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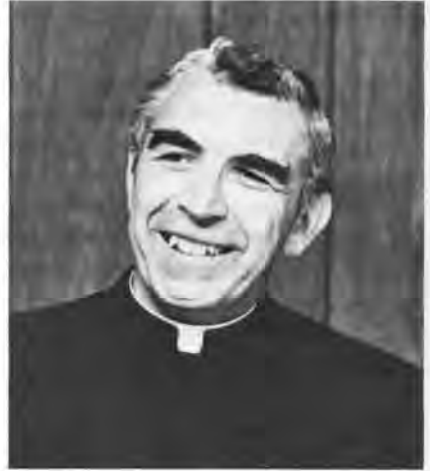
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In Vitro Fertilization and Christian Marriage

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What is there about in vitro fertilization* that seems so attractive to many physicians and scientists as well as potential parents on the one hand, while on the other hand, it seems so repugnant to the teaching Church and to many theologians and Catholic physicians? A Gallup poll conducted after the birth of Louise Brown on July 25, 1978 reported that 60% of both men and women "favored" in vitro fertilization.¹ Of the 1,501 women surveyed by a Harris poll conducted in August, 1978 for *Parents' Magazine*, 85% "said that the procedure would be an option for couples otherwise unable to have children."² *McCall's* magazine for September, 1979 carried a heartwarming article called "Our Miracle Named Louise." The first page of the article has a beautiful color photograph of the one-year-old, test tube-conceived child, Louise. At the end of the article the mother of the child, Mrs. Leslie Brown, is quoted as saying:

Louise is special because she would never have been born at all in a normal way. It was a miracle that I was chosen to have her.

When Louise learns about her birth, I want her to feel proud. Whatever happens in her life, I'll always believe that Louise was truly meant to be.

* Unless otherwise indicated, in vitro fertilization (IVF) in this paper includes IVF followed by embryo transfer.

Persons seeing the photograph of this child who, to all appearances and from the account in the magazine, seems to be a perfectly normal and healthy child, will wonder what can be wrong with in vitro fertilization when the child conceived comes out so fine.

A variety of factors tends to support development of in vitro fertilization. About 15% of all married couples are infertile.⁴ Infertile couples frequently experience their childlessness as a great burden sometimes leading to the breakdown of the marriage⁵ and even to suicide.⁶ The problem focuses really on the *need* for a woman, or a couple, to have a child. Surprisingly, little research has been done on the psychosocial impact of being involuntarily childless. One recent study of infertile single women indicates that the emotional impact may include feelings of inadequacy, guilt, loss of sexual desirability, and grief.⁷ But anecdotal statements of obstetricians — in the absence of documented studies — suggest that the need appears in some cases also to include additional components: 1) the woman wants a child upon whom to shower her love; 2) the woman wants to be loved with that kind of love that only a child shows his mother. One would question, especially in the latter case, whether such a woman would provide a healthy atmosphere for her child. A presently unanswered question is whether in vitro fertilization would meet adequately the cluster of needs apparently associated with female infertility. For the large majority of couples, the desire for a child seems to *be* an expression of one reason why they got married in the first place. Not to have any children is likely to be a great frustration, tinged perhaps with a sense of failure. At times, too, it is the male who places great pressure on his partner to bear a child.

Any physician who has dealt with couples who are involuntarily childless knows the anguish that many married men and women have gone through. Most physicians are truly concerned about the happiness and well-being of their patients and will do all they can within their medical skills to assist them to achieve health and contentment. Then why is the Church apparently so adamantly opposed to artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization?

Medical doctors and scientists look at the question of in vitro fertilization from a scientific point of view as well as from the perspective of managing problems of human infertility. The technological achievement represented by a successful in vitro fertilization and all its sub-procedures is indeed something wonderful to behold when applied to animals, and even to higher forms of animal life. It can be considered a triumph when done for some truly human good. The participants in such activity can truly rejoice in the mastery they have achieved over natural forces. Similarly, physicians treating patients for infertility due to some problem which can be solved or circumvented by in vitro fertilization see the success of that technique as a medical triumph.

