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Robert Rober Lebel

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Artful Childmaking

John C. Wakefield

Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center, St. Louis, Mo., 1978. 205 pp.

This book is the first in a series devoted to papal teaching on various medical-ethical issues. It addresses the question of artificial insemination. The author approaches the task with the dispassionate and carefully balanced perspective of a genuine scholar.

The central materials of the monograph are dicta by various bishops of Rome. Pius XII is the only pontiff to have addressed the issue explicitly, but Wakefield also finds relevant comments on related questions from other papal documents. He is careful to include contributions by many theologians. He gleans from each scholar his chief contributions, to present a brief but thorough history of developing opinion on this matter. In fact, he does this nicely within the context of evolving perspectives on other, related questions of sexual ethics: contraception and masturbation.

Wakefield makes clear that there are actually at least two distinct problems: artificial insemination by husband (AIH) and by donor (AID). The differences are spelled out, and the different theological approaches are pursued. The author's bottom line seems to be that there is ultimately little theological objection to AIH, and that AID is undesirable for a variety of reasons (theological, psychological and genetic) but not necessarily always unacceptable.

Artful Childmaking is a superb piece of work. Wakefield has faithfully summarized massive source materials, making it possible for the reader to achieve a close understanding of the developing argument by reading one small book. His style is a bit colorless, but someone seriously interested in the detailed analysis of the morality of artificial insemination should receive this book with enthusiasm.

— Robert Rober Lebel, S.J.
University of Wisconsin Medical School