

## Chapter 22

### “Catholic Wisdom on the Origin of Human Life and its Link to Human Relationships”<sup>1</sup>

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#### Précis

In this essay, I offer a contribution towards explaining some of the underlying reasons that illuminate the beauty of Church teaching on the origin of human life. I also give an overview of the reasons why the Magisterium teaches that in vitro fertilization (IVF) is morally illicit. After an introductory section which includes a brief presentation of the Church’s positive regard for science (part 1), I offer an overview of basic Church teaching prohibiting IVF (part 2), followed (in part 3) by a moral critique of IVF covering seven points. Then (in parts 4 and 5) I offer a reflection on the beauty of Church teaching on the origin of human life and its

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<sup>1</sup> I presented some of the key ideas in this article in my talk “Theology of the Body and *Dignitas Personae*” at the third Theology of the Body International Symposium at St Mary’s University College, Twickenham, London, June 3 – 5, 2011. A video of that presentation can be viewed here: <https://tobinternationalsymposia.com/dr-peter-j-colosi-theology-of-the-body-and-dignitas-personae/> and here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnoWm7DnBNg&t=275s>. The International Theology of the Body Symposia have been held in five countries (Austria, Ireland, England, Portugal, The Netherlands), and the videos from all five Symposia can be viewed here: <https://www.tobinternationalsymposia.com/>. On a personal note, which is the theme of this volume, I have two motives for delving so deeply into this topic: (1) Simply the desire for everyone to understand more deeply the goodness of Church teaching and (2) there is someone in my life who I love very much who works in the IVF industry, and this has motivated me to work out the rationale behind Church teaching on this topic.

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link to the common good of human society. Parts 4 and 5 together are meant to give evidence of the goodness of the truth of Church teaching on the origin of human life. This evidence can inspire the faithful to desire to live according to Church teaching via seeing and understanding why this teaching is true and good and leads to flourishing and happiness in human relationships and society. Finally (in part 6) I offer some thoughts on the sensitive reality that millions of people already exist who have been conceived via IVF. It is difficult to raise the topic of the immorality of IVF without implying that the Church holds that those conceived via IVF should not exist; this, however, is not what the Church holds. I end with a brief conclusion (part 7).

## **1. Introduction**

One reason why Catholics depart from Church teaching or leave the Church is because they do not receive satisfying answers to burning existential questions they have. These questions come from real life difficulties to which contemporary culture and science offer solutions that on some level work, but from a Catholic perspective are morally illicit. When the Church opposes these solutions, people then ask “why?” To expect a sound explanation is perfectly appropriate – it comes from an openness to hearing a good reason. To ask for an explanation is not to reject Church teaching. However, if an explanation is not forthcoming, and the questioner remains in a state of bewilderment, then turning to functional solutions may not come from a motive of deliberate disobedience, but rather from a sense that what the Church teaches appears irrational since it has not been explained.<sup>3</sup> The search for an explanation also comes from a desire to live a fulfilling

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<sup>3</sup> In its section on “The Obedience of Faith” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that: “Faith...is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie” (par. 157). For this reason, the faithful should obey Church teaching even when it is not fully understood. But the *Catechism* then explains the principle of “faith seeking understanding” in this way: “it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love” (par. 158). This deeper understanding of the moral

life; the person is looking for a solution to a real-life problem.<sup>4</sup>

In an address to university professors Pope Benedict XVI affirmed this idea when he noted that the desire for inner fulfillment so prominent today is a good and healthy desire and one which represents a challenge and a call to those who present Catholic moral teaching to show the link between true morality and genuine human happiness and fulfillment:

Humanity's desire for fullness cannot be disregarded...The new dialogue between faith and reason, required today, cannot happen in the terms and in the ways in which it happened in the past. If it does not want to be reduced to a sterile intellectual exercise, it must begin from the present concrete situation of humanity and upon this develop a reflection that draws from the ontological-metaphysical truth.<sup>5</sup>

The Church does have the ability to provide such explanations, but she needs help from the lay faithful to do so. John Paul II affirmed this when in *Veritatis Splendor* he made a comment that sounds surprising at first. He said that when

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teaching of the Church is precisely what the Church can offer to the faithful today, my point being that the Church's teaching on the origin of life can be explained, and if this is done then the faithful of today will be greatly helped.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to the profound pastoral dimensions of infertility, in particular the deep pain involved in the inability to have children of one's own, many sensitive reflections have been offered by Catholic writers who have experienced this pain: Marie Cabaud Meaney, “Speaking from the Heart – Pastoral Care for Those Suffering from Infertility,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2023) 90.1: 55 – 63; Stephanie Gray Connors, *Conceived by Science: Thinking Carefully and Compassionately about Infertility and IVF* (Florida: Wongeese Publishing, 2021); Kimberly Henkel, Ann M. Koshute, and Stacy Huneck, “A Spring in the Desert: Infertility and Merciful Accompaniment,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 435 – 449; see also the Springs in the Desert website: <https://springsinthedesert.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Widening the horizons of rationality”, delivered at the Sixth European Symposium for University Professors, June 7, 2008. [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/june/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080607\\_docenti-univ.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080607_docenti-univ.pdf).

the Church presents morally binding precepts via Magisterial documents, the Church and the Magisterium then look to theologians (and many other lay experts<sup>6</sup>) to provide fuller explanations for them than might be found the Magisterial documents that promulgated them:

The Church's Magisterium intervenes not only in the sphere of faith, but also, and inseparably so, in the sphere of morals...While recognizing the possible limitations of the human arguments employed by the Magisterium, moral theologians are called to develop a deeper understanding of the reasons underlying its teachings ...Working together in cooperation with the hierarchical Magisterium, theologians will be deeply concerned to clarify ever more fully the biblical foundations, the ethical significance and the anthropological concerns which underlie the moral doctrine and the vision of man set forth by the Church.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In his *Letter to Families* (1994), par. 12, St. Pope John Paul II issued a call to Catholic laity who are experts in many fields to explain and promote the dignity of marriage and family against the current cultural trends, expressing his gratitude for without them, the clergy would be adrift: "I wish to offer special encouragement above all to you, dear married couples, and to all who assist you in understanding and putting into practice the Church's teaching on marriage and on responsible motherhood and fatherhood. I am thinking in particular about pastors and the many scholars, theologians, philosophers, writers and journalists who have resisted the powerful trend to cultural conformity and are courageously ready to 'swim against the tide'. This encouragement also goes to an increasing number of experts, physicians and educators who are authentic lay apostles for whom the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family has become an important task in their lives. In the name of the Church I express my gratitude to all! What would priests, Bishops and even the Successor of Peter, be able to do without you?"