Some would say that the physicians are looking at the solution of a

very limited problem, namely, how to help an infertile couple generate another human being. Physicians advocating this technique believe it to be ethical when the benefits expected from it outweigh the possible risks associated with the procedure. As continued use allows accumulation of further data regarding risks and ways of improving the procedure, physicians will feel all the more justified in recommending in vitro fertilization to women who can be helped by it when the risks become increasingly fewer. Nor can it be said that physicians in such an approach are looking merely at the biological aspects. On the contrary, they are quite concerned about the emotional and psychological well-being of their patients. They see this process as a means not only of providing a child for the couple but also of promoting a degree of contentment and possibly of averting a situation which would lead to divorce and/or suicide.

Achievements Are Laudable

Surely these scientific and medical achievements and goods are laudable. Yet the question can be raised again, why is the Church's Magisterium opposed to this procedure as reflected in its statements to date? Papal teaching since 1897 has been clear regarding artificial insemination.⁸ Whether the semen is obtained from the husband or a donor, artificial insemination may not be used on a woman. While discussing the question of artificial insemination, Pope Pius XII stated parenthetically that in vitro fertilization was "immoral and absolutely illicit."⁹

Because human reproduction is not merely a biological activity — not merely the mating of a man and woman to produce a new member of the species — but an activity of two human persons who cooperate with God in the generation of a third human person, the Church has a valid concern. Thus, moral analyses of activities relative to human reproduction are not restricted to medical or scientific concerns but must also consider the possible impact on marriage as a human and divine institution. Consequently, the Church is competent to make certain statements regarding the way in which married couples exercise their marital prerogatives. In particular, the Church is concerned about preserving the sanctity of marriage by recognizing that marriage is a means by which the salvation of the individual partners as well as the children is to be achieved.

Papal reasons for condemning in vitro fertilization do not rest primarily on the many objections which have been raised against it initially, namely, those which represent possible harm to the embryo or to the mother during the required process. Certainly, if these untoward effects of the procedures were to be substantiated by further research, this information would serve to strengthen the Church's objection to in vitro fertilization. On the other hand, the initial objec-

tions based on risks seem to be fading away as increased information becomes available. The objection put forth by the papal teaching rests on more than these particular empirical data. While not ignoring the data, the Church does not rest its case primarily on them. Rather, the Church's position seems to rest chiefly on an analysis of the nature of human reproduction in the context of marriage. In turn, its teaching regarding marriage rests ultimately on the revelation of Jesus Christ as contained in the Scriptures and in the constant teaching of the Church. Especially important for our present concerns are the teaching of Vatican II regarding marriage, particularly as found in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.¹⁰

The objective of this paper is to present a moral analysis of human in vitro fertilization consonant with the Church's magisterial teaching and to make a contribution to the public discussion of the topic. To realize this objective, the material is divided into three parts: first, a brief description of the procedure; second, a statement of the ethical question; third, a presentation of the Church's basic teaching on marriage and an application to the specific question of in vitro fertilization.

In Vitro Fertilization — The Procedure

The following very brief description of the technique of in vitro fertilization (and embryo transfer) is largely taken from notes prepared for the DHEW's Ethics Advisory Board by Prof. R. V. Short, Medical Research Council, Unit of Reproductive Biology, from a presentation made by Dr. P. C. Steptoe and Dr. R. G. Edwards at the Royal College of Obstetricians, January 26, 1979.

Certain criteria were established for determining the selection of patients for this procedure. The woman had to have at least one normal ovary, a normal uterus and a blockage of the Fallopian tubes. The husband had to have normal semen.

Initially, oocytes were recovered by laparoscopy after ovarian stimulation by gonadotrophins or by clomiphene and chorionic gonadotrophin. Subsequently, the procedure was improved by recovering the oocytes from unstimulated follicles in the natural cycle. To accomplish this successfully, the onset of the LH surge was identified and the oocytes recovered approximately 30 hours afterwards.

