

WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Catholics and Infertility



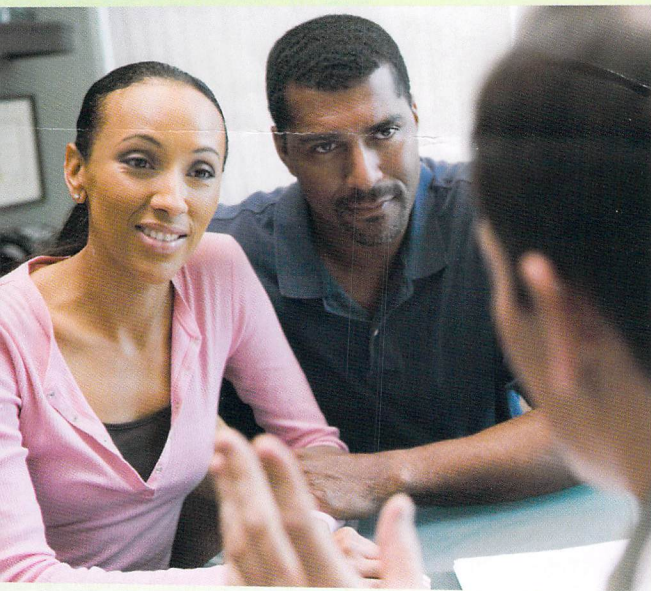
In Vitro Fertilization and Other
Alternative Reproductive Methods

The Pain of Infertility

The desire to bear children is a deep human longing, one that is biological, social and spiritual. Our Church believes that bearing children and providing them with a loving environment is one of the most important duties of marriage.

Yet for a host of reasons, many couples are unable to have children, and this can be tremendously painful. Infertility can introduce great tension into a marriage, it can put friendships at risk, and it can even damage one's relationship with God as one seeks answers and hopes against hope for a child. Sometimes the frustration is so great that a couple will turn to medical science in the hopes of conceiving a child.

The Church stands with every couple facing the challenge of infertility, assuring them always that God loves them no matter what, and that their marriage is of great value.



At the same time, the Church knows that not all acts that lead to conception are equally moral, and that not all are in accord with human dignity.

Nonetheless, God loves each and every human being — regardless of the method or circumstances that led to his or her conception. He loves those conceived *through the loving embrace of husband and wife*; those conceived out of wedlock; those conceived through an act of rape; and those conceived in a Petri dish.

Obviously, however, many of the new reproductive

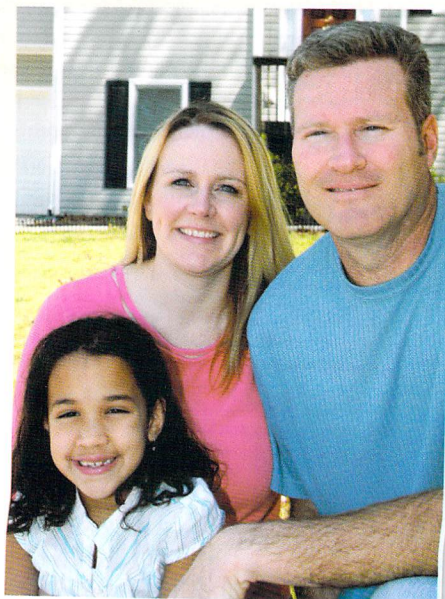
technologies — such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and cloning — involve procedures that violate human dignity.

Supporters of alternative reproductive methods argue that the Church should not oppose any treatment that helps married couples fulfill one of the deepest desires of their hearts and one of the defining elements of marriage: having children. The Church, in fact, does support and approve of many modern medical techniques that assist couples in overcoming infertility, and encourages modern medical science to work to find additional moral means of doing so. Nonetheless the Church deems some methods as simply incompatible with the moral standards related to childbearing, which require that

- the dignity of all human life must be respected
- the spouses must become biological parents only through an act of sexual intercourse with each other.

Children are a Gift from God

Although couples seeking to have children by means of modern medical technology are acting out of love for one another and for the children they hope to have, not all methods are equally compatible with the love that they feel. Children are a gift from God. God chose to have new life brought forth through the loving embrace of a husband and wife. God wants conception and life to be the result of an act of love. Certainly, the Church expresses great compassion and understanding for the struggles and sorrows of couples affected by infertility and encourages couples to explore moral means of assisting fertility. However, the Church also teaches that having children is not a right. Although the disappointment may at times be hard to bear, couples who cannot



have their own biological children may find great happiness in adopting children, becoming foster parents, or caring for their fellow human beings through various forms of charitable work.

