



❖ METROPOLIS OF OROPOS AND PHYLE

THE ST. PHILARET THE MERCIFUL ORTHODOX WOMEN'S GUILD

- Headquarters: Patron 12, Kolonos, Athens

■ A momentous gathering for the furtherance of concerted Orthodox volunteerism

A Lecture on the Rights of the Unborn Child by Presbytera Barbara Metallinos

BY THE GRACE of our God, Who loves mankind, and the protection of the *Panagia Evangelistria*, a lecture by our esteemed and beloved Presbytera Barbara Metallinos was held, with a success surpassing our every expectation, at the “Annunciation of the *Theotokos*” Spiritual Center (Patron 12, Kolonos, Athens), on Sunday, January 14/27, 2008.

This successful lecture and gathering took place under the aegis of the Holy Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle and the direct responsibility of the St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women's Guild—an official agency for our Metropolis' philanthropic work—, which operates under the presidency of our devout spiritual daughter, the honorable Mrs. Irene Archontoule-Photele.

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His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, introduced this outstanding speaker to a large audience (two-thirds of which were women, and for the most part young) with a brief address entitled: “The God Who Ministers and Ministry to our Brother.”

The God Who Ministers and Ministry to our Brother

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ; light-wrought children of the Church:

Tonight, at this moment, I have the especial joy and honor of welcoming, on behalf of our spiritual family, our beloved and highly-esteemed Presbytera Barbara Metallinos.

Her good reputation, as a philologist, theologian, Principal of the United Arsakeion [a girls' academy] of Psychiko, President of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, and, of course, as wife of the likewise highly-esteemed and multitalented Father George Metallinos [Dean of the School of Theology at the University of Athens], precedes her.

We thus welcome her tonight as a person familiar to us, as a beloved sister in Christ, and, even more so, as a spiritual, mature, and experienced mother, whose address will be for us a *sacred legacy*.

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The St. Philaret the Merciful Guild was founded in 2004, with the blessing and guidance of our Most Reverend Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, for the furtherance of the philanthropic work of our Holy Metropolis.

Upon undertaking my new ecclesiastical ministry, I called upon the prayers of my much-revered Elder and the protection of the Mother of God to bring to fruition a vision that I have had from my youth: **concerted Orthodox volunteerism**, which has been, and continues to be, a **duty** as well as a **view of life**.

All of us who have been vouchsafed to know Him Who is the Incarnation of Love, Hope, and Life, ought, with a *sacrificial attitude*, to rekindle constantly the flame of love, hope, and life in the person of our neighbor.

The deeply moving image of Christ our Savior kneeling and washing the feet of His Disciples—this abyss of the humility of the Ministering God—should keep us watchful and enthusiastic, with humility and contrition of spirit, in our **ministry to our brother**.

The collective nature of this **ministry** has a theological basis, perfectly expressed in the Prayer of the *Anaphora*. The celebrant, standing before the Gifts that have already been Consecrated, to-

gether with the whole Church, in Heaven and on earth, prays with fear and trembling: “*Be mindful O Lord... defend the widows; protect the orphans; deliver the captives; heal the sick; be mindful, O God, of those who are under trial, in mines, in exile, in bitter slavery, in every tribulation, necessity, and misfortune, and all those in need of Thy great compassion....*”

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Our “St. Philaret” Guild also serves, at a direct, practical, and collective level, to bring about prayerful and liturgical care for all of our brothers and sisters in affliction and need.

In its charter, our Guild envisions, as one of its many aims, “the moral and material reinforcement and support of the work of associations and other organizations that pursue similar aims” (Article 3, §3f).

This evening, in the person of our esteemed Presbytera Barbara Metallinos, we welcome, in essence, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, and formalize—if you will allow me so to envision it—the *fraternization of our associations*.

With truly sacred sentiments and with heartfelt prayers that this fraternization might bear abundant fruit in Christ, I ask our esteemed Presbytera to come to the podium to deliver her address on the very interesting topic, “The Rights of the Unborn Child and Maternal Love.”