Timing and speed were important and after some experience, Dr. Steptoe reported that it took him about 80 seconds to suction the egg from the follicle. Immediately afterwards (within 60 seconds) freshly collected sperm was added to the medium in which the egg was suspended and placed in an incubator. The egg was exposed to the spermatazoa for 12 hours, after which it was transferred to fresh media. The embryo was then monitored for a normal growth curve in culture. If the embryo were judged to be growing normally, it was judged to be suitable for transfer.

The timing of transfer was critical since the embryo had to be implanted at a time when the uterine lining was suitably prepared. Similarly, the embryo had to be at the stage appropriate for implantation which, as Steptoe and Edwards reported, was the 8-cell or 16-cell stage of development. Their experience, too, revealed that a late evening transfer was more propitious. Surgical transfer of the embryo was tried but subsequently discarded in favor of a transcervical transfer which was done with a 1.4 mm diameter cannula. Out of 32 implantations of fertilized eggs, in the series where oocytes had been recovered from unstimulated donors, four pregnancies resulted. Of these four, two ceased to grow after implantation, one was tubal and had to be aborted, and one was successfully brought to term — Miss Louise Brown.

In summary, the procedure may be divided into five stages:

1. Oocyte collection
 - initiation of LH surge determined
 - laparoscopy
2. Sperm preparation
 - sperm collection
 - washed, diluted, capacitation
3. Fertilization
 - one egg per droplet of sperm suspension
 - 12 hours exposure
4. Embryo development — in vitro
 - after fertilization transferred to different solution
 - monitored for normal growth
5. Embryo transfer
 - at 8 to 16-cell stage (2½ to 4 days)
 - transcervical transfer to uterine cavity

The Ethical Question

Attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas is the aphorism that a question properly formulated represents half of the answer. This is certainly true in the case of the issue at hand. Initially, the issue may be stated as follows: Are there any conditions under which in vitro fertilization may be exercised for a couple which make it morally acceptable?

Taken by itself, the term in vitro fertilization merely means the fertilization of an egg by sperm in an artificial environment. However, in the present context, the term implies that the ovum in question was obtained from a human female and, secondly, that after fertilization with human sperm, the resulting embryo was implanted in the uterus of a woman. While various combinations are possible, in this discussion the man and woman are presumed to be married to each other.

A closely related factor is the motivation on the part of the couple. Why does the couple request in vitro fertilization? One could surmise

a number of reasons why a couple should want it. At one extreme, they could be seeking the notoriety associated with the technological breakthrough, and at the other extreme, they could be desiring a child because they have none and want a child on whom they can shower their love and provide with all the benefits of a Christian home environment. Here I am assuming that their motive is the highest, and that no child was available to them for adoption.

In addition to status and intentions of the donors, attention must be paid to various aspects of the IVF itself. Distinction must be made among the several phases through which the development of in vitro fertilization proceeded as recorded, for example, by Steptoe and Edwards in their numerous publications. The first phase extended over 12 years as the necessary techniques associated with in vitro fertilization and embryo transplant were developed. The birth of Louise Brown marked the transition to the second and current phase: that of the early clinical applications. The third phase will be the time when (and if) the procedure is accepted generally by the medical profession as an appropriate therapeutic process for certain types of infertility.

The official report of the Ethics Advisory Board¹¹ distinguishes between laboratory research involving early human embryos and clinical application of the technique. Without doubt, there are additional serious ethical questions when human embryos are the subject of research — biochemical, physiological, pharmacological, or anatomical. In these situations, generally, there is no intention to transfer them into a uterine cavity or to bring them to viability or term. These specific issues, however, are *not* being considered in this presentation.

In addition, *excluded* from consideration here are questions relating to laboratory research on early human embryos, to possible embryo wastage due to failure of implantation or to accidents while manipulating the embryo, or to decisions not to transfer. Also excluded from the current question are issues which relate to a variety of other clinical applications such as the use of surrogate mothers, the freezing of early human embryos for later implantation, and the use of frozen semen of male donors who are deceased at the time of fertilization.

