

Church's teaching on IVF

Donum Vitae - CDF 1987

God, who is love and life, has inscribed on man and woman the call to a special participation in his mystery of personal communion and in his work as Creator and Father. For this reason, marriage possesses specific goods and values of union and procreation, incomparably superior to those of the lower forms of life. These values and meanings of a personal order determine, on the moral level, the meaning and limits of artificial interventions on procreation and the origin of human life. Such procedures are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial; as such they bear witness to the possibilities of medicine, but they must be morally valued because of their relationship to the dignity of the human person, called to correspond to the divine vocation to the gift of love and the gift of life.

Any intervention on the human body does not only affect the tissues, organs and functions; it also affects, at various levels, the person himself; it therefore carries a moral meaning and responsibility, perhaps implicitly, but in a real way.

The Church has great compassion for those who suffer from infertility. Out of love for all human life and respect for the integrity of marital relations, however, the Church teaches that some means of trying to achieve pregnancy are not licit. Some of these means actually involve the taking of innocent human life, or treating human life as a means toward an end or a "manufactured product." They do violence to the dignity of the human person.

Artificial procreation" or "artificial insemination" is understood here to mean the various technical procedures aimed at achieving the conception of a human being by a means other than the sexual union of a man and a woman. This instruction deals with the fertilisation of the ovum in a test tube (in vitro fertilisation) and artificial insemination by transferring the collected sperm into the genital tract of the woman.

The life of every human being must be respected absolutely from the very moment of conception, because man is the only creature on earth that God has "willed for himself", and the spiritual soul of every human being is "immediately created" by God; his whole being bears the image of the Creator. Human life is sacred because from its very beginning it involves "the creative action of God" and remains always in a special relationship with the Creator, its only end. God alone is Lord of life from its beginning to its end: no one, under any circumstances, can claim the right to directly kill an innocent human being.

The human being must be respected - as a person - from the very first moment of his or her existence. Declaration on procured abortion (CDF - 1974): From the moment the ovum is fertilised, a new life is inaugurated which is neither that of the father nor that of the mother, but that of a new human being who develops by himself. It will never become human if it has not been human since then.

The human being must be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception and, therefore, from that very moment, the rights of the person must be recognised, principally the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life.

In the common practice of in vitro fertilisation, not all embryos are transferred into the woman's body; some are destroyed. The Church, in the same way that she condemns induced abortion, also forbids the violation of the life of these human beings. It is necessary to denounce the particular gravity of the deliberate destruction of human embryos obtained "in vitro" for the sole purpose of research, whether they are obtained by artificial fertilisation or by "twin fission". By behaving in this way, researcher usurps the place of God and, even if he is not aware of it, makes himself master of the destiny of others, since he arbitrarily determines who he will allow to live and who he will send to death, eliminating defenceless human beings.

The very freezing of embryos, even if carried out to keep the embryo alive - cryopreservation - is an offence to the respect due to human beings, in that it exposes them to serious risks of death or damage to their physical integrity, deprives them at least temporarily of maternal care and gestation, and places them in a situation susceptible to further injury and manipulation.

The procreation of a new person, in which man and woman collaborate in the power of the Creator, must be the fruit and the sign of the mutual self-giving of the spouses, of their love and their fidelity.³⁴ The fidelity of the spouses, in the unity of marriage, entails mutual respect for their right to become father and mother exclusively through each other. The fidelity of the spouses, in the unity of marriage, entails mutual respect for their right to become father and mother exclusively through each other.

Through IVFET and heterologous artificial insemination, human conception is obtained through the union of gametes from at least one donor other than the spouses who are united in marriage. Heterologous artificial insemination is contrary to the unity of marriage, to the dignity of the spouses, to the proper vocation of parents and to the right of children to be conceived and brought into the world in marriage and by marriage.

Homologous artificial insemination within marriage is not admissible, except in cases where the technical means does not replace the conjugal act, but is a facilitation and financial aid for the latter to achieve its natural purpose.

Surrogacy is not permissible for the same reasons that lead to the rejection of heterologous artificial fertilisation: it is in fact contrary to the unity of marriage and to the dignity of the procreation of the human person.

Surrogate motherhood represents an objective offence against the obligations of maternal love, conjugal fidelity and responsible motherhood; it offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, gestated, brought into the world and educated by the parents themselves; it establishes, to the detriment of the family, a division between the physical, psychological and moral elements that constitute it.

From USCCB website

In vitro fertilisation brings about new life in a petri dish. Children engendered through IVF are sometimes known as "test tube babies." Several eggs are aspirated from the woman's ovary after she has taken a fertility drug which causes a number of eggs to mature at the same time. Semen is collected from the man, usually through masturbation. The egg and sperm are ultimately joined in a glass dish, where conception takes place and the new life is allowed to develop for several days. In the simplest case, embryos are then transferred to the mother's womb in the hope that one will survive to term.

To avoid the problems of carrying and rearing "too many" babies after several have been implanted, doctors sometimes engage in something euphemistically called "fetal reduction" or "selective reduction." Here they monitor the babies in utero to see if any have defects or are judged to be not as healthy as the others. Then they eliminate those "less desirable" babies by filling a syringe with potassium chloride, manoeuvring the needle toward the "selected" baby in the womb with the aid of ultrasound, and then thrusting the needle into the baby's heart. The potassium chloride kills the baby within minutes, and he or she is expelled as a "miscarriage." If it cannot be determined that one baby is less healthy than the others, some doctors simply eliminate the baby or babies who are easiest to reach. Again we see the unspeakable diminishing of the value of human life which can arise from this procedure.

CCC (2377, 2399) - 1991

Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilisation) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another, but one that "entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children." "Under the moral aspect procreation is deprived of its proper perfection when it is not willed as the fruit of the conjugal act, that is to say, of the specific act of the spouses' union Only respect for the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and respect for the unity of the human being make possible procreation in conformity with the dignity of the person."

Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means.

Dignitas Infinita - DDF 2024

Surrogacy

48. The Church also takes a stand against the practice of surrogacy, through which the immensely worthy child becomes a mere object. On this point, Pope Francis's words have a singular clarity: "The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking. In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs. A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally."

49. First and foremost, the practice of surrogacy violates the dignity of the child. Indeed, every child possesses an intangible dignity that is clearly expressed—albeit in a unique and differentiated way—at every stage of his or her life: from the moment of conception, at birth, growing up as a boy or girl, and becoming an adult. Because of this unalienable dignity, the child has the right to have a fully human (and not artificially induced) origin and to receive the gift of a life that manifests both the dignity of the giver and that of the receiver. Moreover, acknowledging the dignity of the human person also entails recognising every dimension of the dignity of the conjugal union and of human procreation. Considering this, the legitimate desire to have a child cannot be transformed into a "right to a child" that fails to respect the dignity of that child as the recipient of the gift of life.

50. Surrogacy also violates the dignity of the woman, whether she is coerced into it or chooses to subject herself to it freely. For, in this practice, the woman is detached from the child growing in her and becomes a mere means subservient to the arbitrary gain or desire of others. This contrasts in every way with the fundamental dignity of every human being and with each person's right to be recognised always individually and never as an instrument for another.