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, par. 110. This same point was also made in *Donum Vitae*, "[T]he Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addresses an invitation with confidence and encouragement to theologians, and above all to moralists, that they study more deeply and make ever more accessible to the faithful the contents of the teaching of the Church's Magisterium in the light of a valid anthropology in the matter of sexuality and marriage and in the context of the necessary interdisciplinary approach. Thus, they will make it possible to understand ever more clearly the reasons for and the validity of this teaching." I have developed this point further in Peter J. Colosi, "Catholic

In other words, the specific moral precepts are unambiguously declared in these documents, but the underlying rationale is not fully worked out. In the case of this essay, the Church teaching that IVF, as well as any other artificial reproductive technology that replaces conjugal relations, is morally illicit is definitive. Nonetheless, people still want to understand why, and since clear explanations are available, they should be presented with confidence to the faithful who ask for them. I hope to offer a contribution towards explaining some of the underlying reasons that illuminate the beauty of Church teaching on the origin of human life and to explain the reasons for which the Magisterium prohibits IVF.<sup>8</sup>

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Anthropology, Truth, Love and Medical Ethics”, on the blog of St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry, Oct. 4, 2022, <https://www.stbernards.edu/blog/catholic-anthropology-truth-love-and-medical-ethics>. With respect to the overall theme of this volume, namely lived experience as source of understanding and joyfully living according to truth of Catholic teaching, I will site chapters of *Catholic Witness in Health Care: Practicing Medicine in Truth and Love*, edited by John M. Travaline and Louise A. Mitchell, (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2017). *Catholic Witness in Health Care* is divided into three sections. In the first section the theological, philosophical and pastoral foundations of genuine Catholic health care are laid out and in the third section guidelines and hopeful proposals for developing Catholic health care services in our current culture are presented. The second section of this text, the bulk of the text, is written by clinicians from every field of medicine who practice faithfully in accord with Catholic Church teaching. In this regard the book fills a lacuna in the literature of Catholic bioethics which is dominated by theologians and philosophers, but not by those who live Catholic teaching in their day-to-day clinical practice. Reading through the chapters in section 2 reveals that living according to Church teaching is not only possible but becomes a source of fulfillment and genuine happiness in the lives of the doctors and their patients. While such practice is challenging, it is already actually being lived out. As Ashley K. Fernandes, MD, PhD notes in his forward, “For two decades I have hoped for a written tool that would demonstrate the harmony of faith and science in medicine”, describing *Catholic Witness in Health Care* as “the first-ever Catholic medical textbook written by physicians, bioethicists and theologians that is at once accessible to the learned lay person and also a tremendous resource for those who practice medicine, students of the health sciences, and philosophers and clergy who require a scholarly, practical guide to authentic Catholic medicine and ethics.”

<sup>8</sup> A note about terminology: *In vitro fertilization* (IVF) is a morally illicit form of *artificial reproductive technology* (ART). There are other forms of ART in addition to IVF that are also illicit. For ease of reference, in what follows I will speak of IVF, but insofar as

As we proceed, let us keep in mind this passage, which expresses concisely the idea that all the moral prohibitions taught by the Magisterium are rooted in respect and love for the dignity of all human persons, which is the only path to finding the true happiness for which every human heart yearns:

Behind every “no” in the difficult task of discerning between good and evil, there shines a great “yes” to the recognition of the dignity and inalienable value of every single and unique human being called into existence.<sup>9</sup>

Let us also remember here what is often referred to as the “both/and” approach of Catholic thought and before explaining the rationale for the Church’s condemnation of IVF, take note of the Church’s profound appreciation for science and her call for Christians to participate in it:

The Magisterium also seeks to offer a word of support and encouragement for the perspective on culture which considers *science an invaluable service to the integral good of the life and dignity of every human being*. The Church therefore views scientific research with hope and desires that many Christians will dedicate themselves to the progress of biomedicine and will bear witness to their faith in this field. She hopes moreover that the results of such research may also be made available in areas of the world that are poor and afflicted by disease, so that those who are most in need will receive humanitarian assistance.<sup>10</sup>

And this applies as well to the Church’s approach to the science of curing infertility:

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any ART is illicit, then what I say about IVF applies to such ARTs as well.

<sup>9</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae* [On Certain Bioethical Questions], 2008, par. 36. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html)

<sup>10</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 3 (italics in original).

Techniques which assist procreation “are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life.”<sup>11</sup>

If science can heal the pathologies causing infertility or develop methods to help enable procreation to occur within conjugal relations, that is wonderful;<sup>12</sup> and as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, many Catholic scientists and medical practitioners have successfully dedicated their careers to answering this call of the Church and are currently helping couples all over the world.<sup>14</sup> If science in-

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<sup>11</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 12, quoting Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae* [Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation] 1987, Introduction, par. 3.; [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html)

<sup>12</sup> Some examples listed in *Dignitas Personae* are: hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, and unblocking or surgically repairing fallopian tubes, see par. 13. See also, Wendy Laurento “The Unitive Meaning of the Conjugal Act in Evaluating Assisted Reproductive Technologies.” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 404-419. In her article, Laurento perceptively examines whether some forms of assisted reproduction which have been approved of by Catholic moral theologians--because they do not separate procreation from conjugal union--might still violate the unitive meaning of conjugal relations for personalist reasons rooted in John Paul II’s Theology of the Body and may therefore be impermissible.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2375.