The intent of all these exclusions is not only to sharpen the question but also to present (as a method of discourse) the strongest position favorable to the moral acceptance of in vitro fertilization and to focus on the essential aspects. The large majority of writings on the topic considers only, or primarily, the physical consequences of the procedure on the embryo, the mother or on others. Accordingly, in this paper I will focus the moral analysis on determining whether IVF as a technique for the medical management of infertility is compatible morally with the nature of a Christian marriage as the human and sacred institution in which the generation of human children is to take place. I am, of course, here assuming as a given that human beings are to be generated within a marriage.

In light of the above remarks, the specific moral issue which I wish to consider in this paper has a set of assumptions, namely, that:

1. The donors, respectively, of egg and sperm are a woman and a man married to each other.
2. The condition of the couple is such that they have no children and although healthy, are unable to generate their own biological child due to blocked Fallopian tubes.
3. No suitable child is available for adoption by the couple.
4. They wish to provide the child with an optimum Christian environment.

Consequently, the moral question may be stated as follows: Are there any conditions under which in vitro fertilization may be employed for such a couple in a manner which would be morally acceptable in light of the Church's official teachings?

IVF and Christian Marriage

At the outset of their discussion of the dignity of marriage and family, the Fathers of Vatican II declare: "The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life."¹² In this concise statement the central importance of the family is clearly stated. Furthermore, the statement emphasizes that the welfare of the individual and of the community are so closely intertwined that they stand or fall together.

While it is true that the documents of Vatican II dealing with marriage do not contain an explicit discussion of artificial insemination, or of in vitro fertilization, or of embryo transplants, nonetheless, they do state certain principles useful for a moral analysis of that technology. Because God's laws are not arbitrary dictates of a despot, benevolent or otherwise, any prohibitive statements ultimately should be seen as rooted in a concern for the well-being of the individual person. While at times the relationship between revelation and some specific teaching may be rather remote, the connection can be identified. The Church, directed by revelation, strives vigorously to maintain a healthy state of conjugal and family life ultimately for the sake of the individual persons.

Both by analysis of marriage as a human institution and by a reflection on what God has revealed through Jesus Christ, the Church over the centuries has taught steadfastly the essential lines of a Christian marriage.

By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory. Thus the man and woman who 'are no longer two but one' (*Matt.* 19:6), help and serve each other by their marriage partnership;

they are conscious of their unity and experience it more deeply from day to day. The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them. ¹³

In the above quotation, we see that the Fathers of Vatican II were concerned at keeping an equal emphasis on the procreative aspect as well as the unitive aspect of marriage. For the Church Fathers,

married love is uniquely expressed and perfected by the exercise of the acts proper to marriage. Hence, the acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses take place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving being signified and enriches the spouses' joy and gratitude. ¹⁴

A significant statement for our present concern is that "the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude." The same thought is expressed a little further on in the document when the Council Fathers state:

Man's sexuality and the faculty of reproduction wondrously surpass the endowments of lower forms of life; therefore the acts proper to married life are to be ordered according to their authentic human dignity and must be honored with the greatest reverence. When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take only the good intention and the evaluation of motives into account; the objective criteria must be used, criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and human action, criteria which respect a total meeting of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; all this is possible only if the virtue of marriage chastity is seriously practiced. In questions of birth regulation the Sons of the Church, faithful to these principles, are forbidden to use methods disapproved of by the teaching authority of the Church in its interpretation of the divine law. ¹⁵

From these several quotations we can see that the moral analysis of in vitro fertilization requires a study of what precisely constitutes *authentic human dignity* in the carrying out of the proper acts of marriage. In other words, in what manner do a man and woman reproduce which is in accord with their dignity? What actions, if any, would be opposed to that dignity?

Human dignity in the context of marriage sexual relationships seems to require, at least, the following:

1. That the action be freely undertaken by both partners;
2. That there be a mutual agreement regarding this action;
3. That there be a mutual and proportional involvement and commitment which means that each must give according to his or her individual nature the fullest possible contribution;
4. That one person is not used or exploited by the other;
5. That there be true and mutual love for one another;
6. That each respect the particular needs and condition of the other person in his or her current situation;

7. That each respect the natural biological characteristics of the action which they have mutually embraced.

When the above criteria for respecting the human dignity of the partners involved in the marital act are observed, then the individuals may be said to be exercising their sexual responsibility in an appropriate manner. This is so because the marriage partners are both respecting one another's personhood. To be an adult person means, *inter alia*, to exercise one's freedom responsibly. In turn that implies the person's right to truth and to interact with other persons without coercion.

