

Reproductive Technologies

- I. Introduction
- a. More than 3,000,000 couples per year seek infertility treatment.
 - b. Infertility is a real problem, one that has skyrocketed in the last thirty years in developed countries.
 - i. We are a promiscuous culture bent on impeding pregnancy with high doses of fertility suppressant drugs, so it's not surprising that we experience a dramatic rise in rates of infertility when conception is desired.
 - 1. It's a tragic irony:
 - a. We spend the first fifteen years of a woman's reproductive life helping her impede pregnancy
 - b. We spend the second fifteen helping her conceive.
 - c. Now, the desire to overcome infertility is certainly a good desire – a desire for children is healthy and holy
 - i. But this good desire does not justify using an evil means as a way of "getting" a child.
 - 1. E.g., Kidnapping another person's baby is always wrong no matter how desperately a couple wants a child.
 - 2. E.g., 2: Raping your partner is always wrong, no matter how desperately you want a child.
 - ii. A GOOD END NEVER JUSTIFIES AN EVIL MEANS
 - d. So too we will see that all attempts to *manufacture children independently of the sexual act* are also wrong, no matter how desperately you want a child.
 - i. Consequently, we must apply the principles of the theology of the body to the practices of IVF (in vitro fertilization), AI (artificial insemination) and Cloning, to see why the Church forbids such practices.

II. IVF, AI and Cloning destroy the God-given connection between sexual union and procreation

IVF: sperm and egg are joined in a petri dish.

AI: sperm is artificially injected into the woman's eggs.

Cloning: the nucleus of a somatic cell is placed in an egg which has had its nucleus removed.

In each case the baby comes about not as the result of an act of love between husband and wife, but as the result of a medical procedure. The act of marital intercourse is *replaced* by a technique.

- a. Remember that when discussing contraception last lesson we showed the intrinsic connection between the marital embrace and fruitfulness

- i. We pointed out that it is wrong, it goes against our nature and against God's design to directly and purposefully separate *sexual union* and *an openness to new life*.
 - 1. In Contraception, we pursue *sexual union* divorced from the occurrence of *new life*.
 - 2. In IVF, AI, and Coning, we pursue the occurrence of *new life* divorced from *sexual union*.
- b. Both these pursuits destroy human integrity, they rip apart what belongs together.
 - i. What happens if you cut your body into two equal halves? – both halves die.
 - ii. Well, if you cut your capacity for marital love off from your capacity for parental love, both halves will die.
- c. Remember, in the Trinity, fruitfulness (the procession of the Holy Spirit) flows immediately from a specific act of love (the love between the Father and the Son).
 - i. Neither contraception nor reproduction apart from marital intercourse image the love of the Trinity. One gets rid of fruitfulness, the other gets rid of a specific act of love.
 - 1. Goes against Christ's words: "What God has joined together let no man rend asunder."
 - a. Hence it is always wrong, regardless of your intention.
- d. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another through the body.
 - i. Rather, as *Donum Vitae* puts it, this kind of practice: "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."
 - ii. Parents are handing over their own inalienable prerogative to others. But procreation of your children is a privilege and a responsibility that can't be transferred.
 - 1. Some things have to be done by the parent directly:
 - a. You can't send your secretary to watch your son's ballgame
 - b. You can't have a friend walk your daughter down the aisle
 - c. And you can't have your kid made for you by somebody else. You can't send a doctor to go inseminate your wife.
- e. Further, these procedures are a grave offense against the dignity of the child.

- i. It treats the child, the human person, as a mere means to an end, something to be acquired as a mode of fulfilling the parents.
 - 1. Children are things that can be produced, bought and sold in the medical market, not priceless gifts from God.
- ii. Children are not a commodity to be purchased at will.