<sup>14</sup> This work is being made accessible to the wider public via clinicians and websites. Marguerite Duane, MD, MHA, MSPH, FFAFP is the cofounder and executive director of Facts About Fertility, <https://www.factsaboutfertility.org/about/>, which lists the following Statement of Principles on its website:

- Fertility is a healthy aspect of reproductive physiology.
- Our educational approach to fertility awareness based methods (FABMs) is grounded on solid scientific evidence and ongoing research.
- Fertility awareness based methods can be used effectively to achieve or avoid pregnancy and to monitor and manage reproductive health. They empower women to make more informed decisions about their care.

stead employs its art to *replace* conjugal relations with other means of bringing human beings into existence, that is morally illicit.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Overview of Basic Church Teaching on IVF

The Church has commented on what are referred to generally as the *beginning of life issues* in many documents.<sup>16</sup> The two documents that deal most directly

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- Fertility awareness based methods enable women to invite men to share responsibility for family planning, as they each contribute equally to the formation of a unique human being.
  - Physicians and healthcare professionals trained in FABMs can work with patients to care for their reproductive health and address gynecologic disorders, including infertility, with the goal of not suppressing or destroying fertility.
  - FACTS promotes the proven effectiveness of any fertility awareness based method (FABM) that has quality science to support its use.

To be recommended is Dr. Duane's seven minute interview, *The Benefits of Natural Family Planning | EWTN News In Depth* May 12, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY3BAvLI01M>

One among many other excellent and easily accessible online resources in this regard is <https://naturalwomanhood.org/>. See also, Tyler Arnold, "NaPro technology' offers a pro-life alternative to IVF for infertility treatment," March 26, 2024, <https://angelus-news.com/news/life-family/napro-ivf-alternative/>.

<sup>15</sup> An excellent article length presentation from science-based and lived experience perspectives of the key ideas on the topic of IVF as related to this book is: Craig Turczynski, Alexa Dodd, and Mary Anne Urlakis, "Assisted Reproductive Technology and Natural Law: How Seven Years as an Embryologist Revealed IVF's Disordered Approach to Patient Care." *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 388-403. Embryologist Craig Turczynski describes his personal story as a cradle Catholic who pursued a career as a laboratory director who practiced IVF, gradually came to a crisis of conscience and then left his practice. In addition to sharing his personal story, as well as the psychological trauma he saw his patients endure, Dr. Turczynski and his co-authors present a thorough mini-review of the published scientific literature offering a clear, concise and wide-ranging presentation of the problematic dimensions of IVF in the medical, legal, social, health (physical and psychological), research and experimentation areas, along with a Catholic moral analysis. They conclude with a discussion of the morally acceptable field of restorative approaches to healing infertility.

<sup>16</sup> *Humanae Vitae* (1968), *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (1974), *Persona Humana*

with IVF, already cited above, are *Donum Vitae* (1987) and *Dignitas Personae* (2008).

As noted above, the Church makes a distinction with respect to attempts to resolve infertility between two types of medical-scientific interventions: (a) healing the underlying causes of infertility, allowing conjugal relations to achieve their natural procreative fruitfulness, and (b) technological reproductive techniques that substitute for and replace the conjugal act. Interventions which enable the proper functioning and procreative fruitfulness of conjugal relations are morally licit, while interventions that make the conjugal act unnecessary in the bringing of new persons into being are morally illicit.<sup>17</sup>

It seems to me that the most fruitful starting point for our topic would be to take a moment to reflect on the beginning of one’s own existence and life. At a specific moment in time, each of us came into being from non-being. That profound and momentous occasion is meant to be embedded in the most loving of relationships.<sup>18</sup> According to Church teaching, this is only possible within the context of normal conjugal relations between a married husband and wife.

We can, to begin with, see the contrast in the inner attitudes inherent in nor-

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(1975), *Donum Vitae* (1987), *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), *Dignitas Personae* (2008).

<sup>17</sup> See *Dignitas Personae*, pars. 12 – 13. For a concise presentation, rooted in the lived experience of a case study of the various causes of infertility and treatment options that cohere with Catholic medical ethics, see Kathleen Raviele, “Reproductive Health and the Practice of Gynecology,” in *Catholic Witness in Health Care*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 2017): 153 – 59. Following this medical presentation, Raviele discusses her own lived-experience of switching to a natural family planning practice and offers thoughts on living the Catholic faith in one’s medical practice, see, *ibid.*, 159 – 161.

<sup>18</sup> “[R]esponsible fatherhood and motherhood directly concern the moment in which a man and a woman, uniting themselves ‘in one flesh’, can become parents. This is a moment of special value both for their interpersonal relationship and for their service to life: they can become parents—father and mother—by communicating life to a new human being. *The two dimensions of conjugal union*, the unitive and the procreative, *cannot be artificially separated* without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself.” John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (1994), par. 12 (italics in original).

mal conjugal relations verses IVF by listing the steps that occur in IVF. IVF typically involves obtaining sperm from a man by means of an act of masturbation, which is intrinsically immoral, and obtaining eggs from a woman by hyper-ovulating her and surgically removing them.<sup>19</sup> After the sperm and ova are collected, a technician puts them together in a lab, and so the technician is the person whose act unites the sperm and egg which then brings about the new human being. A technician then transfers the embryo into the woman at the point when it can implant in the uterine lining. The Church has declared this procedure to be intrinsically immoral based on three fundamental goods:

With regard to the *treatment of infertility*, new medical techniques must respect three fundamental goods: a) the **right to life and to physical integrity** of every human being from conception to natural death; b) the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to **become a father or mother only together with the other spouse**; c) the specifically human values of sexuality which require “**that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses.**”<sup>20</sup>

Many Catholics who accept the reasons that pertain directly to the prohibition of heterologous IVF, which is when one or both providers of the gametes are not the husband or wife,<sup>21</sup> still would like an explanation for the Church’s prohibition

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<sup>19</sup> While the Church has not condemned such egg retrieval, I think that in addition to arguments against it based on the physical dangers involved, a personalist/theology of the body argument can be made against doing so. See Peter J. Colosi, “Personhood, the Soul and Non-Conscious Human Beings: Some Critical Reflections on Recent Forms of Argumentation within the Pro-Life Movement.” *Life and Learning* XVII, (Conference Proceedings of University Faculty for Life, Villanova University June 1-3, 2007), 2008, 287 – 91. See also, Wendy Laurento “The Unitive Meaning of the Conjugal Act in Evaluating Assisted Reproductive Technologies.” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 404-419.

