



# Reproductive Technology:

The Catholic Perspective on Procreative Rights and Ethics:  
What is the greater moral good?

## Introduction

In July of 2006 I was attending Mount Mary College in South Dakota. It is a small Catholic institution offering undergraduate as well as graduate programs in a variety of disciplines. At the time they offered a Master's program in Pastoral Ministry in a hybrid format. We attended classes on the campus for two weeks each term, then finished our studies remotely from home. One of the classes I attended was Perspectives on Marriage and Family. What follows is the final paper for that course. It was entitled "Laboratory Generation of Human Life," and posed the question: "With respect to the controversy over homologous (between husband and wife) *in vitro* fertilization, which opinion represents the greatest moral good?"

I must admit it was a fascinating topic, one that required a great deal of research. I remember getting so involved in the research part that I almost missed the due date for the writing part. I used the format learned from our class on Moral Theology by discussing both sides of the issue and then concluding with what I personally determined as the greatest moral good. It is a simplified utilitarian view of ethics that defines an act as "good" when its consequences bring the greatest good or happiness to the greatest number of people. I can see Mr. Spock now, raising one eyebrow and saying, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, and the one." The issue addressed in this paper goes deeper than that.

The Catholic Church stands alone in its complete opposition to reproductive technology. Other Christian faith traditions are more open to the subject. Even Jewish and Islamic law allow the practice provided the source of the sperm, ovum, and uterus comes from a legally married couple during the span of their marriage. So, why is the Catholic Church so opposed to assisted reproductive technology? The subject of the whys and why nots will be discussed in the pages that follow.

Remember, the original paper was written on 2006. Things have changed since then and I updated the statistics where they were available. I will make one confession. Attending a Catholic College with Catholic priests and theologians as instructors, you learned quickly to slant your conclusions toward the Catholic world view. I was a new convert at the time, fresh off the confirmation altar. Most of my adult life was spent as a Southern Baptist even though I was raised in the Catholic Church as a child. It was later in life, nearing the age of sixty, that I found my way back to the Catholic Church. After I answered the call to the priesthood my

journey at Mount Marty began. I learned quickly that straying from the Catholic realm of thought would cost me in lower grades. So, my original conclusion in this paper followed the Catholic line: *“God did not intend for humans to be made in laboratories as a product of reproductive technology. Therefore, in vitro fertilization, whether heterologous or homologous, is not The Natural Way: it is morally wrong.”*

In the eighteen years since, my world view has change. At eighty years old, freed from the confines of youth and restricted thought, my viewpoint on assisted reproductive technology has also changed, even broadened. Therefore, while the question posed by this paper remains the same with respect to reproductive technology (What is the greater moral good? What is the moral truth?), my ultimate conclusion has changed and was rewritten.

Enjoy! ... Rev. Jack

*“In the year 6565  
You won't need no husband, won't need no wife  
You'll pick your son, pick your daughter too  
From the bottom of a long glass tube”*

In this verse from the 1969 #1 hit, “In the Year 2525 (Exordium and Terminus),” by Zager and Evans, are the almost prophetic words describing a futuristic technology that, in the end, would not wait until the year 6565 to be developed. The song, originally written in 1964 by Evans, traces the history of humankind from the beginning (Exordium) to its termination or end (Terminus), using a “nightmarish vision of the future, as man’s technological inventions gradually dehumanizes him.”<sup>1</sup> The advancement described in this song verse, the laboratory generation of human life, would be discovered eight years later. Long before 6565, millions of sons and daughters would be conceived “*at the bottom of a long glass tube.*”

Lesley and John Brown tried for nine years to conceive a child without success. It was determined that the problem existed because Lesley’s fallopian tubes were blocked. On November 10, 1977, she underwent an experimental procedure, which up until then, had yet to be successful. At 11:47 PM, on July 28, 1978, through a planned caesarean section, Louise Joy Brown was born.<sup>2</sup> She became the first baby conceived through in vitro fertilization (IVF): the world’s very first test tube baby. A few years after Louise’s birth, the Brown family welcomed another girl named Natalie. She was conceived through the same process (in vitro fertilization). Thanks to reproduction technology, the once childless marriage was now a complete family of four.

