284-285.

<sup>13</sup> Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Romani*, XXIV, 4, apud Jean-Claude Larchet, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> TERTULIAN, “Apologeticul”, IX, 8 translation by Nicolae Chițescu, in: *Apologeți de limbă latină*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> Sf. AMBROZIE AL MILANULUI, *Omilii la Hexaemeron* V, XVIII, apud Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, p. 110.

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- Saint Hieronymus speaks about the practice of some women who kill their children either immediately after birth, or during gestation, by using abortive medicines (potions). By abortion the mother turn themselves against the godlike *providence*, because of each man who comes into world it represents a *servant* of God through his skills given him by Creator, towards the salvation of the world: “isn’t obvious that openly and plainly the devils plot in order to make the women, after they had two or three children, either to kill the children they give birth after that, or to drink something in order to abort the children? Maybe these women are afraid of having too many children because their wealth will be diminished? And by doing so, what else they show if not the fact that they doubt God would feed and take care of those children He established to be born! And it happens that those women kill just the children who would have been able to serve God the best way, either to become obedient and loving their parents. Those women drink poisoned potions, according to a lawless and killer custom, condemning thus their children to an unaccomplished life by death before time in their mother’s womb, and by taking certain drugs, together with the drink, those women empty the cup of the death. Their faith is pitiful, for they reckon that the poison that medicine contains won’t hurt them in any way, by not knowing that in this way, by cutting though death what was conceived in their womb, they will end to be barren. And if in their bosom there wasn’t at that time a living fetus, that doesn’t mean that they didn’t kill within their own creature the nature itself”<sup>16</sup>.

## **IV. Canonical Provisions**

In the General and Local Synods, the Holy Fathers expressed the conscience of the Church from ever, concerning the children killing. The abortion was and it still is reckoned as one of the heaviest sins because it very gravely hurts both the life of the ones involved in abortion and the human existence in its totality. We must notice here that the gravity of a sin it is evaluated depending on how much it hurts the life and the meaning

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<sup>16</sup> FERICITUL IERONIM, *Predici* LII,4, apud Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 112-113.

of the man and of the world by and large. When it comes about abortion, the possibility of the one who killed, to heal the wound he has caused to the life, it is null. The killer parent (the mother especially) they won't ever know what was the meaning God has called the aborted children to life for, neither they could accomplish the vocation that child was created for. What would have been the purpose of that child towards himself, towards his parents, and towards humanity and history?! Any abortion disturbs the life on all levels: parents, family, society and humanity in its entirety. That's why the abortion places the killer woman in full humbleness and in a full dependency on the mercy of God. The content of the churchly canons, though it might seem sometimes as harsh, they want to indicate the gravity of the sin and the seriousness of assuming it. We present here some canonic aspects issued by the synodal Fathers:

- *The Synod from Elvira (306)*, in the *Canon 63*, it considered that the woman who adds to the adultery the killing through abortion, she needs the ascesis of the repentance to the end of her earthly life: "If a woman, by transgressing the law of the marriage, in the absence of her husband, and after this lawlessness she kills the fruit of this affair, she won't be accepted again to the Holy Impartation, to the end of her life, because she committed a twofold crime"<sup>17</sup>; "if a catechumen conceived in an adulterous mode and she impeded the birth of the child, she won't ever be baptized to the end of her life"<sup>18</sup>.
- After only 8 years, the ecclesial office reconsidered the decision and it establishes that a repentance of 10 years could be enough for the adulterine and killer woman to come back into her senses and to be re-integrated in the Eucharistic community: "The fornicator women, the women who kill their children, or who try to kill their child while still in their womb, they were, according to the old order, removed from the Church to the end of their life and there are people who approve that decision. We have decided a milder measure and we condemn those women to different stages of penitence for 10 years"<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Synod from Elvira (306), *Canonul 63*, Marie-Hélène CONGOURDEAU, *Embrionul și sufletul lui la Sfinții Părinți și în izvoarele filozofice și medicale grecești*, translation by Maria-Cornelia Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2014, p. 409; Obs.: the Synod from Elvira, held around the year 306, has not been accepted by the Byzantine canonical Tradition.

<sup>18</sup> Sinodul de la Elvira (306), *Canonul 68*, Marie-Hélène CONGOURDEAU, *Embrionul și sufletul lui...*, p. 409.