<sup>20</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par., 12, quoting *Donum Vitae* II, B, 4 (bold added).

<sup>21</sup> A major problem with heterologous IVF, sometimes adding surrogacy into the mix, involves legal disputes over custody and parenthood, which inflicts profound damage on

of the so-called “simple case” by which is meant: a case of IVF in which no excess embryos are created; no abortion is involved; the providers of the gametes are married to each other (homologous IVF) and the baby will be raised by them. Also, in the “simple case” the sperm is obtained not via masturbation but via one of the methods deemed licit by Catholic moral theologians to obtain sperm for other health screenings, and in some versions of the simple case it is suggested to train the couple to do some of the technical procedures involved in the IVF process.<sup>22</sup> The first thing to note is that here too the Church states that even in the “simple case”, IVF is intrinsically immoral and therefore prohibited:

Certainly, homologous IVF and ET [embryo transfer] fertilization is not marked by all that ethical negativity found in extra-conjugal procreation; the family and marriage continue to constitute the setting for the birth and upbringing of the children. Nevertheless, in conformity with the traditional doctrine relating to the goods of marriage and the dignity of the person, *the Church remains opposed from the moral point of view to homologous in vitro fertilization. Such fertilization is in itself illicit and in opposition to the dignity of procreation and of the conjugal union, even when everything is done to avoid the death of the human embryo.*<sup>23</sup>

*Dignitas Personae* reiterates this point succinctly: “all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization, as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization which substitute for the conjugal act, are to be excluded.”<sup>24</sup>

Let us now turn to the explanation of this prohibition of both heterologous and homologous IVF.

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the child. See Adam E. Frey, “Reaffirming Human Dignity in Disputes over Children Born from Assisted Reproductive Technologies.” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2004) 71.4: 281-307. See also Kathleen Curran Sweeney, MS., “The Technical Child: In Vitro Fertilization and the Personal Subject,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2003) 70.2: 127-42.

<sup>22</sup> See William E. May, “The Simple Case of in Vitro Fertilization and Embryo Transfer,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 55.1, (1988), 29-36.

<sup>23</sup> *Donum Vitae*, II, B, 5 (Italics in original).

<sup>24</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par., 12. See also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2377.

### 3. A Moral Critique of IVF

One reason for the Church's rejection of IVF, whether homologous or heterologous, is that the same fundamentally wrong approach to human beings is at play in both cases. This attitude was expressed by Joseph Ratzinger in this way:

Man is now capable of making human beings, of producing them in test tubes (so to speak). Man becomes a product, and this entails a total alteration of man's relation to his own self. He is no longer a gift of nature or of the Creator God; he is his own product. Man has descended into the very wellsprings of power, to the sources of his own existence. The temptation to construct the "right" man at long last, the temptation to experiment with human beings, the temptation to see them as rubbish to be discarded – all this is no mere fantasy of moralists opposed to "progress".<sup>25</sup>

We human beings can see each other either as precious gifts of irreplaceable worth to be received and respected as such, or we can deliberately decide that some of us will relate to others of us with the utilitarian attitude we take towards inanimate objects produced in assembly lines and judged via quality control criteria.<sup>26</sup> How we decide to bring new human beings into the world *inevitably* affects our fundamental attitude towards them. The posture of reverently receiving a precious new life as a gift arising from normal conjugal relations entails respect for the equal dignity of parents and children.<sup>27</sup> Whereas a utilitarian production process entails a domineering attitude of superiority over the product, which is inevitable when couples, medicine, and society decide to produce children in a labora-

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>26</sup> For a concise outline of the quality control procedures and rating categories, see the "IVF Embryo Grading" page of Medpark Hospital at <https://www.medpark-hospital.com/en-US/disease-and-treatment/ivf-embryo-grading>.

<sup>27</sup> See *Dignitas Personae*, pars. 17 and 29 and *Letter to Families*, par. 15. See also Peter J. Colosi and William V. Williams, "Bill of Rights for Children," *The Linacre Quarterly* (2014) 81.4: 298-301.

tory.<sup>28</sup> And, lest the point be overlooked, this utilitarian approach to life is found even in the ideal “simple” case. This then leads to several follow-on violations of the dignity of persons and human relationships.

### 3.1 IVF and Abortion

A major problem with this shift in attitude and behavior is a dramatic increase in abortions because abortion is integral to IVF practice. It is estimated that twice as many embryos are destroyed in the IVF industry as are destroyed in the elective abortion industry.<sup>29</sup>

Some years ago, the question was raised whether abortion was *a design feature* of the IVF process or whether abortion was merely *a temporary by-product* of the then current technological limitations. On the latter interpretation, the “ideal” IVF process would be one in which no IVF embryos were destroyed. And while one country tried to achieve this goal via federal law,<sup>30</sup> the quote below from *Dig-*

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<sup>28</sup> This is analogous to the 180-degree-shift that occurs when euthanasia and physician assisted suicide are legalized, going from a situation in which doctors never use their skills and training to participate in killing patients to one where doctors do participate in killing patients. I have explained this foundational attitude shift and the resulting inevitable consequences here, Peter J. Colosi, “A Catholic Understanding of Death and Dying,” *Our Sunday Visitor*, Nov. 18, 2022, <https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/a-catholic-understanding-of-death-and-dying/>