In 2003, twenty-five years after her birth, Louise Brown celebrated the occasion with hundreds of other IVF babies. By then, over a million children had been conceived and born worldwide through this once experimental process (BBC News). “IVF gives millions a leap of hope,” Simon Jenkins wrote in the London Times. “This is what science is for the extension of human happiness through choice.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, IVF represents one of the major treatments for infertility, often achieving success when other methods of actualizing conception have failed. Success rates vary according to a woman’s age. Data from the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology on success rates for IVF

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.soundclick.com/music/songInfo.cfm?songID=10537955>

<sup>2</sup> Hutchinson, Martin (24 July 2003). "I helped deliver Louise". *BBC News*. Retrieved 9 August 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “In Vitro Fertilization” by Helen Hunt, The Linacre Centre of Health Care Ethics, [www.linacre.org](http://www.linacre.org)

states that for women under thirty-five, the percentage of live births using the patient's own eggs for a singleton (one child) is 51%. For women ages 35-37, the IVF success rate is 38.3%. For women ages 38-40, the percentage drops to 25.1%, and for women 41-42, it is 12.7%. For women older than forty-two, the IVF success rate is 4.1% for a singleton birth using the patient's eggs.

In vitro fertilization itself is a simple procedure, involving a four-step process; Ovulation induction, egg retrieval, fertilization, and embryo transfer. First, hormonal products are injected into the woman to stimulate follicle growth. Technicians utilize ultrasound and blood tests determine when ovulation is about to occur. Second, either a laparoscopically (which requires small insertions in the abdominal wall that allows three instruments to be inserted: scope, ovary grasping device & hollow needle to capture the ova) or vaginal ultrasound technique is applied (probe is inserted into the proper area and a sheathed hollow needle is inserted. Guided by a monitor, the needle passes through the vaginal wall into the ovary), the eggs are removed. The “harvested” ova are then sent to the lab, treated, and placed in a special fluid. Third, actual fertilization takes place in a petri dish. Finally, several fertilized ova (usually four to six) are inserted into the uterus.<sup>4</sup> (“In Vitro Fertilization,” Fr. Peter Beaulieu, M. A., S.T.L., published in bulletins in The Chapel of Our Lady of Providence in 2000 and 2001). Once the process is complete, pregnancy can be verified within a few weeks.

Although a simple procedure, IVF is not an inexpensive process. Each IVF cycle can cost \$15,000 to \$30,000, and total at least \$60,000 to achieve pregnancy.<sup>5</sup> There are also abuses. “Sperm and eggs are being bought and sold and wombs are being rented,” Bishop Sean P. O’Malley wrote in an article for Catholic Culture.<sup>6</sup> At the time eggs (ova) were typically priced at \$6,500, and sperm at \$1,800. Surrogate motherhood costs range from \$100,000 to upwards of \$200,000. With inflation and demand, those prices have easily doubled or tripled by today’s standards. “In California,” the article continues, “there is a Nobel Prize Winner’s sperm bank where someone can purchase “genius sperm” in the first step towards the

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<sup>4</sup> “In Vitro Fertilization,” Fr. Peter Beaulieu, M. A., S.T.L., published in bulletins in The Chapel of Our Lady of Providence in 2000 and 2001

<sup>5</sup> “The Technical Child: In Vitro Fertilization and the Personal Subject,” by Kathleen Curran Sweeney, Life & Liberty Ministries, 1/8/2005

<sup>6</sup> “In Vitro Fertilization: Ethical Implications and Alternatives, Trinity Communications, 2006

designer baby. Anyone who has enough money can contract for the production of human beings according to the desired specifications.”

A moral controversy over IVF exists. For Catholics, two prominent documents present a united front in condemning in vitro fertilization as morally unacceptable. Although it did not specifically mention the technology, the central emphasis of Pope Paul VI’s Encyclical “*Humanae vitae*” in 1968 was that “there is an unbreakable bond established by God, which man is not permitted to break on his own initiative, between its unitive meaning and the procreative meaning” (*Humanae vitae* no. 12). IVF separates “baby making” from “love making” (May page 85) and therefore violates the church teaching toward this “unbreakable bond.” While Pope Paul’s work was primarily concerned with the issue of contraception, his teaching played a vital role in “*Donum vitae*,” the 1987 “Instruction on Respect for Human Life and its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation.” The “Instruction” deals directly with the moral issues surrounding reproductive technology.