Thank you!

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Presbytera Barbara Metallinos then delivered her talk on the topic, “The Rights of the Unborn Child and Maternal Love.”

The Rights of the Unborn Child and Maternal Love

VERY few years separate us from the time when the peoples belonging to the United Nations devoted themselves with anxiety and concern to confronting the problems of children who, especially in the wake of the Second World War, were found in wretched living conditions. Thus, in 1959, the United Nations Organization voted for the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and, in 1990, adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The same organization,



indeed, declared December 11 to be “World Day of the Child.” In this Convention, as also in other universal declarations, the term “child” includes the fetus, since beneficial and protective measures are to be taken on behalf of the child from the fetal stage.

Thus, the fourth principle of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child underscores that the “care and protection” to be provided for child and mother “include adequate prenatal and postnatal care.” The eighth principle declares that “the child will, in every case, be among the first to receive protection and attention.”

Furthermore, some of the values and practices that make up the “Culture of Peace,” in accordance with the UNESCO Declaration of 2000, are the following:

1. “Respect for every form of life. Respect for the rights and dignity of every person.”
2. “Non-violence. Rejection of every kind of violence and the attainment of justice by persuasion and understanding.”

In the case of abortion, however, is violence not committed against the most defenseless human being, and is the most sacred and loftiest human right, that of life, not stifled?

What is more, the Declaration of Beijing and the Platform for Action, signed by 180 countries at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), propose strategic measures in twelve key areas. Thus, the fourth section reads: “The confrontation and abolition of every form of violence against women and girls,” and the twelfth section supports “legal protection for girls from the earliest stages of life until full adulthood and the elimination of practices harmful to them.” This Declaration, then, also acknowledges the recognition and protection of the first stage of human life, that is, the fetal stage.

The law in our homeland and in other countries acknowledges the personhood of the fetus and renders it a subject and bearer of civil rights. For example, according to the civil code (Article 1711),

if the conceived fetus is born alive, it has the right of inheritance. Article 1594 of the same civil code—which article, for understandable reasons, was abolished—recognized as protector of the fetus its so-called guardian, who would take measures on behalf of the rights of the unborn child.

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Now, what exactly is a fetus? Does the science of embryology give us the right, immediately following the moment of conception, not to consider the fertilized egg and the as-yet unformed embryo a human being? By no means! How much more so when, already in the second month of pregnancy, all of the organs of the embryo have been formed, “organogenesis” ceases, and the organs simply continue to grow. Thus, the fetal stage, from the moment of conception, constitutes the first and most dynamic phase of human life, especially since, apart from many other factors, it has already received, from the moment of conception, everything constituting what we call inheritability. For this reason, legal science recognizes the rights and takes measures on behalf of the fetus, and medical science continually increases its capabilities to perform therapeutic interventions on the unborn child. Orthodoxy, centuries earlier, proclaimed that man is in “the image of God” from the time of conception, “from the very beginning of conception.”

George Orwell, however, writes somewhere that “political language has been designed to make lies resemble truth and crime to be presented as respectable—both truth and crime to be presented as respectable.” The truth of Orwell’s words is manifestly demonstrated in the practice implemented by the “mighty of this world” with regard to the rights of the unborn child. For, although they recognize the fetus as a person with rights and free-will, nonetheless they pass laws that trample underfoot the loftiest and most sacred right of the fetus: the right to life. Thus, most countries not only do not exhibit “adequate prenatal care” (in accordance with the United Nations declaration), do not respect the fetal form of life, and do not prevent the perpetration of violence against thousands of children (in accordance with the Declaration of UNESCO), but, what is more, by allowing complete freedom to perform abortions—which are subsidized, at that—utterly trample upon the rights of the most

defenseless person, the fetus.

Hence, within the euphemistic language of political-pharisaical speech is revealed the spiritual barrenness of all of these mighty people, who are lacking in the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and who, for the sake of various expediencies, enact laws permitting the death of millions of people even before they see the light of day, while at the same time not allocating time or money for informing the public.