<sup>29</sup> Citing statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Illume Fertility website and the “We Count Report” of the Society of Family Planning (all three of which are secular sources in favor of IVF and abortion), reporter Tyler Arnold calculated that the IVF industry ends the lives of twice as many human embryos as the abortion industry each year. See, Tyler Arnold, “More human embryos are destroyed through IVF than abortion every year,” *CAN News*, March 13, 2024, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/257066/more-human-embryos-destroyed-through-ivf-than-abortion-every-year>. The pages he cites are: CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/art/artdata/index.html>; Illume Fertility: <https://www.illumefertility.com/fertility-blog/ivf-attrition-rate#phase-2-fertilization>; and Society of Family Planning: [https://societyfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WeCountReport\\_10.16.23.pdf](https://societyfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WeCountReport_10.16.23.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> In 2004 Italy passed a law (40/2004) requiring that no more than three embryos may be created at any one time, that all embryos created must be transferred into the

*nitas Personae* noted that the empirical evidence over time indicates that abortion is not a temporary by-product due to technological limitations, but rather that abortion continues unabated and is intentionally<sup>31</sup> integrated into the IVF process:

The fact that the process of *in vitro* fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos was already noted in the Instruction *Donum vitae*. There were some who maintained that this was due to techniques which were still somewhat imperfect. Subsequent experience has shown, however, that all techniques of *in vitro* fertilization proceed as if the human embryo were simply a mass of cells to be used, selected and discarded...[I]t is deeply disturbing that research in this area aims principally at obtaining better results in terms of the percentage of babies born to women who begin the process, but does not manifest a concrete interest in the right to life of each individual embryo.<sup>32</sup>

The evidence indicates that abortion is a design feature of IVF which flows necessarily from treating human beings as products. The reason is because those doing IVF *want* several embryos to choose from, so that they have the highest chance of getting "the best" baby and also to avoid having to hyper-ovulate the

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woman and that cryopreservation is forbidden. Such a law seems to flow from an awareness of the moral problems concomitant with the production mentality toward human beings. The Italian law has been challenged and modified numerous times since 2004 by those claiming that it is too restrictive. I know of no other jurisdictions that have attempted to legally restrict IVF to some version of the simple case. See, Andrea Boggio, "Italy enacts new law on medically assisted reproduction," *Human Reproduction* (2005) 20.5, 1153–1157. [https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/20/5/1153/2356855#google\\_vignette](https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/20/5/1153/2356855#google_vignette). doi: 10.1093/humrep/deh871.

<sup>31</sup> "It is true that not all of the losses of embryos in the process of *in vitro* have the same relationship to the will of those involved in the procedure. But it is also true that in many cases the abandonment, destruction, and loss of embryos are foreseen and willed." *Dignitas Personae*, par. 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 14

woman more than one time.<sup>33</sup> The deliberate generation of more embryos than will be used and the deliberate discarding of the excess embryos (by simply destroying them, using them in research, or abandoning them indefinitely in cryopreservation until they die or are disposed of) is integral to IVF.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, if many embryos are transferred and they all implant, “selective reduction” is employed, which involves the parents deciding to abort one or more of the successfully implanted embryos to make room for the others to grow. And prior to implantation embryos are often selected or discarded via preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) “*in order to ensure that only embryos free from defects or having the desired sex or other particular qualities are transferred*”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Cynthia Murdock, “IVF Attrition Rate: Why Don’t All Eggs Create Embryos?” posted at Illume Fertility, in which the procedure is explained clearly, noting the intended goal of retrieving 12 eggs via hyper-ovulation, in the full knowledge that 10 will typically be suitable for fertilization after which only 3-4 of those will be viable for implantation. See, <https://www.illumefertility.com/fertility-blog/ivf-attrition-rate#phase-2-fertilization>. See also, *Dignitas Personae*, par. 15.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, there are many more millions of babies discarded than those transferred, and millions kept frozen. See Stephanie Gray Connors, *Conceived by Science*, 30 and the notes there. See also, Nicanor Austriaco, OP, *Biomedicine and Beatitude* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2021), 138. *Dignitas Personae* notes that, “Currently the number of embryos sacrificed, even in the more technically advanced centers of artificial fertilization, hovers above 80 percent”, par. 14, note 27. Commenting further, we read, “These losses are accepted by the practitioners of in vitro fertilization as the price to be paid for positive results. In reality, it is deeply disturbing that research in this area aims principally at obtaining better results in terms of the percentage of babies born to women who begin the process, but does not manifest a concrete interest in the right to life of each individual embryo” *Dignitas Personae*, par. 14.

<sup>35</sup> See *Dignitas Personae*, par. 22, (italics in original). Even though only in the case of selective reduction are the babies in the womb of the mother, all of the cases mentioned here are abortions, for as John Paul II noted in *The Gospel of Life*, par. 58, “[A]bortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.”

### 3.2 IVF and Eugenics

The idea of *selecting* the “best” embryos (via PGD or selective reduction), in addition to resulting in the abortion of those not chosen, introduces a eugenic mentality to the IVF process which is also a design feature of IVF.<sup>36</sup> Unless a couple is willing simply to use chance to choose which embryos they want to keep, they will have to use some kind of *selection criteria*. In either case it is immoral, but using selection criteria means deciding whether a human being will live or die based on whether they possess this or that trait or “quality level”; this is eugenics. Once the IVF process has begun, with its multiple fertilizations, such decisions will be unavoidable. From this technical necessity it is a very short step to full-on eugenics which explicitly grounds the worth of persons in traits rather than in the fact of just being a new, precious person. If certain traits are deemed essential, a baby without them will be considered without worth and discarded. As noted above, this is integral to the IVF industry, where children are “rated” for “quality”—some kept for implantation, others disposed of.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, feelings of guilt in this regard arise in the parents, which *Dignitas Personae* puts this way:

The decision to eliminate human lives, given that it was a human life that was desired in the first place, represents a contradiction that can often lead to suffering and feelings of guilt lasting for years.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> To be recommended on this theme is *The Linacre Quarterly*, “Special Issue: In Defense of Human Dignity: Against the Depersonalization and Commodification of the Human Person”, (2020) 87.4.

<sup>37</sup> For another discussion of the “grading” process see Stephanie Gray Connors, *Conceived by Science*, 46 – 48, and the notes there. Gray Connors shows the commodification of human beings that is integral to this “grading”. *Dignitas Personae*, par. 15 notes, “Cases are becoming ever more prevalent in which couples who have no fertility problems are using artificial means of procreation in order to engage in genetic selection of their offspring.”

