Bioethics in Brazil: a decade of achievements
(2002-2012)

With this editorial note we have no intention of exhausting the account of the advances in bioethics in the last decade (2002-2012); our only intention is to highlight some facts and the most significant innovative initiatives.

Most significant bioethics events. We may say that the inaugural event of this decade was the carrying out in our country of the VI World Congress of Bioethics in Brasilia (October 30 to November 3, 2002), which addressed the theme: Bioethics, power and injustice. A joint effort of the Brazilian Society of Bioethics (SBB) and IAB, International Association of Bioethics, and also of a pool of institutions and public and community universities, conducted the largest convention in terms of participation (1352 congressmen, 900 Brazilians and 452 foreigners, coming from 62 different countries) to date in the history of IAB. This event marked the sociopolitical themes of injustice and exclusion of the poor and the developing world in the world history of bioethics. Also in the event’s area, the efforts of national and regional SBB were present with national congresses every two years. Nine national congresses have already happened, the last of which, IX Brazilian Congress of Bioethics, was also held in Brasilia (7-10 September 2011), resuming the theme of the World Congress: Bioethics, power and injustice(s): one decade later. This decade ends with the completion of the 8th International Congress of Clinical Bioethics, addressing the theme Diversity in Clinical Bioethics. It was held in São Paulo (SP), 16-19 May 2012 at São Camilo University Center, with support from SBB and other Brazilian St. Camillus entities.

Education in Bioethics. In 2002, there were in Brazil only a few lato sensu graduation (360 class hours) courses. Today, these courses have significantly increased in several universities. The beginning of four courses of stricto sensu graduate studies, master’s and doctorate in bioethics was an academic advance (São Camilo University Center – 2004 Masters and 2008 doctorate (São Paulo); University of Brasília – 2008 (DF) and Rio de Janeiro – 2009, with an inter institutional program between the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, the State University of Rio and the National School of Public Health (Fiocruz)). Three doctors and 108 masters in bioethics finished their studies at São Camilo University Center (São Paulo-SP) until the moment. The latest bioethics degree program approved by CAPES is the one from the Catholic University of Paraná – October 2012 (Curitiba).

Publications in bioethics. The number of publications in the field of bioethics increased significantly as well as the involvement of numerous national publishers. Some of these publications are translated into Spanish and English. This applies to the publication Ibero-American Bioethics: history and perspectives (Spanish in Santiago (Chile), Portuguese in Brazil and English by Springer, in Amsterdam and London), and the publication of the Latin American Dictionary of Bioethics, sponsored by UNESCO’s regional office for Latin America. In our country, we also highlight the publication of the Bioethics Journal, from the Federal Council of Medicine (1993), the Brazilian Journal of Bioethics, from the Brazilian Society of Bioethics (2005), and Bioethikos Journal, from São Camilo University Center in São Paulo (2007).

Important thematic – a) social control of research with human beings. Throughout this decade, the implementation of social control in the area of research on human beings, with the adoption in 1996 of Resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council / Ministry of Health, remains an extraordinary fact. A Brazilian network of more than 600 ethics in research committees exercises the so called citizenship surveillance; b) end of life ethical issues. The remarkable performance of the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM), with the approval of the new Code of Medical Ethics, which came into
force on April 13, 2010, was an important fact. Among the innovations, emphasis was given to palliative care and to the denial of the practice of dysthanasia on the termination of life. Finally, the approval of advance directives for life was given (1995/2012).

**Discovery of the origin of bioethics and Unesco.** In 2007, we also found out with the help of Hans-Martin Sass (a German man who works at the Kennedy Institute of Bioethics in Washington, DC), that the one who first used the neologism “bioethics” was not Potter in 1970, but Fritz Jahr in 1927 in Germany. Jahr extended the Kantian categorical imperative and proposed the bioethical imperative: “Respect every living being as an end in itself, and treat it, if possible, as such”. In 2005, we enthusiastically welcomed the international achievement of the approval of UNESCO’s historic “Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.” Today, UNESCO Bioethics Network has a prominent role in Latin America, with an emphasis on education in bioethics, with the publication of a digital journal via internet.

**Bioethics National Commission and public policies.** We have the need in our country for a National Bioethics Committee, which, like in more advanced countries, advise the Presidency of the country, the Congress and politicians in issues related to the development of public policies involving bioethics questions. We cannot leave these discussions be dealt by mere politicking of an ideological debate. The discussion by the Supreme Court of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), embryos for research and anencephalic embryos are a clear evidence of a lack of education and culture in bioethics.

We hope that the reading and reflection about the texts in this publication will help us to have a prophetic boldness when implementing actions to change our society based on solidarity, justice and participatory inclusive values.

Leo Pessini*
William Saad Hossne**

---

* Ph.D., Theology/Bioethics. He has done studies in Clinical Pastoral Education and Bioethics at St Luke’s Medical Center. Professor of the *Stricto sensu* Programme in Bioethics (Master Degree and Ph.D.), São Camilo University Center, São Paulo. E-mail: pessini@saocamilo-sp.br
** Physician and Researcher. Emeritus Professor of State University of São Paulo – UNESP, Medical School, campus Botucatu-SP, Brazil. Member of the National Commission of Ethics in Research – CONEP. Member of the International Committee of Bioethics – UNESCO. Coordinator of the *Stricto sensu* Programme in Bioethics (Master Degree and Ph.D.), São Camilo University Center, São Paulo. E-mail: posbioetica@saocamilo-sp.br