The controversy is two-fold. First, restrictions on the generation of children through the use of reproduction technology are regarded by a growing majority as “an infringement” on individual “reproductive rights.”<sup>7</sup> May (page 86 footnote) identifies “affluent Western democracies such as the United States,” as more “favorably disposed to the use of heterologous insemination and fertilization to help a childless couple have a baby.” According to May, this acceptance is prevalent in societies “where contraception has become a way of life.” Second, the “Instruction” identifies both heterologous and homologous in vitro fertilization as morally wrong. Heterologous IVF refers to use of donor elements (sperm, eggs, or wombs) provided by individuals who are often anonymous. The moral wrong in this procedure is clear. Use of donor elements is “contrary to the unity of marriage, to the dignity of spouses, to the vocation proper to parents, and the child’s right to be conceived and brought into the world in marriage and through marriage” (May, page 86). In her article already cited, Helen Hunt writes about heterologous IVF in saying, “Parents need no longer initiate together the process of generating children. Children may now be conceived by individuals who will never meet their children or each other.” She concludes, that through this process, “there is no commitment to either the child or the other parent.” May compares heterologous insemination to having an affair after marriage (page 87). “To give themselves to another in

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<sup>7</sup> “In Vitro Fertilization” by Helen Hunt, The Linacre Centre of Health Care Ethics, [www.linacre.org](http://www.linacre.org)

sexual union,” May writes, “they dishonor their marital covenant by freely choosing to exercise their procreative powers with someone other than their spouse, the person to whom they have given themselves, including their power to procreate, “forswearing all others.”

In homologous IVF, however, where the donors are spouses, the moral implications are less perceptible. Many Catholics, including some Catholic theologians, question the moral wrong in an infertile married couple seeking to use technology as a treatment for their inability to foster children in a normal manner. Especially, when they themselves are the donors, partners in a committed marital relationship, and willing participants in the process. What is the greater moral good in what May calls the “simple case” (May, page 87)? To answer this question, the arguments both for and against homologous in vitro fertilization must first be explored. Only after analyzing both arguments is it possible to form a supportable opinion on the issue.

May (page 87) points out that many of the same critics of heterologous IVF, both Catholic and non-Catholic, consider homologous IVF, the “simple case,” in a different light. In this process, there is no use of third-party elements, and “the child conceived is genetically the child of husband and wife, who are and will remain the parents.” Here, moral arguments directed toward heterologous IVF, such as producing, freezing, or making excess embryos the objects of medical experimentation, do not apply. Nor is there the need to use masturbation, “judged intrinsically immoral by the Catholic Magisterium,” to obtain the father’s sperm. Nonmasturbatory methods are available for sperm retrieval. In another opinion, Richard A. McCormick<sup>8</sup> writes, “Obtaining sperm by masturbation does not present a formidable obstacle because so many theologians regard that as a different human action from the type of masturbation rejected as ipsation or self-petting” (McCormick page 337). Proponents insist, that in this “simple case,” the intent of the couple supports the legitimacy of the process. “There is, apparently,” May writes (page 87), “only the intent to use modern technology as a means of helping a married couple, unable either by reason of the wife’s blocked fallopian tubes or the husband’s low sperm production or other causes, to have a child of their own and give it a home where it can take and grow under the loving tutelage of its own parents.

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<sup>8</sup> McCormick, Richard A. *The Critical Calling, Reflections on Moral Dilemmas since Vatican II*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989

Pivotal in considering the moral legitimacy of homologous IVF is the “inseparability principle” (May page 89), which was the heart of *Humanae vitae*, and carried over into the “Instruction.” According to the line of reasoning found in both documents, “it is morally wrong for a married couple to generate human life outside the marital act, because to do so is to choose to sever the bond between the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act” (May, page 89). McCormick, and others, disagree, and regard homologous in vitro fertilization “not as a replacement for sexual intercourse, but as a help to it, a kind of extension or completion of it” (McCormick page 349). In this, “the child generated can still be regarded as the “fruit” of the spouses’ love” (May page 97). McCormick concludes that there is “no insuperable theological obstacle” to the “simple case,”<sup>9</sup> stating the “inseparability principle must promote the person “integrally and adequately considered.” When it becomes an obstacle to that promotion, it loses its normative force” (McCormick page 340).