Sexual intercourse for humans is more than a biological activity to provide the opportunity for the male and female gametes (sperm and egg) to unite. While it can be performed at times in a routine manner, at other times with tenderness or with violence, sexual intercourse has powerful psychospiritual dimensions important for the participants. It is an expression of love and commitment. Although these latter qualities can be divorced from pleasure and fun, for a husband and wife sexual intercourse represents a medium of non-verbal communication which greatly aids to bring warmth and stability to the family. Thus, the parents finding mutual affirmation through sexual expression are better able to furnish their children with the warmth, affirmation and commitment which they need for their proper personality development. Because the body is a substantive principle or part of the human person, its properties may not be ignored. Consequently, responsible use of the body's sexual function requires that the persons work in harmony with the relevant forces.

God's wisdom is reflected in what He has created. He has given humans an intelligence whereby they may more fully benefit from the world in which they are placed. They build shelters, make clothes, travel by a variety of vehicles to far-away places, communicate almost in an instant to the other side of the earth, see distant lands without leaving home, assist in the restoration of health when the body is wounded by accident or weakened by disease — but all these activities, in themselves, are *not* in opposition to the relevant natural forces. When in particular cases they are, the consequences sooner or later become apparent as our recent ecological awareness has made clear. In a similar way, the natural forces and laws which govern the begetting of human beings need to be respected; that is, human intervention should not be in opposition to their normal functioning.

Accordingly, to engage in sexual activity in accord with authentic human dignity requires the partners to permit these forces to realize their built-in program, that is, their intrinsic teleology. Human intelligence may rightfully be employed to understand these processes and to act in accordance with, but never in opposition to, their normal functioning.

Christian Marriage and In Vitro Fertilization

The Catholic Church has long recognized the essential role of sexual intercourse in providing the mutual support and expression of love the couple need for their own development as well as for the rearing of the children in an atmosphere of love and trust. Pope Pius XII had addressed this issue at least four times. One of his significant statements on this point can be found in his 1956 address to the Second World Congress on Fertility and Sterility. After recognizing that involuntary sterility in marriage can become a serious threat to the stability of the marriage and can be source of much pain to the couple, Pius XII goes on to stress that sexual union should not become "an egotistical quest for emotional and physical satisfaction in the interest of the spouses alone." He then adds a counterbalancing injunction:

But the Church has likewise rejected the opposite attitude which would pretend to separate, in generation, the biological activity in the personal relation of the married couple. . . . It is in the unity of this human act that we should consider the biological conditions of generation. Never is it permitted to separate these various aspects to the positive exclusion either of the procreative intention or of the conjugal relationship.¹⁶

While Pius XII was asked to make some comments about "artificial fecundation" (artificial insemination), he digressed momentarily to make a single statement about in vitro fertilization: "On the subject of the experiments in artificial human fecundation (in vitro) let it suffice for us to observe that they must be rejected as immoral and absolutely illicit."¹⁷ Neither Vatican II nor the statements of subsequent popes have altered that teaching. If anything, Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* reinforces the basic principles which underlie that judgment.

By placing the generation of human beings apart from sexual intercourse, the God-given role of marriage which unites the personal loving intimacy of a man and woman with the generation of another human being is sundered. The book of Genesis asserts, and the Gospels confirm, that the "two shall be in one flesh." In the Genesis account, Adam states:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.¹⁸

This is understood to refer to the physical union of man and woman in sexual intercourse. St. Paul states that to have intercourse with a harlot is to become one body with her: "Can you not see that the man who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? Scripture says, the two shall become one flesh."¹⁹

In a sense, sexual union is seen by the Bible as the reversal of the

creative act which took woman out of man; he is incomplete without her and by sexual union is reunited, made one and whole. At the deepest level this completion occurs only if, and to the degree that a truly loving commitment exists. How can each be made whole and one unless the union is not only a tangible expression of that loving union, but also, in a different sense, is the one flesh which results from the two? Consequently, what God has united — the procreative and unitive aspects of sexual intercourse — let no man put asunder, either by contraceptive or by technological procreation. Hence, the official teaching of the Church which opposes contraception likewise opposes IVF, and for the same essential reason: the inviolability of the physical/spiritual elements of the integral act of conjugal intercourse.