<sup>19</sup> The Synod from Ancira, (314), *Canon no. 21*, Răzvan PERȘA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Canoanele Sinoadelor locale*, Editura Basilica, București, 2018, p. 25. This



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- *The Apostolic Constitutions*, composed at the end of the Fourth Century, and which constitute one of the major expressions of the canonic law from the first centuries of Christendom, they command in *The Seventh Book*: “You will not kill child in the womb, neither you will kill the born child; for if the fetus whom God has given a soul, he will be killed, he will be revenged (cf. Exodus 21, 23), because he was killed unjustly”<sup>20</sup>. This text is a reformulation from *Didache*: “the second commandment of the teaching: ‘You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery’; you shall not corrupt boys, you shall not be fornicator, “you shall not steal”, you shall not do witchcraft, you shall not make poisons, you shall not kill child in the womb, neither shall you kill the born child...”<sup>21</sup>.
- Saint Basil the Great, in the *Second Canon*, he expresses the conscience of the Church regarding the abortion, no matter the moment the abortion is done on. The specifications made by Saint Basil are very important because the distinction from Exodus 21, 22 (the abortion of the unaccomplished child and the abortion of the accomplished child), seemed to justify the thesis of the later animation. The Christian tradition has appropriated the thesis of the concomitant animation and, consequently, any attempt to the child’s life from the mother’s womb it constitutes a killing of a fully human person: “The woman who commits abortion through some craftsmanship, she is subjected to the punishment for killing. In the Christian faith it is not specified if the fetus was formed or it wasn’t formed then. But we are asked for justice not only by what was due to be born, but also by the woman who plotted against herself, because of, as it often happens, the women die in such attempts. Here is added also the killing of the embryo/fetus, which is a second killing, at least intentioned by the ones who perpetrate such deeds. Although the repentance of such women must not be prolonged to their death, but they can be accepted again to the Holy Impartation after a ten years period. But their healing mustn’t be

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canon is textually taken from the Synod from Caesarea, (315): “women who fornicated and killed what they gave birth or the ones who tried to make potions in order to have an abortion, the law, until now, it has been excluding them to their death, but we reckon as more appropriate to the mercy to prescribe an exclusion for ten years according to the established penitence stages”, according to Marie-Hélène CONGOURDEAU, *Embrionul și sufletul...*, p. 409, note 1503.

<sup>20</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> “Didahia...”, p. 26.

decided according to the time, but according to the way they repent themselves in”<sup>22</sup>.

- *The Synod from Lerida (524)*, through *The Second Canon*, it nuances the theme of the abortion. It distinguished between the forbidding from the Eucharistic communion – diminishing this forbidding down to 7 years – and the period of the repentance because of the killing of the child which must last for the rest of the woman’s life: “Anybody who tries to kill, either after birth, or in the mother’s womb, the fruit of an adultery, that person cannot be admitted to Impartation sooner than 7 years, having to spent the rest of the life in tears and repentance”<sup>23</sup>.
- *The Synod from Trulan (692)*, through *The Canon 91*, it extends the responsibility for abortion also upon the ones who facilitate the killing of the unborn child by providing medication: “The women who offer abortive medicines and the women who accept those poisons in order to kill their embryos, we submit them to the punishment for killing”<sup>24</sup>.

The ulterior canonic texts, as *The Nomocanon* of the Saint Photius (Ninth Century), *The Compendium of Canons* of Saint Simeon the Metaphrastes (Tenth Century) or the *Syntagma* of Matthew Blastares (Fourteenth Century), are not else but compilations from the canons of the *Synod from Ancyra*, of the Saint Basil the Great, and of the *Synod from Trulan*, as also of some imperial laws like the ones from *Digesta* of Justinian and from *Novella* of Leon VI the Wise<sup>25</sup>.

The highlighting Saint Basil the Great did, that *in the Christian faith it isn’t specified if the fetus was formed or if the fetus wasn’t formed*, and that *the woman who kills her fetus is guilty of the charge of killing*, it remained normative for the Orthodox Christian spirituality. The embryo is a person ever since the moment of the conceiving and is a hypostasis with an existence independent from the mother’s person (even if the embryo is depending on the mother in what concerns the moment of the apparition, of the growth, and of the nourishing) – fact that excludes the possibility of reckoning the embryo as a part of the mother’s body, of which the mother

<sup>22</sup> Sfântul VASILE CEL MARE, “Canonul 2”, in: Răzvan PERȘA, *Canoanele...*, p. 96. The text of the canon is taken from the *Epistola 188, III, Către Amfilohiu, despre canoane*, scrisă în anul 374, to be seen in: Sfântul VASILE CEL MARE, *Epistole*, translation by Teodor Bodogae, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 270.

<sup>23</sup> According to Jean Claude-Larchet, *Etica procreației...*, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup> Synod from Trulan, “Canon no. 91”, in: Răzvan PERȘA, *Canoanele...*, p. 325.

<sup>25</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 117-118.

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could dispose as she likes, like in antiquity thought the stoics, Philo the Alexandrine, and other philosophers - and like in the present times it is being proposed by the feminist movements and the pro-abortion legislation.

**V. Spontaneous Abortion**

Like we have shown above, the voluntary abortion is considered by the conscience of the Church as an abominable crime which needs *tears and repentance* to the end of the earthly life, and which separated the killer mother for several years from the Eucharistic communion.