What is the moral good in supporting the use of homologous in vitro fertilization? It is a trade-off. Any inherent moral disadvantages, real or perceived, of homologous IVF are “clearly counterbalanced by the greater good of new human lives and the fulfillment of the desire for children of couples who otherwise cannot have them” (May page 97).

Following the publication of the “Instruction” in 1987, Joseph Boyle, Jr., wrote “An Introduction to the Vatican Instructions on Reproductive Technology.”<sup>10</sup> Within his work, Boyle presents a five-point summary expressing the underlying principles of the Instruction’s teachings. “First,” Boyle writes, “God makes human individuals in His own image and likeness, and He is directly involved in the coming-to-be of each new person. Second, the human person is one being, bodily as well as spiritual, so bodily life and sexuality may not be treated as mere means to more fundamental purposes. Third, every living human individual, from the moment of conception, should be treated with the full respect due to a person and so is inviolable. A human person is always a he or she, and I or a you, never an object, a mere something. Fourth, sexual activity and procreation can be morally good only if they are part of marital intercourse. Fifth, in marital intercourse, love-making and life-giving should not be separated.”

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<sup>9</sup> McCormick uses the term “Standard IVF”

<sup>10</sup> *Linacre Quarterly*, 55, July of 1988



The “Instruction” itself, as summarized in Boyle’s work, presents a strong and consistent argument against the moral legitimacy of homologous, or any form of in vitro fertilization. First, God is not “directly involved in the coming-to-be.” With IVF, the lab technician “has thus become the principal cause of generation, acting through the instrumental forces of sperm and ovum” (May page 87).<sup>11</sup> Second, IVF is a “means” to obtain a “more fundamental” purpose. IVF production of babies is “inconsistent with and so impedes the communion of persons endowed with equal dignity which is appropriate to any interpersonal relationship. It is the choice of a bad means to a good end” (May page 98). Third, the personhood of the IVF baby at “the moment of conception” is a product, an “object,” a “something.” A child is not “owed” to anyone; it is a gift. “The supreme gift of marriage” is a human person” (CCC 2378). Fourth, McCormick’s claim that in vitro fertilization is an “extension” of, and not a “substitute” for the marital act “is simply contrary to fact” (May page 98). Through homologous IVF, “the generation of a human person is objectively deprived of its proper perfection, namely, that of being the result and fruit of a conjugal act in which the spouses can become “cooperators with God for giving life to a new person” (May page 90). Lastly, in vitro fertilization, whether heterologous or homologous, physically separates the “love-making” and “life-giving” aspects of marital intercourse. In using IVF, a married couple dissociates “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” (CCC 2377). A child has the right “to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents” (CCC 2378).

The Catholic Church has been consistent in its teaching since the issue of artificial insemination first became a question in 1987. The Holy Office was asked, “May artificial fecundation<sup>12</sup> of a woman be done? The answer: “It is not permissible” (McCormick page 333). From the beginning, God intended new human beings to be “begotten, not made.” Begotten, as in “generated by procreation,”<sup>13</sup> through the marital act: “a unique human act expressive of the marital union of husbands and wives and open to the generation of new human beings” (May page 99). God did not intend for humans to be made in laboratories as a product of reproductive technology. If this is true,

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<sup>11</sup> May is quoting Benedict Ashley, O.P. “The Chill Factor in Moral Theology,” *Linacre Quarterly* 57, no. 4, November 1990

<sup>12</sup> The act of fertilizing; fertilization

<sup>13</sup> WordNet ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University

in vitro fertilization, whether heterologous or homologous, is therefore morally wrong.

## **Conclusion**

As previously noted, to answer the original question, the arguments both for and against homologous in vitro fertilization must first be explored. Only after analyzing both arguments is it possible to form a supportable opinion on the issue. Through this paper, I believe that has been accomplished. So, what is the greater moral good? What is the moral truth?