Assisting vs. Replacing

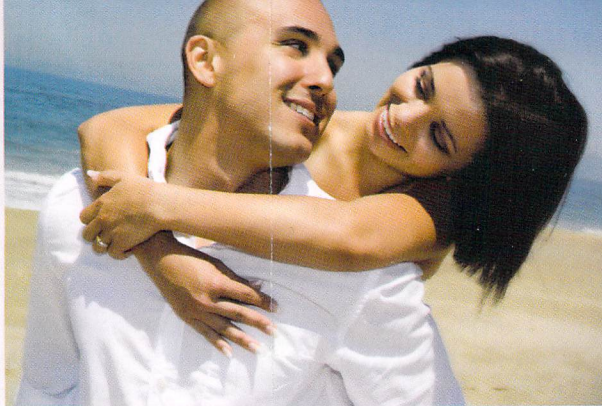
The principle that the Church uses to distinguish moral from immoral reproductive methods is that moral methods *assist* nature, whereas immoral methods *replace or substitute for* nature, for the marital act that should be the source of new life. The justification for this principle is found in the Church's natural law theory of morality, which understands God to be the author of nature and the human person to be a creature with the ability to live freely either in accord with nature or in violation of it.

Moral Reproductive Methods

Not all procedures developed by modern medical science violate natural law. For instance, fertility drugs may help a woman who does not regularly ovulate to release an egg or eggs. A pregnancy aided by fertility drugs is still directly the result of an act of sexual intercourse and only indirectly the result of technology. Similarly, corrective surgery for blocked fallopian tubes or of anomalies in the male reproductive organs may enable those who have been having difficulty conceiving to conceive through natural means. Moral reproductive technologies, therefore, are those that restore the body to its normal functioning state, and where conception is the direct result of a marital act of sexual intercourse. In these cases, the role of science is simply to make conception possible through intercourse, in accord with God's will for the bringing forth of new life.

Immoral Reproductive Methods

Some medical reproductive interventions, however, do violate the meaning of the sexual act. Such methods include artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy. For those instances when collection of sperm is required, the male produces semen through an act of masturbation, an intrinsically immoral act. Yet, even when moral means of collecting semen are used



Shutterstock

(such as use of a perforated condom during intercourse), artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy require that a technician's skill be substituted for the act of sexual intercourse. The conception of the child is then the result of medical technology, rather than a loving act between husband and wife.

Further, alternative reproductive methods often rely on the fertilization of sperm from a man other than a woman's husband or ova from a woman other than the wife. This use of the reproductive material from non-spouses violates the sanctity of marriage and of child-bearing; the child is the result of an exchange of genetic



Brand X Pictures

material of those who have no loving commitment to one another, rather than the result of a loving act between husband and wife, mother and father.

Science has made it possible for any woman, married or unmarried, heterosexual or homosexual, to attempt to become pregnant by purchasing sperm from a sperm bank, and even to select with some specificity what sort of genes she would like her baby to have. The relative ease and frequency of this approach must not dull us to the fact that this practice violates the sanctity of human reproduction.

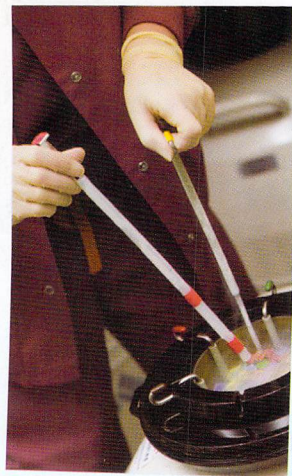
Procreation vs. Reproduction

It is very important to grasp that human beings do not “reproduce”; they “procreate.” Whereas the term “reproduction” suggests that a repeatable product is being produced, the term “procreation” reflects the involvement of God in the act of bringing forth new life and suggests the unrepeatable uniqueness of each human being. The term “procreation” discloses that, in conceiving and giving birth, the husband and wife are cooperators with God, who supplies a unique, newly created immortal soul for each life conceived. Many modern reproductive methods treat the child being conceived more as a product or an object than as a precious gift from God.