Besides the voluntary abortion, there could be also the case of unwillingly using/aborting the child who was wanted and expected by his parents. It is about the so-called *spontaneous abortion* or *involuntary abortion*. The canonic perspective of the Church has pronounced itself on these situations by forbidding the mother from Impartation for a period of a year (*the woman who aborted involuntarily she receives penance for a year*<sup>26</sup>) and through a religious service/prayer for forgiveness and untying, which call the involuntary abortion as manslaughter: *Lord Master, our God, for You have born Yourself out of the Holy Birth Giver of God and forever Virgin Mary, and in mangle You were laid like a little child, have Yourself mercy on this servant of Yours - who has fallen today, into sin, willingly or unwillingly, and she has aborted the one conceived within herself - and forgive her willing or unwilling sins. Protect her against all the plots of the devils and clean up her defilement; heal her pains; give her body and her soul health, You, the One who Loves the people, and protect her with an angel of light against all the rushing in of the unseen devils, So, Lord, save her from helplessness and weakness, and clean her up of all the bodily defilement and of all sort of pains of the belly, which come upon her. And by Your much mercy rise her up, by strengthening her helpless body and rise her up from the bed of the pain she is laying on. For in sins and in lawlessness we have been born and all of us are unclean before You, Lord, and we shout out with fear and we say: look from the sky and see our helplessness, of the condemned ones. Forgive Your maid who has fallen in sin of killing willing or unwillingly, and she has aborted the one conceived within her; and forgive all the ones who have been with her*

<sup>26</sup> "Canonul 34 Ioan Ajunătorul", in: Răzvan PERȘA, *Canoanele...*, p. 266.

and who have touched her, for You are a good and loving of people God; according to You great mercy, have mercy of them and forgive them, for only You have power to forgive the sins and the lawlessness, for the prayers of Your Most Clean Mother and of all the saints<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the text of the prayer calls the spontaneous abortion as *manslaughter* and it is places in causal connection with “the willing and the unwilling sins” from the mother’s life. Respectively, the abortion can be voluntary on the moment it takes place, but it is in an organic connection – an ensemble connection – with the past sins. Consequently, the apparition of a voluntary abortion in somebody’s life and family, it presupposes their moral responsibility. The woman, the husbands, they can on a given moment to strongly desire a child, but they have their concrete life and past, and the lost of that pregnancy *it is spontaneous only on that moment*, but in the ensemble of their life the abortion is a “natural” consequence.

The modern medical research has determined “a series of causes, by no means innocent, which can lead to abortion: uterus with the uterine mucous modified, atrophied because of the contraceptives or of the sterilet; uterus with scars or with synechiae (the sticking together of the uterus’s walls) after an abortion (or after several abortions) in antecedents; the insufficiency of the cervix (frequent after a complicated abortion). To these causes we can add the infections due to the antecedent abortions or to the diseases with sexual transmission, motives the both partners are guilty for. The unhealed post-abortion syndrome itself (nervous depressions) can lead to a spontaneous abortion<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, the fact that the Church forbids from the Eucharistic communion the woman who suffers an involuntary abortion, for a year, it must be understood from the perspective of the moral responsibility upon the ensemble of her life and of the family she belongs to, and not by simply reducing the things to the moment of losing her child.

The concrete experience of the life it presents also situations when the spontaneous abortion takes place in Christian families who wanted children from the beginning of the marriage and who never used any sort of contraceptive methods, and the woman and the man had a clean,

<sup>27</sup> “Rugăciune când femeia leapădă pruncul”, in: *Molitfelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, p. 205.

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virginal life before marriage. It is hard to explain to these husbands why their children die *spontaneously* during pregnancy. One could say, on one hand, that these husbands belong to concrete/given genealogical lineages which could have accumulated an existential mode which is deviating from the nature God has created the man with, and their flaws have been actualized and have been manifested in the physiological helplessness of the woman to cross through the pregnancy and reach the end of it and, on the other hand, *that neither they nor their kinships have committed sins and the spontaneous abortions belong to the Providence of God*. We must not forget that the birth of a human being doesn't depend only on the caprices of the biology and on the human sexuality but, in the first place, it depends on the creator will and work of God. In this sense the spontaneous abortions, as also many of the hormonal abortions, they can indicate the fact that God, in His absolute knowledge, He knows that it is not useful to created a human being even if the parent want to procreate. God pursuits the eternal destiny and He doesn't aim only the psychic/emotional and social accomplishing of the human person. And, because of this, He often deprives a human being of what that human being considers as being the solution/the accomplishment of him in the temporal conditions of the existence. In other words, God allows the sufferance/the trial (even if this is called as spontaneous abortion) for He knows which the appropriate measure to each human being is, in order to freely self-determinate himself towards salvation and, God works through all the trials the eternity of the man. Often, a spontaneous abortion triggers within woman/husbands the questions of the eternity and it operates the opening or the availability for knowing God. The canon/the penance given to the woman/to the husbands, consisting in not impart themselves for a year, it must be considered as a chance or as a path towards the Kingdom of Life, and by no means as something punitive.