<sup>38</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 21. See Sheryl de Lacey, “Death in the clinic: women's perceptions and experiences of discarding supernumerary IVF embryos,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 2017 39.3, 397 – 411. Open access at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9566.12497>. From the abstract: “21 women and 12 of 21 partners

### 3.3 IVF and the Loss of Unconditional Love

One might think that it is only the discarded embryos who are violated, but John Crosby has observed that while the crime of killing a person takes place with respect to the discarded embryos, those not killed but kept are also profoundly depersonalized.<sup>39</sup> This truth is reflected in the thoughts expressed by some persons produced by IVF when they realize—with a shock—that had they lacked this or that trait, they would have been the discarded embryo and that one or more of their siblings were in fact discarded when they were selected and kept. This gives rise to the inner sense that they were not loved and accepted just for who they are, but rather selected based on “quality control” or “designer baby” traits. The doubt that this realization awakens with respect to unconditional love and acceptance by one’s parents represents a profound lived-experiential reason for the immorality of IVF.

An additional dimension of this doubt about love becomes clear in the experience of those who have been created using so-called anonymous sperm “donors”.<sup>40</sup> One such person, Christine Whipp, made the point this way,

My existence owed almost nothing to the serendipitous nature of normal human reproduction, where babies are the natural progression of mutually fulfilling adult relationships, but rather represented a verbal contract, a financial transaction and a cold, clinical harnessing of medical technology.<sup>41</sup>

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were interviewed about the decision they made to discard their embryos...The clinic treated embryo discard as disposal of biological waste and failed to acknowledge the meaning of the event. By contrast women experienced emotional bereavement described as similar to early pregnancy loss, and described experiences of attachment and grief.”

<sup>39</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 10 – 12.

<sup>40</sup> I say “so-called” sperm donors because the terms “donation” and “donor” come from the Latin word for “gift”, but in this situation money is paid to the provider of the sperm. Even if no money were paid, this is still immoral, but calling it sperm-donor is disingenuous.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Clark and Elizabeth Marquardt, “The Sperm Donor Kids Are Not Really Al-

Insight on this can be gained by comparing what Christine Whipp says with this passage from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift. The "supreme gift of marriage" is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged "right to a child" would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right "to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents," and "the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception."<sup>42</sup>

### 3.4 IVF and Discrimination

Another way to express the intrinsic immorality of IVF reflected in the production and eugenic mentalities is in terms of discrimination:

By treating the human embryo as mere "laboratory material", *the concept itself of human dignity is also subjected to alteration and discrimination*. Dignity belongs equally to every single human being, irrespective of his parents' desires, his social condition, educational formation or level of physical development...Such discrimination is immoral and must therefore be considered legally unacceptable, just as there is a duty to eliminate

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right", *Slate Magazine*, June 14, 2010. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2010/06/new-study-shows-sperm-donor-kids-suffer.html>. See also, Kerri Christopher, "Our Bodies, Our Anger," *First Things*, March 2024, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/03/our-bodies-our-anger>: "IVF bequeaths to a child some uncomfortable truths: that he has his origins in an act of masturbation rather than sexual union; that doctors selected him from among his siblings as the most likely to survive; that his siblings were thereafter discarded, or remain on ice. He will spend his life wrestling with how his existence—something objectively good—could come from something so distorted. If his mother used a sperm donor, this child might spend his adult years trying to find his half-siblings, or even his father. He'll be grateful to be alive, but deeply confused about what family means. For the rest of her life, his mother will carry these weights in her soul."

<sup>42</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2378. Another very helpful website in this regard is <https://thembeforeus.com/>.

cultural, economic and social barriers which undermine the full recognition and protection of disabled or ill people.<sup>43</sup>

Bringing human beings into existence via IVF was the first method of doing so outside of conjugal relations. Overtime that has led to other methods of doing so in the laboratory. Those methods bring further moral problems with them. I will now comment on three such methods, namely: human embryo “models”; reproductive cloning; and three parent embryos.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.5 IVF and Human Embryo “Models”

News recently broke of the creation of “human embryo models.” Described by their creators as textbook images of human embryos at 14-days, they are created using naïve stem cells, without using sperm, eggs or a womb and they produce hormones that result in a positive pregnancy test.<sup>45</sup> I suspect the term “model” was carefully chosen in anticipation of potential volatile reactions that would have ensued if it were stated that these are actual embryos. But they very well may be human embryos, and in reading about the procedure there is much evidence in that direction.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 22.

<sup>44</sup> As *Dignitas Personae*, 15 noted: “This sad reality, which often goes unmentioned, is truly deplorable: the ‘various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life.’”

<sup>45</sup> James Gallagher, “Scientists grow whole model of human embryo, without sperm or egg”, BBC News September 6, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-66715669>. This BBC science news report is based on Bernardo Oldak, et. al., “Complete human day 14 post-implantation embryo models from naive ES cells”, *Nature*, published online Sept. 6, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06604-5>.

<sup>46</sup> An obvious question arises here: How can these be human embryos if they are engineered in this way? Since they behave exactly as human embryos and are members of the human species, then this would seem to very strongly suggest that they are human beings. Theologically speaking the question is: Why would God put a soul into a human being created in this way? It is similar to the question of whether God will put a soul into

There will certainly be much discussion in the world of bioethics and especially Catholic bioethics on this latest development in the coming months and years. For now, since there is no way to know whether these are human embryos or just human “models” (a term not quite defined), and since everyone agrees they are alive and of the human species, I am going to refer to them in what follows as embryos, and not as “models.” Furthermore, this state of doubt about whether they are human embryos yields a moral obligation to treat them as if they are.<sup>47</sup> Here, I want to make just one point which pertains to the topic of this essay related to the fact that these human embryos were created without the use of sperm or eggs.<sup>48</sup> Those involved in this work say they have no intention of implanting these em-