Every human being is a great gift from God; human beings should not be products of technology.

In Vitro Fertilization: In vitro fertilization involves the creation of several embryos to increase the chances that at least one will survive. The “excess” embryos are discarded, frozen, or used for purposes of experimentation. In some cases, parents who know themselves to be carriers of defective

genetic material make use of in vitro fertilization so that they can discard any embryos that do not measure up to their standards of product excellence. While the desire to have a healthy baby is altogether natural, the willingness to kill those embryos that are not healthy is reprehensible. It reinforces the misconception that human life is a dispensable commodity instead of a precious gift from God.



Shutterstock

Surrogacy: Surrogacy — where a woman essentially rents out her womb — shares all the misplaced values of artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization, plus



Shutterstock

a few more. Indeed, the practice of surrogacy resembles the practice of baby-selling; a contract is signed and, typically, the surrogate is paid for her services. The baby becomes a commodity. Further, many contracts require that the surrogate undergo amniocentesis and agree to abort the fetus should it have any genetic abnormalities.

No objective, even though noble in itself, such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings, or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, either inside or outside the mother's body.

— Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,
*Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and
on the Dignity of Procreation* (Vatican City: Libreria
Editrice Vaticana, 1987)

Medical procedures such as the new reproductive technologies were developed out of concern for couples wanting but unable to conceive children. Yet such procedures have in many ways reduced the value of human life to a dispensable commodity that can be manufactured, selected, and discarded at will (as in abortion or the destruction of excess embryos).

What Can We Do Next?

- For information on natural fertility regulation and reproductive medicine, contact the Pope Paul VI Institute, 6901 Mercy Rd., Omaha, NE 68106-2604; <http://www.popepaulvi.com>
- For support to couples who are struggling with infertility through one on one contact and support groups, go to Catholicinfertility.org, 513-300-5795; <http://www.catholicinfertility.org>
- Pray for the intercession of Saint Gerard Majella, patron saint of mothers and motherhood. <http://saints.sqpn.com/saintg06.htm>

Couples faced with infertility can, even in their suffering, provide a powerful witness to a society that is so insensitive to these abuses. Couples who understand and accept the Church's teachings make their lives a testament to the dignity of human life by acknowledging that children are to be conceived in partnership with God, not in the laboratory of a technician. With the support of their parish, couples can find the strength to bear this challenge with courage and faith.

For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2373-2377

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day (Donum Vitae) (San Francisco; Ignatius Press, 1987)

Andrew Kimbrell. *The Human Body Shop: The Engineering and Marketing of Life* (San Francisco; Harper, 1993)

William E. May. *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2008)

USCCB and papal documents on cloning and immoral reproductive methods (*Humanae Vitae*)

For additional Catholic resources
or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet contact:

Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

By Janet E. Smith, Ph.D.

Copyright © by Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

Permission to reprint required from publisher.

Inventory No. P704

Nihil Obstat: Rev. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ John M. D'Arcy

Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Oct. 21, 2008

The *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the *Nihil Obstat* or *Imprimatur* agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

The Scripture citations used in this work are taken from the *Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (RSV), copyright © 1965 and 1966 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

US \$14.95

ISBN 978-1-59276-467-9



9 781592 764679



For Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2373-2377

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day (Donum Vitae) (San Francisco; Ignatius Press, 1987)

Andrew Kimbrell. *The Human Body Shop: The Engineering and Marketing of Life* (San Francisco; Harper, 1993)

William E. May. *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2008)

USCCB and papal documents on cloning and immoral reproductive methods (*Humanae Vitae*)

For additional Catholic resources
or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet contact:

OurSundayVisitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

By Janet E. Smith, Ph.D.

Copyright © by Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

Permission to reprint required from publisher.

Inventory No. P704

Nihil Obstat: Rev. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ John M. D'Arcy
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Oct. 21, 2008

The *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the *Nihil Obstat* or *Imprimatur* agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

The Scripture citations used in this work are taken from the *Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV)*, copyright © 1965 and 1966 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

US \$14.95



9 781592 764679

Catholics and Infertility



Gerry Images

In Vitro Fertilization and Other Alternative Reproductive Methods