## **VI. The Hormonal Abortion**

The contemporary medical knowledge affirms that in the frame of the process of human reproduction, during the first days/weeks of pregnancy, there can take place the so-called *hormonal abortions*. Because these ones happen involuntarily and sometimes even without the knowledge of the

woman, the hormonal abortions are listed by specialists in the category of the spontaneous abortions. They are also called as *menstrual abortions* because the embryo is eliminated with the menstrual blood of the woman and it takes place before the implantation of the embryo into the uterus. The physician Christea-Todea Gross specifies that: “it is being lost an embryo of approximately ten days of age. This is called as menstrual abortion. But it is about a simple menstruation, about menstrual blood? This blood contains though that tiny embryo, not noticeable with the naked eye, which, when examined under the microscope (histopathologically), it could be seen. When the authors describe the histopathological<sup>29</sup> modifications there appears to be a contradiction. Even they admit that the mode the elimination of the uterine content it takes place in (to be understood here: blood, placenta, embryo (it differs from the one usually taking place in menstruation or birth! It couldn’t be otherwise, for it is not about any menstruation here, neither is about the birth of a living child, but it is about an abortion! In conclusion, the “menstrual” abortion it is though a true, spontaneous abortion”<sup>30</sup>. If in the space of Orthodox Christian thinking it is believed that in the hormonal (menstrual) abortion it takes place the lost of a human being, in the Roman-Catholic space of thinking it is considered that it is only about a matter with organic life of human nature (non-viable embryos) without human status: “the purely natural mechanisms of the reproduction are organized in such a manner than eliminating the non-viable embryos it is one of their functions and we cannot consider that in such cases it would be about human beings”<sup>31</sup>. Since the union of the two seminal cells of the man and of the woman and to the *individuation* (the attaching of the embryo into uterus) the embryo is an organic life of human type but not an individual person<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> The histology is a branch of the biology studying the organic tissues, the cells, the non-cellular formations and their microscopic structure; the histopathology is a branch of the biology studying the microscopic aspect of the ill organs or tissues.

<sup>30</sup> Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, p. 206.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques-Marie POHIER, “Reflexions théologiques sur la position de l’Église Catholique”, in: *Lumière et vie*, 1972, pp. 78-79.

<sup>32</sup> J. Fr. MALHERBE, “L’embryon est-il une personne?”, in: *Lumière et vie*, 172, nr. 1/1985, p. 29. On the line of the profane medical rationality, it is considered that not only during the period until the implantation of the embryo in uterus we cannot speak about a human person, but neither during the pregnancy period, if the embryo and then the fetus present major congenital malformations. Consequently, the embryo always can be considered as a *potential person*. Physician Paul Chuchard, professor at École

## VII. The Therapeutic Abortion

The therapeutic abortion is an abortion caused by surgical methods or by using medicines, because of medical reasons (healthy child and sick mother or sick child and healthy mother) or social (healthy mother and healthy child) regardless gestational age<sup>33</sup>. The name as therapeutic abortion it is applied also to the pregnancies with major maternal risks (grave illnesses of the mother) or fetal risks (major immunologic, genetic affections or the unborn child). The most frequent situations of therapeutic abortion are applied to the pregnancies with genetic risk and to the ones with immunological dysfunctions (Rh incompatibility).

What the Rh incompatibility means? Rh, or the Rhesus factor, it is an antigen, namely a protein that is found on the surface of the blood red cells, which is present to the majority of the human beings<sup>34</sup>. These people are classified as being Rh positive. In Romania about 85% of the population is Rh positive, and the rest of 15% are Rh negative, a fact that means that the same 15% of husband and wife are Rh incompatible. In the situation the mother has Rh negative and the child has Rh positive, we speak about incompatibility between mother and child. The immunologic conflict will appear on the moment the mother's organism starts producing antibodies (substances with the role of protecting the organism against the foreign bodies, by destroying them), and the antibodies will determine the child's Rh positive as something foreign and they will try to destroy the red blood cells of the child by generating in these ones a hemolytic anemia, fact that could generate to the child severe anomalies. When detected on time, the immunologic conflict can be medically treated, with greater or smaller

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des Hautes Études, from Paris, he affirms in this sense: "an egg isn't human except in its genetic aptitudes it could lead to the development of the brain. An embryo is not human, except he has a brain, even if this one presents some insufficiencies. If there is about a late affection that impeded the development of the brain we can say since that moment the embryo is dead", J. Fr. MALHERBE, "L'embryon est-il une personne?", p. 78; In such situations, regardless the intrauterine life of the child, this one is not considered as child/man, but a mass of flesh with human form which must be removed from the woman's womb without being there any moral question, J. Fr. MALHERBE, "L'embryon est-il une personne?", pp. 83-84.

<sup>33</sup> Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, pp. 199, 222-223.