But what is the greater moral good in the “simple case?” To form an opinion, we must first consider the following questions:

- Is homologous in vitro fertilization morally wrong, even if the “intent” of the infertile married couple is to use reproductive technology as a treatment for their inability to foster children in a normal manner?
- Is it an acceptable moral trade-off, with any inherent moral disadvantages, real or perceived, “clearly counterbalanced by the greater good of new human lives and the fulfillment of the desire for children of couples who otherwise cannot have them?” Or is all in vitro fertilization, whether heterologous or homologous, morally wrong?
- Does reproduction technology exclude God’s direct involvement in the process of “coming-to-be?”
- Does reproduction technology represent a “choice of a bad means to a good end?”
- Are babies turned into a product, an “object,” a “something?”
- Is IVF an “extension” of, and not a “substitute” for the marital act? Or is the human person “objectively deprived of its proper perfection, namely, that of being the result and fruit of a conjugal act in which the spouses can become “cooperators with God for giving life to a new person?”
- Does in vitro fertilization, whether heterologous or homologous, physically separate the “love-making” and “life-giving:” the sexual act from the procreative act in marital intercourse?

The Catholic Church has consistently opposed surrogacy, in vitro fertilization, and abortion on the grounds that they violate natural law.<sup>14</sup> “At every moment of its existence,” Pope Francis stated in his “State of the World” address to members of the Diplomatic Corps,<sup>15</sup> “human life must be preserved and defended.” The Catholic Church has long opposed vitro fertilization because it depersonalizes conception and disposes of some embryos, which is the equivalent to abortion.

The position of the Catholic Church regarding assisted reproduction follows the proclamation issued in 1956 by Pope Pius XII who defined artificial fecundation as immoral and illegal, because it separates procreation and sexual normal function.<sup>16</sup> These views were reinforced by Pope Paul VI in 1968 and again in the report issued by the Roman Catholic Church in 1987<sup>17</sup> entitled “Respect for Human Life and the Dignity of Procreation” which stated that “Children are a gift and a blessing from God and that although science makes some things possible it does not make them right. Research must continue into the causes of infertility, but the morality of these should be carefully considered.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, all forms of assisted reproduction and surrogate motherhood are not accepted. Moreover, the Catholic Church offers its respect and protection to the human being starting with its first seconds of existence; it therefore considers the zygote, pre-embryo, embryo, and fetus as persons and strongly disapproves research on embryos, cryopreservation<sup>19</sup> and abortion.<sup>20</sup>

Catholic doctrine declares that God intended human beings to be “begotten, not made.” Begotten<sup>21</sup> through the marital act, which May describes as “a unique human act expressive of the marital union of husbands and wives and open to the generation of new human beings.” God did not intend for humans to be made in laboratories as a product of reproductive technology. Therefore, in vitro fertilization, whether

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<sup>14</sup> “The Conversation,” a podcast published January 10, 2024, 8:30am EST, co-hosted by Daniel Merino

<sup>15</sup> The Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See at the Apostolic Palace on January 8, 2024, in Vatican City.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Pius XII Disclosure to those taking part in the Second Naples World Congress on Fertility and Human Sterility.

<sup>17</sup> Roman Catholic Church. *Report entitled “Respect for Human Life and the Dignity of Procreation”* 1987

<sup>18</sup> Paul . Rome: Vatican; 1968. “*Humanae Vitae*: Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Regulation of Birth, sec 12”

<sup>19</sup> Cryopreservation is a process that preserves organelles, cells, tissues, or any other biological constructs by cooling the samples to very low temperatures.

<sup>20</sup> Abou-Abdallah M. The Vatican view of human procreation. In: Rizk Botros, Garcia-Velasco Juan, Sallam Hassan, Makrigiannakis Antonis. editors, editors. *Infertility and Assisted Reproduction*. Cambridge University Press; 2008. pp. 741–746.

<sup>21</sup> Something is begotten when it's been generated by procreation — in other words, it's been fathered.

heterologous or homologous, is not The Natural Way, and is therefore morally wrong.

What about Judaism? Is reproduction technology permitted? In Rabbinic Judaism,<sup>22</sup> infertility was considered a serious issue, as having children was seen as a central aspect of fulfilling the commandment to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).

According to Jewish law, a man was permitted to divorce his wife if she were infertile and could not bear him children. However, this was not the preferred solution, and many rabbinic authorities discouraged such divorces. Instead, various remedies and treatments were prescribed to help couples conceive.

One such remedy was the use of medicinal herbs and other natural treatments, which were believed to increase fertility. Additionally, the Talmud records several prayers and rituals that were used to invoke divine intervention and aid in conception.

