



IVF Violates Human Dignity

Science and technology have made enormous contributions to our lives and society. But the fact that a certain procedure is technologically possible does not make it ethically right.

What is IVF?

“In vitro” literally means “in glass.” In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a process whereby human life is generated in a laboratory environment such as a glass petri dish.

How is IVF carried out?

The process of IVF begins when fertility technicians administer hormone treatments to a woman. The hormones hyper-stimulate the woman’s ovaries to produce a number of eggs at one time. The eggs are collected from the woman’s body and then combined with sperm. The resulting embryos are nourished in laboratory cultures and inserted into the woman’s body with the hope that one embryo will successfully implant in the lining of the womb and develop. The process is very controlled and involves numerous trips to the IVF center.

How does IVF cause the death of human embryos?

The Jones Institute, one of the pioneers of IVF, reports that only 10 to 20% of the human embryos produced by IVF ever result in a normal pregnancy.ⁱ The Centers for Disease Control estimated that in 2003, 48,000 babies were born through IVF in the United States. This means that

240,000–480,000 human embryos are missing from the equation for that year alone.

What happens to the rest of the embryos?

- Many embryos die in the transfer process since they are fragile.
- Some embryos are unwanted and eliminated because they are considered genetically inadequate.
- Some embryos are stored alive in freezers.
- Some embryos are simply killed as they are washed down the sink.ⁱⁱ

Why is this wrong?

It is a scientific fact that human life begins at conception/fertilization. From conception, a human embryo has a complete genetic code, and his or her growth and development are totally coordinated from within.

“Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person.”ⁱⁱⁱ

When this fundamental moral line is violated or obscured, categories of people become devalued and they become easily used for utilitarian purposes.

What about infertile couples who desperately want a child?

No one has the right to a child. Even for the most loving of couples, there is no right to a child through either normal conjugal relations or reproductive technologies.

IVF turns children into commodities. When a couple undergoes IVF, they are saying, “We want a child no matter what,” and the child becomes an object. This evolves into a selective mentality, whereby couples choose the kind of child they want.

Above all, a child is a gift. Cooperating with God’s plan for human procreation ensures that all children are accepted as gifts.

If IVF did not bring death or harm to human embryos, would it be okay?

IVF is wrong because it separates human procreation from conjugal union. In the process, couples make themselves the masters of human life instead of its stewards.

Conjugal union has both a unitive and a procreative purpose. In other words, conjugal intimacy is meant to express both love and fruitfulness.

Because the human person is a unity of body and spirit, both the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act must be expressed spiritually and physically. The biblical notion of “two in one flesh” (cf. Gen 2:24) has a concrete significance here.

Spousal union is expressed both spiritually and physically. And at the same time, the procreative dimension of conjugal union yields both spiritual benefits and physical fruits. When conjugal union is physically fruitful, a couple participates in God’s creative act instead of dominating it.

What is the fundamental principle?

Any reproductive technique that replaces the conjugal act undermines the meaning of conjugal union and is an affront to human dignity.

Is there a connection between IVF and cloning?

Once IVF is accepted, there is no substantial reason to oppose cloning. Both take human procreation out of the context of conjugal union. IVF begins the slippery slope that leads to cloning, eugenics and experimentation on human embryos.

Is there a connection between IVF and contraception?

One can easily understand that contraception is a violation of this same principle. Contraception is a separation of the procreative meaning from the unitive meaning of conjugal union. In other words, it’s like saying “yes” to spousal love but “no” to the possibility of a child.

When human procreation is disconnected from sexual relations, spouses can quickly become objects for sex. When the human dignity of the spouse is not respected, it becomes difficult to recognize human dignity in others, especially the preborn child.

How does marital integrity protect human dignity?

Maintaining both the unitive and procreative meanings of conjugal union guards against the demand for children as a right and the use of spouses for sex. Respect for love and life as essential aspects of marital integrity helps ensure that spouses and children are appreciated as gifts. On a profound level, marital integrity is needed to protect human dignity.

Some embryos conceived in normal conjugal relations die. Why is it a big deal if embryos die in the process of IVF?

In normal conjugal relations, no one makes the intentional choice to cause the death or harm of

embryos. In IVF, there is an intentional choice to carry out a procedure whose consequences are known in advance.

Isn't adoption the same as demanding a child?

Adopting a child is accepting someone who, because of some unfortunate circumstance, needs a loving home. Adoption is a generous act focused on a child who already exists.

Using IVF is not accepting a child as a gift, but rather manipulating a child into existence.

What about the children resulting from IVF? Do they have less dignity?

God allows children to be conceived through IVF because He respects human freedom. But this does not mean that IVF children have any less God-given dignity. Every child is made in the image of God and deserves to be protected and loved.

However, this does not mean we can condone IVF. Analogously, children are born outside of marriage, but that doesn't mean we should promote the practice.

Are there any options for infertile couples?

There are natural techniques which can help couples better understand the cycle of fertility and

the optimum time for conception. The Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction^{iv} has been on the forefront of helping couples and families within God's design.

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- i www.jonesinstitute.org
 - ii *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 2001.
 - iii *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2270
 - iv Pope Paul VI Institute
6901 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106-2604
www.popepaulvi.com

What documents explain this in further detail?

There are several documents which explain the dignity of the person, marriage and family:

- *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) by Pope Paul VI
- *Donum Vitae* (Gift of Life) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith
- *Familiaris Consortio* (The Family in the Modern World) by Pope John Paul II

These excellent explanations can be found at Pauline Books and Media:
www.pauline.org/store/index.html.

The pastoral letter *Of Human Life* by Archbishop Charles Chaput provides an excellent explanation that has specific relevance to the American situation. It can be found at: www.archden.org/archbishop/letters.htm.



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