<sup>34</sup> In Romania and to the Caucasian populations 85% of individuals has positive Rh; the African populations is 95% positive; the Asian populations are 100% positive, according to Christa TODEA-GROSS, Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, p. 225.

chances of success, concerning the ulterior sequelae in the child's health. The hemolytic illness of the fetus in the first three months of pregnancy it is solved by the medical corpus, sadly, through abortion. It is the most facile solution for the physician and the less Christian one. The mother would have the possibility to carry the pregnancy to its end, no matter its finality. If the child is gravely ill and he will die, either during pregnancy or after birth, the mother wouldn't be guilty of this death, for she didn't caused it. If the mother decides to have an abortion, while the child still being alive, he will become not only the killer of her child but also the killer of a child with grave health issues<sup>35</sup>.

The name *pregnancy with genetic risk* appeared consequently to the progresses in deciphering the human genetic patrimony. The genetics allows us to find out what the risk is for the baby to have some lethal genetic disease. The screening type tests measure the risk degree of giving birth to a child with congenital malformations. The possibility of genetic testing for the hereditary transmitted illnesses it allows the physicians to predict, in some degree, the evolution of the child both during pregnancy and after birth. In the situation major affections are detected, the "solution" of a therapeutic abortion is used – this solution is legally justified but ethically controversial. It has been thus opened, the legal but profoundly immoral way of *embryos' selection*. The therapeutic abortion, in cases of chromosomal anomalies, in order to avoid giving birth to a child with severe handicap, it places us in front of a paradox: can it be considered as good what is obtained by killing a human being, be it even a handicapped human being? Behold a possible answer of a Christian bioethicist: "the position of the Church in condemning the abortions by Church's canons, it has dramatic implications for the contemporary medicine, for it leads to a

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<sup>35</sup> "I have observed, writes Dr. Christa T. Gross, that the gynecologist advises a mother to abort her child, especially if she had antecedents of aborted fetuses or of dead fetuses, because of the hemolytic illness. I think that each time there is a chance for this child, and to the mother the psychic trauma is smaller if she carries her pregnancy to the end (the child dying at birth) than when he commits an abortion. To the parents is very difficult to endure the abortion of a handicapped child; a study reported the maternal depression at 92% and the paternal depression at 82% (the post-abortion syndrome), and in addition to that a 30% separation incidence to the parents, after abortion. The trauma is more easily endured if the child is allowed to be born, and then, even if he dies, the parents have the possibility to baptize the child at his birth and, reconciled with him, and with themselves, to take good bye and to bury him Christianly.", Christa TODEA-GROSS, și Pr. Prof. dr. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Îndrumarul medical și creștin despre viață...*, p. 233.



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firm condemning of the prenatal screening and of the abortion. These ones ended to ask for the evaluation of the unborn children and for the abortion in case the children prove to be malformed. This fact encourages the parent to not face the challenge of loving and taking care of a child with severe defects or handicaps. ... In front of the law, the physicians reached to be responsible if they do not offer the parents the necessary information for they could be able to decide if they want to kill their unborn child. (...) The Church's tradition has no sympathy for arguments like those which affirm that the child would be harmed by the fact he is allowed to live with a grave malformation. For the perspective is the eternal life, and not only a temporary sufferance, the child is always given a huge good together with the passing life, being given the possibility of experiencing the Church's Mysteries, despite the harms associated to the defect, to the handicap, or to the sickness of his"<sup>36</sup>.

Another type of a so-called therapeutic abortion it is the one referring to the pregnancies with psycho-social risk. It is about an *unwanted pregnancy*. Either because of material poverty, or because of age (high school students, university students), or consequently to an adulterous affair, the women who are pregnant in the mentioned situations they agree to have an abortion. The motivation is psychic and social. The psychic motivation aims the incapacity of the respective woman to assume the moral responsibility for the fruit of her sexual life. The poor woman is overwhelmed by the worries regarding the future, for she has one more mouth to feed; the high school student and the university student are overwhelmed by the fear that their professional and familial future is compromised, and the adulterine woman's psychic is overwhelmed by the fear of formally/legally dissolution of her family she have just betrayed it. The social motivation of the abortion in the case of the *unwanted pregnancy* it is represented by the pro-abortionist mentality of the social environment, which have dissociated the sexuality from birth and which has desecrated the human existence in all its earthly compartments (according to the formula: *if God hadn't existed, then everything would have been permitted*). The social motivations are consumed only in the economic, professional, and of a hedonistic culture horizon, without taking into consideration the good of the child: the child's right to live, regardless his health or his illnesses.

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<sup>36</sup> H. Tristam ENGELHARDT, *Fundamentele Bioeticii Creștine. Perspectivă Ortodoxă*, traducere Cezar Loghin, diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, Mihail Neamțu, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 363.