This teaching of the Church can be a purely *a priori* assertion about human procreative activity. Because IVF is an example of biotechnology it is appropriate to examine it in a more empirical way, to consider what impact it may have on human dignity. It would be easy to conclude that technology is always the "bad guy" if it were not seen in its fuller dimensions. I should say here in anticipation that I am not opposed to technology; on the contrary, I see technology as a very important aspect of human activity and part of divine providence. Both Vatican II and Pope John XXIII before had made a number of affirmative statements regarding the positive aspects of technology (for example, see Pope John XXIII, *Peace on Earth*, no. 3). The issue then is, how does one judge whether technology is in accordance with human dignity and God's providence and when is it contrary to one or the other or both?

Evaluating Technology

It would seem to me that one of the important criteria for evaluating technology is whether or not a particular technological procedure enhances the human status; that is, whether it promotes true justice and peace in the human community. How does a particular technological device help the individuals involved to be more truly human; that is, to be more free, more compassionate, more loving, more capable of responding to God's call to them? Here are the criteria which Pope John Paul sets up to measure technological progress:

... Does this progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth "more human" in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more "worthy of man"? There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential — whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all. ²⁰

Many medical devices certainly assist us in this wise. Something as simple as aspirin which lessens or removes a headache and lowers body temperature, enables the sick person to respond more freely and joyfully to his environment and to offer prayers of praise to God. The life-saving devices such as blood transfusions and antibiotics are also a great help generally to assist the human condition. Spectacles enable some visually impaired persons to see more clearly, to read, and to perceive their environment more sharply. This is also true of hearing devices for those who have a partial loss of hearing; such devices have been a great help in restoring human communication. Numerous diagnostic devices such as x-rays have helped restore function and health to individuals more rapidly by the correct diagnosis and evaluation of the patient's condition. All these medical devices, in general, help the individual to be restored entirely or in part to his or her normal functioning. Accordingly, does in vitro fertilization promote the humanity of the couple? Does it help the partners become more "mature spiritually"? Does it advance the cause of peace and justice in the world?

An adequate response to these questions is beyond the space limitations of this paper, and it may even be beyond the data we have available. Since very few couples (perhaps three or four) at present have had children by this means — and only in the last two years — there is no adequate IVF experience from which we can draw. However, the number of couples who have had children by artificial insemination runs in the tens of thousands. While a careful study of this cohort would be revealing, I am not aware of any published study which would answer the three questions stated above. Such a project remains to be done. Consequently, for the present we must be satisfied by an analysis of the *likely* impact the use of in vitro fertilization would have on a Christian marriage.

Consider the first question: does it promote the humanity of the couple? Promotion of the couple's humanity presumes that their individual personhood be respected. As previously stated, Church teaching traditionally has held that this respect in part means that their biological nature is not thwarted. The generation of another human being is a process designed by God, established and tested, as it were, by millions of years of evolutionary development. To circumvent this process on the basis of a dozen years, or less, of experience certainly seems unwise. The experience we have had in the area of intervention into natural processes has shown that when we go *contrary* to a natural force or process we create problems — sometimes disasters — e.g., ecological catastrophes. The use of IVF is *contrary* to the intrinsically programmed reproductive process because the physician:

1. removes the oocyte from the woman's body;
2. requires the male to place his sperm in a "test tube" rather than the woman's body, i.e., in the vagina;
3. fertilizes the egg by sperm in a foreign environment, i.e., an artificial media in a petri plate;
4. incubates the resulting embryo in an "alien situation."