Our own country has also taken part in this deadly practice. Purely for the sake of winning votes, so as to gratify a small portion of the population—primarily women—, and despite strong opposition, on July 3, 1986, abortions were completely legalized, thereby “completing” the previously existing law, which permitted abortions for medical, eugenic, moral (in the case of incest, rape), and psychological reasons. In other words, only the socioeconomic factor was not covered. Thus, in our homeland, the “country of elders,” thousands of Greek children are killed every year by abortion. Law 1609/86, as is only natural, dulls our pliant consciences all the more. And the lack of objective, scientific information on the subject leads to superficial knowledge, which proves to be the worst counselor in such important decisions and the “best alibi” for our egotism and individualism.

Law 1609/86 of the Greek Nation refers, in a language that is utterly euphemistic and pharisaical, to the following: “Technical interruption of pregnancy and protection of the health of the woman...,” which can perfectly legally be performed within the first ten weeks of pregnancy. From its very title, this law, denying every right to the embryo—and, indeed, to life itself; that is, its most precious gift—refers to and protects, in a completely one-sided way, the supposed health of the mother. Has it been scientifically established, though, that abortion guarantees the health of the woman? Non-partisan specialists—such as gynecologists, obstetricians, psychiatrists, and psychologists—do not assure us of such a thing. On the contrary, abortion itself entails a significant amount of risk, and many long-term physical and psychological problems (such as infertility) may arise in a woman following an abortion. Scientists are already researching and confirming the existence of “Post-Abortion Syndrome.”

But this pharisaical language, in presenting only half of the truth,

also uses another euphemistic expression: “interruption of pregnancy.” The word “interruption,” however, is one that brings hope, since one expects the resumption of that which has been interrupted (such as, for example, electricity or water). Abortion, on the other hand, is the irrevocable destruction of the most defenseless human being, whose inaudible cry cannot avert the deadly action against it.

By what logic, then, does the legislator make such a unilateral distinction between two persons—the unborn child and the mother—, such that the supposedly endangered life of the one—the mother—is protected by the annihilation of the other, that is, of the fetus? Thus, instead of morally and materially supporting the Greek family to bring about and preserve life, the State itself officially pays to bring about death to the child and psychological and physical “trauma” to the mother.

Of course, one could object, human, civil law gives one the freedom to perform abortions without making them obligatory. Owing to a lack of information, however, and also to the faith of many that civil law contains what is right and true, many people are set at ease and follow it, which results in the dulling of our consciences in the face of the violent deprivation of the life of the fetus—this most defenseless person, who should also naturally be the most beloved.

Every responsible person, however, and especially every Christian, knows that expediency, weakness, and impermanence slip into human law, which is why it opposes the Divine Law, in accordance with the axiomatic theological rule: “One ought to obey God rather than men.” Thus it is that the Divine Law proclaims that the fetus is a person “from the very beginning of conception,” contrasting the language of truth with the political-pharisaical language—which contrives, once again, according to George Orwell, to make “lies resemble truth and crime to be presented as respectable”—, so that people will not be beguiled. This, of course, is done solely out of love, because the truth does not create obligations; rather it truly frees us: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (St. John 8:32).

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Here, as an antidote to the schizophrenic legislative decisions and the contradictive human practices that destroy life at a personal,



social, and national level—the great enemy of, and threat to, our homeland being nothing other than its frighteningly low birth-rate—various organizations, the Church, and conscientious politicians ought, first of all, to work towards the abolition of Law 1609/86, to make known the scientific facts and the advances of embryology, and, above all, morally and materially to strengthen love of children, underscoring the paternal and, especially, the maternal sentiment.