In conclusion, considering the problem / the drama of the abortion, we can express here a few considerations from a Christian theological perspective:

- The life of each person is a fundamental asset, a unique, absolute, and irreplaceable value, and it cannot be weighted by some economical, political, cultural, ideological scales, in order to justify the life's suppression;
- Abortion means suppressing the right to life of a human being and it constitutes an abominable crime;
- The hedonistic and utilitarian culture generated by the atheistic humanism (the Marxist ideology in the forms of the economic communism and cultural (neo)liberalism) have generated an abortionist mentality which engulfed and subordinated the Euro-Atlantic civilization; because of this, the society pays with public money and it facilitates through permissive legislation, the killing of the unborn child, whose life and whose right to live are deemed as banal and passed into derisory;
- The contraception by using medicines, and the abortive contraception, as any other methods of killing the child in his mother's womb, are firmly condemned by the Church;
- In the situation the objective medical experience affirms that the child's life cannot be saved by any means and the mother's life is in danger of death, the decision will be to save the mother life;
- In the cases the pregnant woman's life is really in a danger (extra-uterine pregnancy, cancer) the mother's life should have priority, not because her life has a greater value than the child's life, but due to the responsibility for other persons who are depending on her;
- In the case the genetic investigations (verified by several specialists, and not through a unique and superficial diagnostic) are discovered anomalies to the unborn child, the Church recommends that child to be born for the right to live it belongs also to the people who have severe handicaps; though, the decision must be of the family after previously have been analyzed all the, moral implications of an abortion, and of the implications of giving birth and raising a handicapped child. All these aspects must be analyzed from the perspective of the signification and of the purpose of the earthly life: the salvation or the eternal life;
- In the situation the pregnancy is the result of a rape or of an incest, the Church doesn't approve the abortion by any means; the Church urges

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- to give birth to that child and, depending on each case, to be given for adoption;
- The abortion never could be justified by economic reasons, by age reasons, or by professional reason (carrier reasons).

**VIII. The Post-Mortem Destiny of the Aborted Children**

The Church's faith regarding the concomitant animation – in the moment of the union of the two seminal cells it takes place the animation of the child who is thus considered as full person – it raises the natural question: what the state of the embryos is, after their abortion? Since the zygote (the egg cell), the pre-embryo, the embryo, the fetus represent only moment of the becoming of the body, and the human being is a full human being in the image of God since the moment of the conceiving, it turns out that regardless the moment and the sort of the abortion the aborted children have a post-mortem destiny.

The Church's Fathers, although they didn't develop an elaborate theology upon the state of the embryos after the moment they are aborted, there still are some paragraphs which to shed light upon this aspect. We have selected from the presentation Jean-Claude Larchet<sup>37</sup> does it, some patristic positions:

- Tertullian affirms the thesis that the souls of the death ones go in the lowest parts of the earth (in a place of waiting) to the day of body's resurrection and of the judgment. The children prematurely kidnapped from the world (consequently the aborted children too), pure and innocent due to their age, they have good places and condition<sup>38</sup>.
- Augustine, on the line of considering the ancestral sin in connection with the sexuality, he considered that all the not-baptized children (therefore also the aborted ones) because of receiving their existence through the gate of the sinful lust, they endure the slavery of the darkness and the eternal fire<sup>39</sup>.
- The XII-XIII Centuries, Peter Abelard, Peter the Lombard, Guillaume d'Auvergne: "the dead children do not suffer a punishment except that

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 210-234.

<sup>38</sup> TERTULIAN, "Despre suflet" VI-IX, translation by Nicolae Chițescu, in: *Apologeți de limbă latină*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, pp. 266-271.

<sup>39</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 212-213.

of being forever deprived of seeing God”; “they will be placed in a place which is not that of the torment from now, neither of the glory”<sup>40</sup>;

1. Albert the Great (1200-1280) – the not-baptized children go in a place called *limbus puerorum* situated at the edge of the inferno; they are deprived of the glory of God, but they aren't in a total absence of His glory<sup>41</sup>;
2. The Eastern Father reject the idea that the prematurely dead children – either in their mother's womb, or after birth, and not-baptized, would have beyond an unhappy destiny. A contrary: “these ones won't lack the sight of the glory, neither will be they punished by the Right Judge; they haven't received the seal, but neither they have done something evil, and they are rather victims than causing the evil”<sup>42</sup>;
3. The apocrypha text *The Apocalypse of Saint Apostle Peter*<sup>43</sup> speaks explicitly about the destiny in eternity of the aborted children: “they will dwell in a wonderful place of delectation, being entrusted to the Angel Temelouchos”<sup>44</sup> (in Greek language *timeléo* means *to take care of*);
4. Clement the Alexandrine took the affirmation from *The Apocalypse of Saint Peter*, regarding the not-condemning the aborted children, and he divided those children in two groups: one of the children who, in the virtue of the absolute knowledge of God would have been lived virtuously on earth (these ones have a better dwelling place and they will have a higher knowledge of the godlike glory) and the other group of the *others who will achieve the dwelling place of the salvation, as worthy of mercy for the injustice done to them, and their rewards will consist in the fact that they won't be punished; the first ones, under the guidance of the angel they will enjoy a good growing up and education in order to achieve the contemplation/the seeing of God*<sup>45</sup>;

<sup>40</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>41</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NAZIANZ, *Despre învierea morților*, XIV,6, coll. *Sources Chretiennes* 379, p. 270, according to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, p. 217.