III. Common Objections to this Teaching

- a. “Fine, so children must be the fruit of their parents’ love. But children conceived through these reproductive technologies are the fruit of their parents’ loving relationship with each other, right?”
 - i. Well remember, the major theme of this class is how fundamental our bodies are to us in our personal relationships. It’s not enough that we say we love each other, we have to give love through our bodies (e.g., handshake, hug, kiss, intercourse between spouses). And it’s not enough to say the child comes from our marital love; this has to be literally true also on the bodily level.
 - 1. As human beings we are essentially bodily creatures. Therefore, to dispense with the proper role of the body is *de-humanizing*.
- b. “Didn’t God call us to have dominion over creation? Aren’t these technologies just an extension of that dominion?”
 - i. It is true that God gave us the permission and responsibility of using created things *other than man* for our own benefit. Therefore, we are allowed to manipulate, destroy, and design subhuman realities to suit our needs.
 - 1. We can carve the presidents’ faces in a mountain
 - 2. We can cut down trees
 - 3. We can kill and cook livestock
 - 4. We can artificially inseminate a cow
 - a. Why? Because a cow is not made in the image of God; it is not called to love as a pure reflection of Trinitarian love.
 - ii. But we cannot do this with ourselves. Our bodies are sacred, temples of the Holy Spirit, intimately bound to the everlasting, infinitely valuable soul, and destined for paradise.
 - 1. Therefore, we are not allowed to simply reinvent the human body at our pleasure. It does not belong to us; we can help it, heal it, support it, but not remake it.
 - 2. JP II: “When the human body, considered apart spirit and thought, comes to be used as raw material in the same way that the bodies of animals are used... we will inevitably arrive at a dreadful ethical defeat.”

- c. “Isn’t He the one who gave us this power? Why would he give us this power if He didn’t want us to use it?”
 - i. Well, you might say God has given us the power to gossip, to commit suicide, to cheat and steal, but of course He doesn’t want us to actualize those powers.
 - ii. This is the mystery of human freedom, and the ultimate question of life. Will we choose to do good instead of evil, even though both options are open to us?

 - d. “It’s cruel and unsympathetic for the Church to deny a couple their right to a child.”
 - i. This is very important: *no one has the right to a child. Just as no one has the right to sex.*
 - 1. Children and intercourse are gifts, gifts to be received with gratitude.
 - a. Once you start thinking of these things as something you have a right to, you will begin to pursue unethical means to obtain them.
 - ii. However, the child *does* have a right.
 - 1. Each and every person has the right to be conceived from the union of a husband and wife
 - 2. In this area, the child’s right is absolute: the right to be the fruit of the specific act of the sexual union between spouses.
-
- VI. Further, these practices often lead to the direct killing of innocent human beings
 - a. Remember, embryos are human beings; they’re persons.
 - i. Whenever there is a living human organism, we recognize a human person
 - 1. And a new, unique, living human organism is present at the moment of fertilization
 - a. This is not theology, this is science
 - b. This brand new organism has all the genetic information it will ever have. All it needs now to thrive is nourishment and a safe environment (as do we all)
 - 2. So embryos are human persons, with spiritual souls, made in the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by Christ
 - ii. But when these human beings are brought into existence in a lab, or through some medical manipulation, we begin to think of them as *our property*
 - 1. And so can dispense with them, use them, destroy them at our discretion and pleasure

