

## Reproductive Technologies: Artificial Insemination, In vitro fertilization and Surrogacy

God loves each and every human life no matter the method of a baby's conception. That is, He loves those conceived through the loving embrace of husband and wife, those conceived out of wedlock, those conceived through an act of rape, and those conceived in a petri dish. Nonetheless, obviously, not all acts that lead to the conception of new life are equally moral; not all are in accord with human dignity. Many of the new reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and cloning involve procedures that violate human goods.

Many argue that the Church should not oppose any method that helps married couples fulfill one of the deepest desires of their hearts and one of the defining elements of marriage: that is, having babies. While the Church has approved many modern medical techniques that assist couples in overcoming infertility and hopes that modern medical science will find additional moral means as well, it nonetheless judges that some methods are simply incompatible with the moral parameters surrounding child-bearing. Those moral parameters are that the human dignity of all life must be respected and that the goods of marriage must be respected.

First it must be noted that however natural and good it is that spouses desire children, it cannot be said that they have a "right" to children. Children are a gift from God. God chose to have new life brought forth through the loving embrace of spouses. He wanted life to be the result of an act of love by those committed to loving each other and the life that may be conceived as the result of their loving acts. All human life is in profound need of being loved, and babies are especially in need of being loved by their parents. God's design is to have children lovingly conceived and cared for by loving parents. Many children are denied much that would enhance their upbringing, but we ought to strive to make certain that our actions do not lead to difficulties for the children we bring into this world.

Although it is surely the case that couples seeking to have children by means of modern medical technology are acting out of love for the children they hope to have, not all methods are equally compatible with the love that they feel. The Church expresses great compassion and understanding for the struggles and sorrows of those afflicted by infertility and urges modern sciences to discover and perfect methods that will assist the infertile in a moral fashion.

The principle that the Church uses to distinguish moral from immoral methods is that moral methods assist nature, whereas immoral methods replace or substitute for the conjugal act that should be the source of new life. The justification for this principle is found in the Church's natural law theory of morality which sees God as the author of nature and the human person as a creature who is given the ability to live freely in accord with nature or as one who can violate nature. "Nature," here, does not refer simply to the biological laws of nature; rather it refers to the whole nature of the human person. The institution of marriage is a natural institution in that it meets natural needs of the human person both on the physical and spiritual level. The conjugal act represents the total self-giving of spouses, and since children are the result of and the most incarnational representation of that total self-giving, it is appropriate that children come to be only through an act of conjugal sexual intercourse.

Some of the procedures developed by modern medical science do respect and assist nature. For instance, fertility drugs may help a woman who does not regularly ovulate, release an egg or eggs to be fertilized. Should she become pregnant, the pregnancy is directly the result of an act of sexual intercourse and only indirectly the result of technology. Corrective surgery for blocked fallopian tubes or of anomalies in

the male reproductive organs may also enable those to conceive who have been having difficulty conceiving. In all moral use of reproductive technologies, the procedures simply restore the body to its normal functioning state. Conception is not the direct result of a technical intervention; the technical intervention makes it possible that conception be the direct result of an act of conjugal intercourse, and such is in accord with God's will for the bringing forth of new life.

Some methods, however, violate the unitive meaning of the sexual act. Methods, such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy require the collection of sperm. Generally semen is collected through an act of masturbation, an act that is considered intrinsically immoral. Yet, even were the semen to be able to be collected by a morally permissible means, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy nonetheless require that a technician's skill be substituted for the act of sexual intercourse as the direct cause of the conception of the child. In these methods the child is not a result of the loving union of the spouses but of a technician's skillful manipulation of "reproductive material." For this reason, these methods are considered to be immoral.

One court case demonstrates the confusion of parenthood that comes with some reproductive technologies. This case involved a woman who had had some of her husband's semen frozen. After they divorced, she decided to use some of the semen to have herself impregnated through artificial insemination. After the baby was born, she sued her former husband, the biological father, for child support. He contested claiming that he was not the legal father of the child. The court decided that the lab technician was the legal father since the lab technician was most directly responsible for the impregnation of the woman.