<sup>43</sup> At the end of the II Century this text was present in Canon Muratori, and at the end of the Vth Century, according to the historian SOZOMEN, *Istoria ecleziastică*, VI, 19, this text still was read on the Great Friday in some churches from Palestine.

<sup>44</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, p. 220.

<sup>45</sup> According to Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Etica procreației...*, pp. 221-222.

5. Saint Gregory of Nyssa has a writing entitled *About the Prematurely Dead Children* in which, though he seems to speak only about children who died immediately after birth or shortly after birth, by using the expression *the prematurely dead children*, he comprises here also the voluntarily either spontaneously aborted children. Saint Gregory thinks that *the ones who die prematurely* and “they exist the life whilst their thought still was innocent and good, they will enjoy the best fate and state”<sup>46</sup>; “the child who didn’t know the evilness and whose eyes of the soul weren’t impeded by the illness of any cataract to taste the joys of the light, that one lives in his natural dwelling places for he doesn’t feel as lacking anything...”<sup>47</sup>; the life of the man consists in *participating to God*, and this is being realized in two stages: first by/into the creation act for *the human being is image of God*, and then along the earthly life through virtue, as impartation with the godlike glory. The *prematurely dead* children, regardless their age (embryos or born, baptized or not) they participate to the godlike life by/in the fact that they structurally and primarily are *images of God*. On the virtue of this fact – “only if you have in yourself something resembling you can see the one resembling to you”<sup>48</sup> – the children dead prematurely (including the aborted ones), *images of the Image*, they have through their status of *image*, access to the life of God. The embryo is, from the first moment of the conceiving, the *image* of God: “in His image He made the man (Genesis 1, 27), and this is like He would have said that the human nature is partaker to all the good things, and if God is the fullness of these good things, and if the man is “in the image” of this fullness, then, not in this fullness it will consists the man’s resemblance to the Archetype, or to his Model? For what difference could be between God and what is totally alike Him? There is only one: the Godhead is uncreated, whilst the one resembling

<sup>46</sup> Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, „Despre pruncii morți prematur, către Hierios”, translation by Teodor Bodogae, in: Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri exegetice, dogmatico-polemice și morale*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 30, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 414.

<sup>47</sup> Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, „Despre pruncii morți prematur...”, p. 419.

<sup>48</sup> Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, „Despre pruncii morți prematur...”, p. 417.

to the Godhead he has been brought to life through creation”<sup>49</sup>. So, the prematurely dead children are partaker, through the act of the conceiving, to all the qualities of God, and after dead these qualities, unaltered in any way by some personal sin, they enter in a process (epektasis) of growing up and of spiritual increasing, through communion with the glory of God, as some mirrors in which the life of the Uncreated One is being reflected endlessly.

## IX. The Prayer for the Aborted Children

One of the most profound worries of the Christians it is related to the prayer for the prematurely dead children, especially if it is about the aborted children and about the ones passed into eternity without receiving before the Mystery of the Baptism. The Tradition and the Canons of the Church are prudent in offering clarifying details concerning the prayer for the children dead before being baptized. *The Service for Children's Burial* accentuates the theme of the dead child's innocence, the not-consummation of his age, the absence of any voluntary sin by not tasting the joys and the pleasures of the earthly life, all of these being sufficient reasons for God to take his soul in the Kingdom of Heavens and make him partaker with the saints. Only the prayer from the frame of the special litany for the child, it specifies that it would be about a special religious service specific for the children who received the baptismal illumination: “Lord, Jesus Christ, our God, You have promised to give the Kingdom of Heavens to the ones born out of water and Ghost and in righteousness moved to You. You have said: let the Children come to Me, for to ones like these it belongs the Kingdom of Heavens. We humbly pray You, make partaker of Your Kingdom, as You have promised, Your servant, the innocent child (Name) moved away from us. ...” The text of this prayer is in tight connection to the affirmation of the Lord: “Jesus answered, and said: Verily, verily I say to you, if somebody isn't born out of water and out of Ghost, he won't be able to enter the Kingdom of Heavens” (John 3, 5).

<sup>49</sup> Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, “Despre facerea omului”, translation by Teodor Bodogae, in: Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri exegetice, dogmatico-polemice și morale*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 30, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 49.