Unlike most medical procedures which seek to restore natural functioning, IVF bypasses an important segment of the process.

Furthermore, IVF disrespects the humanity of both partners by an undue emphasis on the *product* of marital intercourse. In our technological age in which so much emphasis is placed on producing, on a "get-it-done-I-don't-care-how" attitude, on gratification of all desires with a resulting confusion of needs and desires, it is no wonder that some couples and physicians would see no objection to IVF as a means of managing the problem of infertile couples. Such an emphasis on the product results in a *subordination* of the couple to that product, the child. IVF removes the generation of *this* specific child from the loving embrace of a husband and wife.

A second question raises the issue of spiritual maturity. Does IVF promote a development of the couple's spiritual life? An essential aspect of the Christian life is the desire for, and acceptance of, God's loving plan. This includes His purposes as contained and revealed in natural processes, as well as accepting one's life situation by not going contrary to God's law. Granted that infertility for a couple who strongly desire a child can be a great burden. Part of that burden may arise because a couple is frustrated, believing that they have a *right* to a child. But this is a mistaken notion. Throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, a child is seen as a gift from God.²¹ In Catholic teaching, marriage is seen as conferring a right to sexual acts which are apt for the generation of a human being. No right to a child is thereby conveyed.²² The basic reason is that the child is a person and no human person has a right to another. This would reduce the child to a mere object. Consequently, the ability to transcend the disappointment of not having one's biological child would be a move towards spiritual maturity.

The third question which considers the relationship of technology to peace and justice may be more difficult to apply to IVF. Does it restore peace to a family? Does it contribute to righting an injustice? Since peace largely depends on the presence of justice (and love), that second question is the more important. As previously noted, no person or couple has a right to a child. Consequently, not having a child because of infertility does not constitute an injustice. Instead, an injustice may be done to a child so conceived. Apart from the possible harm which may befall such a child resulting from the technique, that individual will always perceive himself as someone apart from the vast

majority of humans conceived in the usual manner. This self-image may be seen as an injury and an injustice. If this brief reflection has any validity then, IVF would *not* pass the test of promoting peace and justice.

Moral Evaluation of In Vitro Fertilization

The moral evaluation of in vitro fertilization cannot abstract from the other human activities which precede and succeed the technological intervention. Nor would it suffice to consider the problem as an event which would possibly occur once or only a few times in any one particular human family. Nor does the ethical argumentation depend on the *quantity* of persons who would be so generated.

Rather the ethical argumentation against IVF sees it as destructive of the integrity of conjugal intercourse and hence unable to promote human dignity, spiritual maturity, or marital peace and justice. The fundamental objection is that in vitro fertilization introduces into the generation of a human being, an element which is opposed to the dignity of the human persons involved: the wife, husband and child. It is opposed not because technology is used, but because it is misused; it *displaces* the human act which is the essential bonding act of the family. Because human actions frequently carry with them a symbolic meaning, the impact of a *single* act can go far beyond the physical consequences. Thus, a single act of adultery can break up a marriage, or stomping on the national flag can have serious consequences for the perpetrator.

Not infrequently the novelist penetrates the essence of an event and foresees its long-range implications for mankind. Such seems to be the case with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.²³ In this novel, Mr. Huxley portrays a civilization in which children are generated solely in the laboratory, from fertilization through gestation to birth, all in glass, stainless steel and shiny chrome. Once procreation was removed from the context of family, then family was fulfilling no basic human need and was therefore superfluous. Sexual activity had become a means of keeping the people under control through pleasure: "In 1984 the lust for power is satisfied by inflicting pain; in *Brave New World*, by inflicting a hardly less humiliating pleasure."²⁴

The notion of love, and of sexual activity as an expression and a fostering of love, becomes lost. Pleasure is now the *focus* rather than the *companion* of responsible sexual activity. As a consequence, the stability of conjugal life is threatened, the role of family as providing much needed warmth and support for its members is endangered, and the well-being of the individual person is seriously compromised.