- b. This is usually the case with **IVF** – in vitro fertilization
 - i. In vitro fertilization brings about new life in a petri dish.
 - 1. Several eggs are removed from the woman’s ovary after she has taken a fertility drug which causes a number of eggs to mature at the same time.
 - 2. Semen is collected from the man (usually through masturbation).
 - 3. The egg and sperm are joined in a glass dish, where conception takes place and new life is allowed to develop for a few days. A number of Very Young Human Persons (embryos) are then transferred to the mother’s womb in the hope that one will survive to term.
 - ii. Around 90% of the embryos are killed at some point in the process
 - 1. Invariably several embryos are brought into existence; yet only those which show the greatest promise of growing to term are implanted in the womb.
 - 2. The others are destroyed, or used for experimentation by removing their stem cells resulting in their death or they are frozen.
 - 3. In a desire to hold down costs or to enhance the chance for success doctors sometimes implant five or six embryos in the mother’s womb.
 - a. Then to avoid the problem of carrying or raising too many children all at once, all but one are aborted, “selectively reduced.”
 - b. Once implanted the babies in utero are monitored to see if they have any defects or are judged to be less healthy than the others.
 - c. Then the doctor eliminates those babies deemed “less desirable” by filling a syringe with potassium chloride, maneuvering the needle toward the selected baby in the womb, by means of ultrasound, and then thrusting the needle into the baby.
 - d. If they are equally healthy, the doctor eliminates the babies easiest to reach.
 - iii. Here we see clearly the unspeakable diminishing of the value of each human life which can arise through this procedure.
 - 1. In IVF children are engendered through a technical procedure, subjected to quality control and eliminated if found defective or inconvenient.
 - 2. For this reason *Donum Vitae* states:
 - a. “The connection between in vitro fertilization and the voluntary destruction of human embryos

occurs too often. This is significant: through these procedures, with apparently contrary purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus sets himself up as the giver of life and death by decree.”

3. The link between sex and procreation, union and life, holds the dignity of human life in place. Sever it and human life is automatically cheapened.
 - a. Sever it and human beings come to be treated no longer as persons to love but as things to use.
- c. We also have the tragic situation of embryonic stem-cell research, and the cloning of human embryos
 - i. How does it work?
 1. Firstly, what is a stem cell?
 - a. A stem cell is essentially a blank cell, capable of becoming another more differentiated cell type in the body such as a skin cell, muscle cell or a nerve cell.
 - b. Stem cells are important because they can be used to replace or heal damaged tissues and cells in the body (heart attack or spinal cord injury).
 - c. Now, there are two broad classes of stem cells:
 - i. Embryonic stem cells
 - ii. Adult stem cells
 1. These come from umbilical cords, placenta, bone marrow, fat, etc.
 2. No one dies in the process
 2. How are embryonic stem cells obtained?
 - a. Embryonic stem cells are obtained by harvesting very young human persons, say 5-7 days old.
 - b. Then remove the stem cells from the embryo which results in the destruction of the very young human person.
 3. Where do they get all these embryos?
 - a. Either through the joining of sperm and egg, or
 - b. Cloning:
 - i. Cloning involves the taking of the nucleus of a body (somatic) cell and introducing it into an egg which has had its nucleus removed. The cloned embryo is an identical twin – it mimics the biology of an identical twin.

- ii. The creation of an identical twin through cloning for the purpose of killing the twin, so that its stem cells can be harvested for research.
- iii. Sometimes referred to “clone to kill”
- iv. Life is created by cloning for the purpose of destroying it to do research.

Cures from

Embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning

0

Adult stem cell research

65

This is why private money is flooding into Adult Stem Cell research
Not embryonic

Regardless of what good cures people hope to gain from embryonic stem-cell research, it involves a massive holocaust; murder on an unbelievable scale.

So we have to fight it with everything we’ve got. Have to show that it’s wrong to “make” new human life in a lab, and that it’s wrong to destroy that new human life.

- VII. What is permissible if there are difficulties conceiving?
 - a. One can morally make use of medical technologies that help or assist the marriage act and its fertility.
 - i. E.g., surgery that overcomes tubal blockages in the man or woman which prevent fertilization
 - ii. E.g., #2, Tracking the natural reproductive cycles effectively may enhance the chances of achieving pregnancy.
 - iii. E.g., #3, Fertility drugs, though these may place the mother and children at risk with multiple pregnancies.
 - b. Note that these procedures are all there to help with the marital act, *not* to replace it.
 - i. If the intervention replaces the marriage act in order to engender life, it is not moral.
 - c. C.f. the Pope Paul VI institute in Omaha.