Motherhood, like fatherhood, is a Divine gift to humankind, since spouses are called upon to continue the creative work of God and, having become co-creators, to grant the greatest gift, that of life, to others. The mother, indeed, to a greater extent than the father, senses her dynamic coöperation in the creation and continuation of life. She feels that being a mother is not her own personal affair; rather, she becomes the hope of humankind. For a mother bears the fetus in her womb and gives it life. The mother is warmth, the mother is nourishment, and the mother is the satisfying condition of the gratification of the fetus' needs and safety. Of course, maternal love is a difficult duty, because it requires selflessness and the ability to give everything and to desire nothing other than the well-being of her beloved. Maternal love is a limitless affirmation of the child and its needs, for which the mother is ready to offer everything, even her own life.

The needs of the child begin at least from the moment of conception. And despite the fact that significant social changes have taken place and that family conditions and customs have undergone alteration, parents nevertheless remain the surest bulwark for the child's even development already from the fetal stage. Above all, the unborn child needs maternal love, which means that the mother's sacrifices

and offering of boundless affection begin from the time of pregnancy. For nine months, the fetus will rely solely on her; for it breathes by her, is nourished by her, and her spiritual powers and mental condition influence it. The mother's every impression influences not only her, but also the child. Her pleasure is also its pleasure, just as her pain is also its pain. Thus, good books, soft music, euphoria, happy moments, and a prayerful disposition all have a positive effect on the fetus. All of her spiritual and cerebral changes and every substance she uses have a positive or negative influence on the unborn child.

Being aware of all of these things, genuine maternal love will turn down things considered to be rights of the modern woman—rights that are purely self-centered, such as sensual pleasure and the denial of every responsibility. This is why a mother does not sacrifice humanity and love for the sake of individualism and self-love, and is not tempted to take away the life of her child. The genuine mother will not be enticed by common phrases such as “It’s my body and I’ll do what I want with it,” or “Women will not put up with the limitation of their rights.” For she knows that the fetus is not her body—nor, indeed, a diseased part of her body to be rejected—, and, secondly, that in claiming her self-centered rights, she would suppress the inalienable right of her own child to come to life. Moreover, to become or to be a mother is not simply one’s own affair, but a social, national, and universal one.

Our times call upon and incite us to serve the mystery of life from the moment of conception. Motherhood is a Divine gift that truly honors woman and is interwoven into a woman’s nature. The siren songs of eudemonism and individualism call upon women to deny their primary calling, that of motherhood. Various feminist movements call upon them to “say yes to production and no to reproduction.” Let us all help woman to serve motherhood. The opportunity you have provided strengthens the young woman, that she might wish to experience motherhood, and for that I congratulate and thank you.

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The speaker, with scientific documentation, underscored, with a serene and mellow dynamism, the hypocrisy and pharisaism—in the case of official international declarations and national laws—towards

the unborn child and the tragic reality of abortions; spoke on “motherhood, like fatherhood, as a Divine gift to humankind,” which “truly honors woman”; and concluded with the exhortation “let us all help woman to serve motherhood.”



• **We would** note that the published text by Presbytera Barbara Metallinos constitutes only the core of her lengthy speech, which broached a multitude of related issues, one of which especially shocked the audience: **Greece is the country with the highest rate of abortions in Europe and the third in the world!**

The speech was followed by an edifying dialogue, during which Presbytera Barbara answered various questions from the audience. Our spiritual child, the pious physician Dr. Loukas Palles, then offered some vivid testimonies and examples from his work as a surgeon on the relationship between pregnancy and breast cancer.

In conclusion, Bishop Cyprian offered Presbytera Barbara—along with everyone’s thanks—a superb Icon of the *Theotokos* Kissing the Divine Infant, a work of the Icon Studio of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Phyle, Attica, which was painted with the prayer and hope that it help future mothers to love their unborn babies. The President of the St. Philaret Guild, Mrs. Irene Archontoule, offered flowers and cordial wishes.

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This was a truly momentous gathering from the standpoint of **concerted Orthodox volunteerism**, which satisfied and filled everyone with enthusiasm; awoke in us a sense of our obligation with regard to the **Protection of Motherhood and the Unborn Child**; offered specific **practical suggestions** to this end for activity at a personal and collective level; and contributed to the awareness that we must ultimately be **Ministers of the Ministering God**.