If these measures did not work, adoption was also considered a valid option for couples who were unable to conceive naturally. However, adoption was only permitted under certain conditions, and the child was required to be raised as if they were the biological child of the adoptive parents.

Overall, Rabbinic Judaism recognized infertility as a significant challenge for couples seeking to fulfill the commandment to have children and various solutions were prescribed to help overcome this difficulty.<sup>23</sup>

Current Jewish views on modern reproductive technology issues are therefore readily deducible. According to the Talmud, the soul does not enter the embryo until 40 days after conception. Furthermore, we all have an obligation to have offspring and to “be fruitful and multiply.” IVF is absolutely obligatory when it is medically indicated in order for a couple to have children. It is not just allowable, but it is obligatory. Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) represents no moral or ethical risk because the soul has not yet entered the embryo. Selective reduction of a multiple pregnancy is acceptable if its goal is to enhance the possibility of life. Embryo research to promote life is, therefore, acceptable. Not only is

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<sup>22</sup> Rabbinic Judaism has its roots in the Pharisaic school of Second Temple Judaism and is based on the belief that Moses at Mount Sinai received both the Written Torah (Torah she-be-Khetav) and the Oral Torah (Torah she-be-al Peh) from God. The Oral Torah, transmitted orally, explains the Written Torah.

<sup>23</sup> Audie Dewey, Health, Beauty & Relationship Expert, Posted in Quora.com

therapeutic cloning acceptable but it is an obligation to do any research which can enhance and promote life-saving treatment such as stem cell and cellular replacement therapy. In orthodox Judaism, which is otherwise a “right to life” and anti-abortion religion, the early embryo does not yet have a soul and so is *not* yet a person. Nonetheless it cannot be just discarded for no reason, because it is a step toward the commandment “be fruitful and multiply.” But it would not be considered murder to utilize an early embryo for research that might eventually save lives.<sup>24</sup>

When the husband's sperm and the wife's eggs are used, there is general rabbinical agreement that in-vitro fertilization is permissible in accordance with Jewish law.<sup>25</sup> For Israeli couples, Israel provides free IVF for the first two children up to age 45, at the discretion of the medical team and insurance, which has helped make the country a major world hub for the procedure.<sup>26</sup>

The attitude toward reproduction technology varies among other Christian groups. Most Protestant churches accept traditional treatment of infertility: assisted reproductive technologies are partially accepted only when the gametes are from married couple and when the procedure avoids damage to the pre-embryo. Sperm donation and oocyte donation are prohibited.

The Anglican Church is the state religion of the United Kingdom. Anglicanism spread as the British colonists settled in North and South America, Africa, and Asia. Anglicans often view themselves as a bridge church between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Assisted reproduction technology was developed in the United Kingdom and Australia, where the Anglican Church prevails. The Anglican Church is more liberal on the use of IVF/ET and allows semen collection by masturbation for artificial insemination by the husband for IVF, but it forbids the use of gamete<sup>27</sup> donor, semen, and oocyte from a third party. Gamete donation and surrogacy are prohibited.

What about the issue of this term, the “Natural Law.” The Natural Law is defined by the Catholic Encyclopedia as “the rule of conduct which is prescribed to us by the Creator in the constitution of the nature with which

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<sup>24</sup> “Judaism, and Reproductive Technology,” by Sherman J. Silber, article published in The National Library of Medicine, (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>)

<sup>25</sup> “Religious Attitudes to Fertility: A Jewish View,” article published 12/12/2018 in Fertility Plus, by Roy Humburg, Fatima Husain, Anit Cudi, Mark Brincat, and Amit Shah.

<sup>26</sup> “Doing Fertility Treatments in Israel: Pros and Cons,” Haaretz | Science & Health, by Amy Klein, March 9, 2015

<sup>27</sup> A gamete is a reproductive cell of an animal or plant. In animals, female gametes are called ova or egg cells, and male gametes are called sperm.