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a cloned human being. If a conception event has occurred, then God puts a soul into a human being. The question is whether cloning or the procedure discussed here constitute conception events. This was the heart of the matter in the Altered Nuclear Transfer and Oocyte Assisted Reproduction (ANT-OAR) technology debates. It was claimed that those procedures created pluripotent embryonic stem cells in morally acceptable ways. They used various methods involving ova, genetic manipulation and cloning technology to, it was said, bypass the zygotic stage and generate cells with the epigenetic profile of pluripotent embryonic stem cells. Some Catholic scientists and theologians endorsed these procedures. Other Catholic thinkers and scientists argued against these technologies because we simply could not know whether in fact a conception event had occurred or not, arguing that at the very least the principle of precaution should prevail. The arguments against ANT-OAR should not be forgotten as we enter these new and more dangerous waters. See the collection of articles in *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Collections: Critiques of Altered Nuclear Transfer (ANT) and Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming (OAR): <https://www.communio-icr.com/collections/view/ant-oar>. I also offered a critique of ANT-OAR, Peter J. Colosi, 2008. “Personhood, the Soul and Non-Conscious Human Beings: Some Critical Reflections on Recent Forms of Argumentation within the Pro-Life Movement.” *Life and Learning XVII*, (Conference Proceedings of University Faculty for Life, Villanova University June 1-3, 2007), 277-304.

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II’s words to those “who try to justify abortion by claiming that the result of conception, at least up to a certain number of days, cannot yet be considered a personal human life”, apply here as well: “[W]hat is at stake is so important that, from the standpoint of moral obligation, the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo.” *The Gospel of Life*, par. 60.

<sup>48</sup> An easy-to-understand presentation of the method is given by Gallagher, *op. cit.*

bryos into wombs and bringing them to term (meaning that they intend to kill them before doing so; that is, they will be used exclusively for research). If, however, at some future point scientists do implant some of these embryos and they turn out to be human persons and are brought to term, then what we will have are *children who do not have parents*. At least those children who were conceived via an anonymous sperm “donor” have a biological father who they can find, however painful that situation is. Children brought into existence with this method will literally *have no parents in existence* even to look for since they were not created from sperm from a specific man and eggs from a specific woman. To eliminate the existence of parents and thereby the existence of family would seem to be the most blasphemous and cruel act possible for science to carry out. I can’t think of a greater attack on the meaning of God’s creation as given to us in *Genesis*.

### 3.6 IVF and Cloning

Another form of asexual reproduction, reproductive cloning, would have a set of related existential problems if it ever came to pass. As *Dignitas Personae* pointed out:

If cloning were to be done for *reproduction*, this would impose on the resulting individual a predetermined genetic identity, subjecting him—as has been stated—to a form of *biological slavery*, from which it would be difficult to free himself. The fact that someone would arrogate to himself the right to determine arbitrarily the genetic characteristics of another person represents *a grave offense to the dignity of that person as well as to the fundamental equality of all people*.<sup>49</sup>

The problem here is that a cloned human being does not come about via the union of a sperm and an egg generating a DNA structure unique to the new person, but rather contains the DNA structure of the somatic cell of the person whose

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<sup>49</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par. 29 (Italics in original).

clone was made. This is a form of deliberate biological manipulation by a person and technicians to replicate the physical self of that person in another person.<sup>50</sup> That second person, the clone, though truly a new and unique human person, would nonetheless have profound difficulty accepting his or herself as a unique individual. Consider a comparison to one of the most depersonalizing experiences that can happen in life, namely, when we are approached exclusively in terms of repeatable traits, as in being stereotyped:

We only have to consider the point of view of people who are viewed through the lens of general types and patterns; they feel ignored as persons. Just when I think someone is taking a personal interest in me, I painfully realize that the interest is based only my being a typical something or other. This means that the one taking the interest in me would take the same interest in any other equally typical man or woman, and so his interest is not really in me as a person. I am replaceable in his eyes by any other equally good instance of the type that interests him. This is why I feel offended: I know that as a person I am in fact more than just a replaceable instance of a type.<sup>51</sup>

Now, if it is such an experiential affront to one's dignity to be stereotyped, how much more so would the affront to one's dignity be felt by one whose very coming into being was the result of biological manipulation for the express purpose of repeating the physical traits of someone else?

In addition to the moral problems just mentioned which make reproductive cloning intrinsically immoral, therapeutic cloning is also intrinsically immoral for a different set of reasons. This technology is sought after to clone human embryos which will then be killed to extract their pluripotent stem cells which will not be rejected by the body of the person from whom the clone was made; these cells will

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<sup>50</sup> This is completely different from the case of identical twins, who come about as gifts via conjugal relations of their parents and are received as gifts.

<sup>51</sup> John F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Paul II*, (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2019), 26 – 27.

then be used to develop treatments for that person.<sup>52</sup> It is intrinsically immoral to create new human persons in order to kill them at a certain stage of development and to then use their remains to create therapies for another person. In perceptive futuristic movies this concept is logically extended to stages of development beyond the embryonic and cloning is used to create adult human replicas as sources of replacement organs for the rich and famous.<sup>53</sup> The violation of human persons in this way at any stage of development is equally horrific, but in such futuristic logical extensions of current scientific research one sees vividly that the Church’s description of cloning as “biological slavery” applies in another chilling way to therapeutic cloning as well.

Another reason for the intrinsic immorality of cloning is that it represents yet another method serving the literal elimination of the family, as John Haas has noted:

Some homosexual people have said that cloning would be a perfect way to have children, because they would not have to marry someone of the opposite sex. This would be terribly unfair to the child, depriving him or her of a natural father and mother.<sup>54</sup>

It is the mentality behind and the practice of IVF that has served as the gateway to cloning, and thus to these further violations of the dignity of persons, the family and God’s plan.

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<sup>52</sup> The desire to obtain such pluripotent stem cells in an ethically acceptable way was the motive behind the attempt to create human embryonic stem cells via altered nuclear transfer and oocyte altered reproduction. See note 46 above.