Conclusion

While it may be admitted that under certain restricted conditions in vitro fertilization to conceive a human child may not have any immediate or apparent negative results, the analyses above suggest that the long-range impact on individuals and society would be negative. For society to have a policy which permits this kind of reproductive activity seems to be eventually inimical to the well-being of not only society but also of the individuals immediately involved in that technology. The procedure of in vitro fertilization and embryo transplants is *inherently* destructive to a truly human generative act by removing the symbolic/reinforcing expression of the couple's love from the process by which their child is generated. The Church's concern has been to preserve the stability of marriage and this particular technology seems ultimately to be destructive of that stability because it weakens the marriage bond. It places the procreative aspect of marriage in an isolated position and subordinates the means of generation to it. That is, the couple are willing to undergo this particular procedure in order to generate a child. While at first sight this may seem attractive, closer study suggests that it is ultimately deleterious to marriage as an interpersonal relationship.

The Church's insistence upon respecting the integrity of the procreative and unitive aspects of conjugal intercourse provides opposition in principle to the process of IVF. Further considerations have been presented, based on Pope John Paul II's criteria for legitimate technological progress, to show that the long-term negative consequences of the use of IVF will support the Church's opposition in principle.

In this discussion little was said about the negative effects resulting from the current status of in vitro fertilization and embryo: accidental death of embryos at various stages of the process, deliberate termination of unwanted human embryos and human experimentation with very young embryos not destined for implantation. These and similar objections can be raised against IVF in its current stage. But as I have attempted to show, the most basic objection to IVF, and one which will not disappear as the technique improves, is that it is inimical to the very substance of marriage.

Appendix

After the birth of Louise Brown in 1978 following in vitro fertilization, Joseph Califano, then Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, directed the National Ethics Advisory Board to study the question of in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer. During the period of study, the Ethics Advisory Board heard testimony both from a variety of experts as well as from the public at

large. On May 4, 1979, the Ethics Advisory Board turned in its report and conclusions.

The ethics advisory board finds that it is acceptable from an ethical standpoint to undertake research involving human in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer provided that:

- A. If the research involves human in vitro fertilization without embryo transfer, the following conditions are satisfied:
 1. The research complies with all appropriate provisions of the regulations governing research with human subjects (45 CFR 46);
 2. The research is designed primarily:
 - a. To establish the safety and efficacy of embryo transfer and
 - b. To obtain the important scientific information toward that end not reasonably obtainable by other means;
 3. Human gametes used in such research will be obtained exclusively from persons who have been informed of the nature and purpose of the research in which such materials will be used and have specifically consented to such use;
 4. No embryos will be sustained in vitro beyond the stage normally associated with the completion of implantation (14 days after fertilization); and
 5. All interested parties and the general public will be advised if evidence begins to show that the procedure entails risks of abnormal offspring higher than those associated with natural human reproduction.
- B. In addition, if the research involves embryo transfer following human in vitro fertilization, embryo transfer will be attempted only with gametes obtained from lawfully married couples. ²⁵

The Ethics Advisory Board arrived at several other conclusions. One of them concerned the support of carefully designed research involving in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer in animals, including nonhuman primates in order to obtain a better understanding of the process of fertilization implantation and embryo development, to assess the risk of both mother and offspring associated with such procedures, and to improve the efficacy of the procedure. ²⁶

The Board also found it acceptable for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to support or conduct research involving in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer. And finally, the Ethics Advisory Board encouraged or directed or urged the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and other agencies to work with agencies and societies throughout the world to collect, analyze and disseminate information regarding research and clinical experience involving in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer. ²⁷

In this rather lengthy report, the focus of attention is on the possible undesirable physical effects on the embryo, on the parents, or on the child developing from that embryo. The question of the impact such reproductive technology would have on marriage or on the couple or on society at large is not treated by the experts and barely raised by the public comments as reported. As with many other uses of technology, the initial impact has frequently serious and negative

side effects. But with additional experience and a better understanding of the process resulting in the improvement of the technology, a considerable number of the negative impacts can be reduced or eliminated. Consequently, it was necessary to look at the problem from its essential aspects and consider it as it impacted on the nature of marriage itself.

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