He has endowed us.” It goes on to state that “in any being the changes due to necessary causes are called natural, whereas those produced by intentional human activity are called artificial.” In contrast the CCC states that the natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern (to be able to see, recognize, understand, or decide something)<sup>28</sup> by reason the good and the evil, the truth, and the lie: The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin.<sup>29</sup>

Can you see the contradiction here? While the Catholic Encyclopedia clearly states the Natural Law is “prescribed to us by the Creator,” the CCC indicates that the Natural Law is “written and engraved in the soul of each and every man.” The Encyclopedia states that anything “produced by intentional human activity are called artificial,” but the CCC puts the ability to “discern by reason the good and evil” on humankind.

Confused? It sounds to me like the definition of the Natural Law is that it was ordained by God, but God placed the decision-making process on you and me when it comes to moral issues. After weighing both sides carefully regarding the issues surrounding in vitro fertilization, it is ultimately up to us to decide what is the greater good and what is the truth that is applied to our situation. Why? Because we were made in the “image and likeness of God”<sup>30</sup> and were given an inherent moral compass to guide us in the discernment and making of those decisions.

I am not saying that there is no right or wrong answer. What I believe is the right or wrong of the answer is something that each one of us must discern for ourselves and our situation. God “engraved” on our very soul the ability to make those decisions and God expects us to cultivate correct moral principles within ourselves, to God’s glory and honor.

In closing I would like to share some final thoughts.

- God “is” involved in all things in heaven and on earth. Humankind may place the sperm and egg in a tube, but only God creates life from it. Therefore, God is involved directly in the “coming to be” of a child through IVF.

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<sup>28</sup> Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary

<sup>29</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, pages 474 – 476 (1954 – 1960)

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 1:27

- Do you think that Patrick Steptoe and Sir Robert Edwards, who are credited with pioneering the IVF procedure in 1978, conceived the process all on their own? If the Bible is considered to have been written through divine intervention or inspiration, is there not an argument for God’s intervention or inspiration in scientific discovery as well? Romans 11:36 reads, “For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things: to him be glory forever. Amen.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, everything comes from God; everything exists by God’s power; and everything is intended for God’s glory, including the discovery and proper utilization of reproduction technology.
- What about the “intent” aspect of the argument against IVF? There is a parallel in celebrating the Sacraments where “Form, matter, and intent” are considered. If the “intent” is to celebrate the sacrament in a worshipful manner, then the form and/or matter parts may be modified to fit the circumstance. In Vietnam we did not always have all the tools we needed, especially in the field. Altars were often a pile of ammo boxes and baptismal waters mud holes. Prayers and rites were given with what was available. No one was turned away because of a lack of form or matter because the “intent” was to celebrate the sacrament. Would the same logic not apply to an infertile couple seeking to follow God’s command to “Go forth and multiply.” Would they be turned away and not allowed to become loving parents and raise a family of future generations? Is not their “intent” enough to allow for some adjustments in the form and matter?
- Are babies born through IVF or other nontraditional methods turned into a “product,” an “object,” a “something?” Really? Are you serious? Ask any parent holding their child produced through reproductive technology if they think of their child as a “product,” “object” or a “something.” I challenge you to find one ... I’ll wait.
- And finally, do you seriously think that God would prefer an infertile couple to go through life without children rather than utilize every option including science to achieve the “procreative” aspect inherent in marriage? Let’s look at Genesis 1:28 again, “God blessed them

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<sup>31</sup> Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition (DRA) Public Domain

and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”<sup>32</sup> Built into this blessing is the capacity to reproduce new generations of human beings—and the command to do so. God gives three instructions: Be fruitful (or “bear fruit,” have babies). Multiply (as each new generation has more kids and they have more kids). Fill the earth (populate). I do not see any restrictions in this blessing. I do not see a verse that says we are off the hook if we can’t have children for some reason. We may choose to not follow God’s command, which is an option under our free-will clause. But when life and circumstances make the decision about following God’s command for us, that same free-will clause directs each and every one of us to search for options; options guided by the moral compass we have all been given as God’s creative work.

Mary Mason once wrote, “A baby is something you carry inside you for nine months, in your arms for three years and in your heart till the day you die.”

I have six children. One by birth, four by marriage, and one by adoption. Like Mary, they will each “be in my heart till the day I die.”

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<sup>33</sup> The Vatican Publishing House (Italian: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Latin: Officina libraria editoria Vaticana; LEV) is a publisher established by the Holy See in 1926. It is responsible for publishing official documents of the Roman Catholic Church, including Papal bulls and encyclicals.