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The faith of the first Christians, that without Baptism the salvation isn't possible, it determined the living ones (at least in Corinth, as the *Epistle I Corinthians 15, 29* it certifies), to be baptized for the dead who couldn't receive the Baptism and passed into eternity: *For what would do the ones who are baptized for dead ones? If the dead do not resurrect by any means, what they are baptizing themselves for?* The practice of the baptism for dead ones it was canonically stopped by the ecclesial office in the virtue of the teaching of faith which affirms that the Holy Mysteries can be administrated only to the living ones: "also it has been accepted not to be offer the Eucharist to the bodies of the dead one. For it is written: take, eat (Matthew 26, 26). But the bodies of the dead cannot either take or eat. And it has been accepted not to be done, out of the priests' nescience, the baptizing of the ones who are already dead."<sup>50</sup>

Some Orthodox believers practiced in Romania, and in some places are still being practiced, the baptizing of the aborted children and of the ones who died without being baptized. It is about an old folk belief, that the not-baptized children aren't received in heavens, and they become werewolves (or devils), wandering on earth and causing fear and damages to their homes, in order to force their mothers to untie them from the power of the evil one, by baptizing them:

"The werewolf originates in the not-baptized children, born dead or lost (aborted) and buried. After seven years he comes out of the tomb and flies in the sky in order to search a baptism for himself. The people say that they hear the werewolf shouting out: Christian, Christian! Or Cross, Cross! Then, whosoever hears that, let him break a piece of something, either of his garment, or of his scarf, and let him say: if you are a boy, you will be called John, if you are a girl, you will be called Mary! In another region they say: John, Johanna. If you do not give him, he becomes a devil, a werewolf. In another region they say that on such tombs you have to pour, for seven years in a row, that great holy water from the eve of the Epiphany, and then the child is like baptized. In another region, on the Epiphany's day, the women go to such tombs and they pour holy water. In another region, to the not-baptized children, they put in the tomb incense and holy water,

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<sup>50</sup> "Canon no. 18, Cartage", in: Răzvan PERȘA, *Canoanele...*, p. 145.

and in the day of the Epiphany, they take somebody to pour holy water on that tomb, that one to be the godfather, saying the formula: ‘It is being baptized the servant of God, John, in the name of the Father, Amen, and of the Son, Amen, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen’, and this is to be done on each year. After seven years, that child is like baptized, and he goes to god. Or the priest makes holy water for that child, immediately that that child had died, and the godfather goes for seven Saturdays and pours holy water on that tomb, and in order to do that the child’s mother gives the godfather, on the last day, a candle wrapped in a piece of fabric taken from a baptism garment, and two wafers, and then the child is like baptized, and if not, he receives wings and he flies to the sky and he asks for baptism, and who hears that, let him throw a piece of towel to him, or something else, and to say like I have mentioned before. And then the child’s soul takes that piece of fabric and goes to god and shows that he is baptized, and God receives him with the other angels, otherwise God banishes him and he becomes an unclean ghost, and he goes and stays at his place. From there, when he wants, he makes himself a wind and comes out, and he grabs dust and straws from that place and he goes like a swirl, day and night, and if he comes across somebody he either cripples him or blows him away through the air. When you see him, you better lay down on the ground, for if you do that he won’t harm you”<sup>51</sup>.

Each area of Romania has popular customs like the one described above, regarding the Baptismal prayer for the aborted children. These practices have been born because of the silence the clergy answered with, the need of the people involved of not forsake their prematurely born children, either aborted or after birth, and not-baptized. Often the Church’s servants were and still are reticent to officiate the religious burial service for the not-baptized children, especially of the children lost through involuntary abortion or who dies at birth. It is difficult to understand the silence kept by the Holy Fathers and by the Canons referring to a religious burial service for the children prematurely dead and not-baptized. This

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<sup>51</sup> Elena NICULIȚĂ-VORONCA, *Datinile și credințele poporului român*, vol. I, Editura Saeculum I.O., București, 1998, p. 361.



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might be explained through the theological considerations of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, to whom the prematurely dead children were innocent and saints by their intrinsic status of *images* of God and, consequently, their religious burial service it naturally was that one of the lightened children, especially for they belonged to Christian parents. The lack of a religious service for the aborted embryos it can be explained also by the development stage of the medicine in the past. But the contemporary medicine has the possibility to offer, *on request*, the embryo to the parents, no matter the embryo's evolution stage and age in the uterine life. The Church's servants should officiate the burial of the embryos, in the virtues of the Orthodox teaching that those ones are full human persons ever since their conceiving. In this sense, the religious burial service for the baptized and prematurely dead, existing in the cultic books it is very positive, being added the specification that the child (Name) didn't receive the Mystery of the Holy Baptism: "Lord, Jesus Christ, our God, You have promised to give the Kingdom of Heavens to the ones born out of water and Ghost, and who have been moved to You in righteousness. You have said: let the children to come to Me, for to ones like these it belongs the Kingdom of Heavens. We humbly pray You, make partaker of You Kingdom, as You have promised, Your servant, the innocent child (Name) moved away from us, who, by the godlike lenience, he hasn't reached to receive that lightening of Baptism...".