

CASES AND QUERIES

FERTILIZATION "IN VITRO", ITS MORALITY

1. *May I have your opinion on the reported experiment in Britain about the production of a "test tube" baby?*
2. *Is there any justification for such a move?*
3. *How would you reconcile the "test tube" baby experiment with the current moves to check the population explosion?*

The Press Report

On or about last February 25, several local dailies carried reports concerning attempts done in London to fertilize the ripe ovum of a woman outside the womb, which was later to be implanted into the womb of the same woman for gestation and development. Apparently the action was not carried out for experimental purposes, and the male element was not procured from other than the husband of the same woman. The object was to ensure fertilization and provide more chances of having a baby to the woman, who apparently had difficulties attaining conception the normal way.

The Vatican Censure

The clinical venture can be described, therefore, as remedial. It attempted to help nature and to attain the aim of Nature. Nonetheless, a day or two later, the Vatican press office, in a statement attributed to its Director Msgr. Vallainc, labelled the action as immoral by Catholic standards. This statement has puzzled many. In order to provide some understanding of the background and meaning of this statement, as well as of others of similar nature, it will be useful to consider and answer the following questions:

Premises

First: Are sex and the human reproductive process the creation of God and, therefore, His property, or of private individuals? To say that they are creation of private individuals is tantamount to saying that private individuals made themselves. So we have to say that sex and the human reproductive process are essentially things of God.

Second: When God gave these things to individuals did He intend to engage their cooperation and does He expect such cooperation with regards to a definite purpose and design of His, or not? Quite obviously so. There would have been no sense in imbuing human individuals with sex and biological sexual processes.

Third: Does the Natural Law governing man, that is, the Law of God inscribed in the design of human nature, as male and female, embody not only an aim but also the manner of attaining the said aim? Laws do not only embody an objective, but also the manner of attaining it. So it is obvious that God's plan with regards to human procreation, not only involves the aim but also the manner of attaining it, that is, through the mutual cooperation and the precise roles to be discharged by the spouses.

Immorality of Fertilization of the Human Ovum "In Vitro".

Going back now to the London case, it is quite obvious that the action of the British Doctor does not contravene the aim of Nature, in the particular instance, on the contrary it appears to help that aim. However, it is against the manner laid down by the Natural Law of God governing the procedure to be followed by men with regards to the aim of procreation. One can offend the Law of God, not only by contravening the aim, but also by overriding the manner laid down to attain the aim.

Not against the Aim, but against the Manner Laid Down by Natural Law

It is due to the fact that the action of the British doctor appears to favor the aim of the Natural Law, that some people have been surprised at the censure of "immorality" levelled on it. Indeed, an action contravening the objective of Natural Law would be a more serious of-

fense and more immoral at that, as in the case of contraception; but this does not mean that an action overriding the manner prescribed by Natural Law should not be immoral at all. It is less immoral than the first one, but nonetheless also immoral.¹

No Moral Justification

If fertilization "in vitro" of the human ovum is against the Natural Law, as explained, and therefore immoral, no honest or rightful aim can justify it. As the principle goes: The aim does not justify the immoral means. The desire of the woman to have her own baby and our sympathy for her plight may be rightful, but these things cannot justify what of its nature is immoral. Otherwise a whole gamut of criminal acts could also be justified on the ground that the aim of the agent is good.

Doctrine of Pope Pius XII

The statement attributed to Msgr. Vallainc with regard to the action of the British doctor is nothing new. It is echo of what Pope Pius XII had already said in his address to the Second World Congress on Fertility and Sterility, on May 19, 1956. "On the subject of the experiments in artificial human fecundation 'in vitro' (test-tube) let it suffice for us to observe that they must be rejected as immoral and absolutely illicit." Anyone can see that the action involved is a replacement of the sexual intercourse of spouses, which Natural Law has laid down as the manner for attaining procreation, with another process.

Immorality of Human Artificial Insemination

It is also on account of this reason, that artificial insemination among humans, for the purpose of obtaining offspring, has been declared immoral, even if the donor of the male element is the husband. The procedure is an overriding of the manner laid down by Natural Law, and a substitution of the latter with something else. Some may see weakness in the Church's stand in this matter owing to the reason

¹ When we say that an action is less immoral than another, the statement should not be taken to mean necessarily that the former action is just a light or "venial" offense. An offense against the law of God is, of its nature, not a light matter. But, even within the category of serious offenses, one can be more serious than another.

that She does not object to artificial insemination among animals. But, there is a world of difference to be considered in this matter.

Duty to Respect the Rights and Law of God

In the case of animals, taken both as species and as individuals, God and Nature have ordained them to the utility of men. As long as, therefore, men use animals within the framework of such scope, men do not contravene the Law of God. But, in the case of men, who are equal in rational dignity, no man is simply ordained to the utility of another. Nor are the powers of man given to him by God in proprietorship, but for beneficial use according to the purpose and manner He has laid down. This truism men must keep in mind, namely, that they and their powers are the creation and property of the Creator, and they are duty bound to respect His rights with regards to the same.²

No Grounds for Apprehension

Apprehension has also been raised that the London attempt at fertilization "in vitro" may open the door to the mass production of human beings and thus worsen the population problem. The fear appears to be far fetched if we take the following into consideration: a) The action involves a highly technical procedure dealing as it does with a microscopic object, the female ovum, and requiring a special laboratory equipped with the proper instruments. These things are not readily found in every neighborhood. b) The action also requires an accurate knowledge of the release time of the ripe ovum, and of its precise location in the recesses of the woman. This knowledge is not readily available nor can it be readily obtained. c) The extraction of the ovum is also another problem.

Hence, even if theoretically and in a particular instance, in which a ripe ovum is already had, fertilization "in vitro" is "very simple":

² The foregoing moral evaluation will also apply to "Cloning", if and when the procedure becomes feasible for human beings. Cloning, from the Greek root which means "cutting", is defined as a "sexual reproduction", or reproduction without fertilization. The clonal offspring will have only one parent, whether male or female, and will be an identical twin or "carbon copy" of the parent. The theoretical basis for Cloning, and significant breakthroughs on the plant and animal levels, are reported in Science Digest, November 1969.

yet, it is not practical nor feasible as an ordinary way for human procreation. The procedure cannot, therefore, contribute in any significant manner to the problem of population explosion.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDINARY OF THE MASS*

1. *When no member of the congregation is present who can make the acclamation after the consecration, should the priest say "mysterium fidei"?*

No. The words *mysterium fidei*, which have been removed from the context of the words of the Lord and placed after the consecration, "provide as it were an introduction to the acclamation of the faithful" (cf. cons. Missale Romanum). When in particular circumstances no one can respond, the priest omits these words as is done in a Mass which, out of serious necessity, is celebrated without any minister and in which the greetings and blessing at the end of Mass are omitted (General Instruction, no. 211)

The same holds true for the concelebration of priests at which none of the faithful are present.

2. *In eucharistic prayers II and III, when may the special formula for the deceased be used?*

A doubt has arisen because the rubric of eucharistic prayer III reads: "When this prayer is used in *Missis defunctorum*, it is said..." This rubric is made clearer in the new Ordinary of the Mass (no. 322b), according to which the formula is said "when a Mass *pro aliquo defuncto* is celebrated." Therefore this particular prayer may be used in every Mass celebrated for a specific deceased person or in which some special remembrance of a deceased individual is made. The purpose of the law is to facilitate the execution of no. 316 of the General Instruction for calling for a "moderate" selection of Masses for the dead.

* From *Notitiae* (47, pp. 324-327) whose solutions enjoy only an "orientative" value; solutions *ex officio* are made public in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.