In addition to requiring the immoral act of masturbation and of replacing a technician's skill for the act of sexual intercourse, the above mentioned methods are immoral in other ways. Often the reproductive "material" used in these procedures does not belong to the parents of the child being conceived. That is, sperm from a man other than a woman's husband may be used; ova from a woman other than the woman herself may be used. Such use of "alien" reproductive material violates the sanctity of marriage and of child-bearing, for the child is no longer the result of a loving act of the spouses but is the result of an exchange of genetic material of those who have made no loving commitment to one another.

Indeed, it is possible now for women, married or unmarried, heterosexual or homosexual, to purchase sperm from sperm banks and to select with some specificity what sort of genes they would like their baby to have. There is virtually no oversight of the distribution of the semen. One individual man could be anonymously fathering dozens or hundreds of children through semen donations; such children may be in some danger of marrying a half-brother or sister some day. In a famous legal case, a doctor who worked at an infertility clinic used his own semen and fathered many children with his patients. Women long past natural child-bearing age have had babies through these reproductive technologies. They purchase ova from a female donor and are impregnated through in vitro fertilization.

The bringing forth of a new human life is more properly termed "procreation" than "reproduction". Many modern reproductive technologies treat the child being conceived more as a product and object than as a precious gift from God. Whereas the term "reproduction" suggests that a repeatable product is being produced, the term "procreation" reflects the involvement of God in the act of bringing forth new life and it suggests the unrepeatable uniqueness of each human being. The term "procreation" discloses that spouses are cooperators with God in bringing forth new human life; each

human life is the result of a new creative act of God who supplies a unique, newly created immortal soul for each life conceived.

Many of these techniques do not treat the embryos "produced" in accord with the dignity of a human being. For instance, many reproductive technologies involve the fertilization of several embryos and selective implantation of only a few. The unselected embryos are either "disposed of" or frozen for future "use." Clearly any procedure that involves the creation of new life that is going to be "disposed of" or "used" is not compatible with innate human dignity. All current techniques for in vitro fertilization involve the creation of excess embryos. These procedures allow for selective termination of life carrying undesirable genetic material. Some individuals who know themselves to be carriers of defective genetic material, use in vitro fertilization rather than an act of sexual intercourse to conceive their children precisely so that they can have the conceptus examined for genetic anomalies, and if defective, have it discarded.

Surrogacy is a "reproductive technology" that involves a woman carrying a child for another woman, who may have fertility problems, health problems, or some other reason for not wanting to carry a child to term. The woman will often be fertilized by artificial methods with the sperm of the other woman's husband or will be impregnated with the conceptus produced from the woman's ova and her husband's sperm through in vitro fertilization. This method shares all the disvalues of artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization and a few more. The surrogate is generally paid for her services, generally at much less than the minimum wage and thus the practice stands to exploit poor women. Indeed, the practice of surrogacy verges closely on the practice of baby-selling; a contract is signed before hand. Again, the baby conceived is often treated like a product; many contracts require amniocentesis and abortion should the baby be deformed in some fashion. Famous court cases have confirmed the view that women bond strongly with the babies in their wombs and have difficulty abiding by the terms of a contract that requires them to give the baby away.

Cloning is another procedure that creates a new human life outside of the act of conjugal sexual intercourse. The nucleus of a mature but unfertilized egg is removed from the woman and replaced with a nucleus obtained from a specialized somatic cell of an adult organism. An unlimited number of genetically identical individuals could be produced through this process. It is not yet perfected for human beings but seems within the realm of possibility. In addition to many of the disvalues mentioned above, cloning would open up another Pandora's box of possibilities that will be difficult if not impossible to control. It will be possible to create clones of individuals who will then have a ready supply of "spare parts." It will be possible to clone those we think have special talents or beauty and create for ourselves a kind of a perfect society.

These reproductive technologies along with abortion have served to diminish the value of human life greatly. At one time the medical profession expressed great horror at the Nazi regime for experimentation done on human beings, particularly on embryos. Government funding is now provided for experimentation on the excess embryos produced through in vitro fertilization, all in the name of science. The government has stopped short of permitting funding of projects that involve the creation of embryos for the express purpose of experimentation but has not made the procedure itself illegal.

Medical "advances" such as abortion, contraception, and the new reproductive technologies all developed in the name of compassion, have made it possible to separate sexuality and baby-making. But now we find ourselves now in a "Brave, New World" where sexuality and child-bearing are far removed from their natural and proper meaning and human life itself has come to have little value in the eyes of many.

Biblio:

CCC 2373-2377

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