<sup>53</sup> *The Island* (2005), directed by Michael Bay, DreamWorks. This movie is based on this premise concerning the purpose of cloning. See, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Island\\_\(2005\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_(2005_film)).

<sup>54</sup> John, M. Haas, (n.d.), “Begotten Not Made: A Catholic View of Reproductive Technology”. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/reproductive-technology/begotten-not-made-a-catholic-view-of-reproductive-technology>.

### 3.7 IVF and Embryos with Three Genetic Parents

Another clear attack on the Divine plan is the creation of human embryos with three genetic parents. This has already been done and it results in biological and psychological confusion about parentage to any such embryos brought to term. The justification given for this use of IVF is to prevent inherited mitochondrial disease in human beings whose mothers are known to have the disease. But the biological rupture and psychological confusion concerning the familial identity of the child makes this procedure intrinsically immoral. There are various methods for creating three-parent embryos; they all involve IVF and some involve the creation and destruction of embryos in order to obtain the material needed to create the embryo who will be brought to term without the mitochondrial disease.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See, “World’s first three-parent baby raises questions about long-term health risks,” *The Conversation*, September 28, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/worlds-first-three-parent-baby-raises-questions-about-long-term-health-risks-66189>. In the case of this first three-parent baby who was brought to term, this article explains that “the nucleus that contains all of the genetic material apart from the mitochondria was removed from the mother’s egg and placed into an egg with healthy mitochondria, from which the nucleus had been removed. The egg was then fertilized with the father’s sperm and the resulting embryo was placed in the mother’s womb where it developed into the baby. This means the baby has three genetic parents: the father who supplied the sperm, the mother who supplied both womb and the egg nucleus, and an anonymous donor who supplied healthy mitochondria. Of these, the mitochondrial DNA is by far the smallest contribution.” I outlined this procedure and developed a critique of it from the point of view of Catholic medical ethics and social teaching here, Peter J. Colosi, “A Catholic Anthropology and Medical Ethics.” In *Catholic Witness in Health Care*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 2017), 55 – 58. I summarized the method that requires the deliberate creation and destruction of earlier embryos thus, “In this procedure, two zygotic embryos are created through IVF, and both have their pronuclei removed. The nuclear DNA removed from the zygote whose original egg had defective mitochondrial DNA is implanted into the enucleated zygotic embryo conceived by a donor woman whose egg had healthy mitochondria; the pronuclei from that zygote are discarded. The resultant developing embryo has about 98 percent of its DNA from the original couple and the rest from the mitochondria in the donor egg, thus giving the embryo three genetic parents,” 54-55, see also the notes to those pages.

With respect to embryo “models”, reproductive cloning and embryos with three genetic parents, little could John Paul II have known the new existential meaning “having no family” would take on when he penned these words back in 1994 describing the pain caused to the children of broken families due to the Sexual Revolution:

When he has no family, the person coming into the world develops an anguished sense of pain and loss, one which will subsequently burden his whole life. The Church draws near with loving concern to all who experience situations such as these, for she knows well the fundamental role which the family is called upon to play.<sup>56</sup>

### **3.8 Concluding Remarks on the Moral Critique of IVF: Pope Francis on “The Throw Away Culture”**

All of the above points amount to treating the children—both those destroyed and those kept—as a means to an end, rather than as persons with a dignity equal to that of the parents, not to mention to the doctors and the technicians.<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>56</sup> *Letter to Families*, par. 2.

<sup>57</sup> In addition to confirming the high death rates of embryos in the IVF industry, two recent documents authored by Catholic organizations have helpfully collected and organized information and data from numerous secular sources showing the large number of health risks to women who undergo IVF and the high percentage rates of numerous diseases contracted by babies because of having been conceived via IVF. Additionally, they provide evidence, again from multiple secular sources, showing that very often there are “mix-ups” that lead to heartbreak, familial confusion and long, drawn out, painful legal battles. See, “In Vitro Fertilization: The Human Cost” published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and recently updated in March 2024. Available at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/ivf-fertilization-human-cost-2024>, and the letter dated January 19, 2024 by The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), the Catholic Medical Association (CMA), and the National Association of Catholic Nurses, USA (NACN-USA) written to the Division of Reproductive Health at the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion objecting to that agency’s proposal to drastically curtail data collection requirements in the process fertility treatments. Available at

attitude, to treat another person as a means to one's own end, is opposed to love.

Furthermore, the creation of human beings with the deliberate intent to destroy some of them for the sake of others (for the sake of the parents, for the sake of the implanted siblings, and for the sake of the doctors, technicians, and researchers) is a clear example of what Pope Francis has referred to as "The Throw Away Culture":

The throwaway culture says, "I use you as much as I need you. When I am not interested in you anymore, or you are in my way, I throw you out." It is especially the weakest who are treated this way — unborn children, the elderly, the needy, and the disadvantaged.<sup>58</sup>

*Dignitas Personae* succinctly captures the moral problems covered above in a quote that also segues into a discussion of the beautiful reasons why the Church holds the view that every child ought to be conceived within the conjugal embrace of his married mother and father:

The blithe acceptance of the enormous number of abortions involved in

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3ada1a6a2e8d6a131d1dcd/t/65ef21d28ef66444062dddc0/1710170578087/ART+Final+2024+copy.pdf>. See also, Emi Nietfeld, "The Exes Who Froze Embryos and Regret It From hurt feelings and debt to legal battles and harassment, risks come with committing by combining DNA," *The Cut*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.thecut.com/article/what-happens-to-frozen-embryos-when-couples-break-up.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, January 29, 2023. See Courtney Mares, "Pope Francis decries culture that 'throws away' unborn children, elderly, poor," *CNA News*, January 29, 2023. Examples of the throw away culture expanding due to IVF could be multiplied; to take just one more example, consider the recent case of research done on poor women in Nayarit Mexico in order to compare naturally conceived embryos with IVF embryos in which the women were paid the equivalent of about two months' wages and were required to sign away their rights to their embryos and to agree to terminate via uterine curettage or methotrexate any pregnancies that occurred. This is presented and analyzed from a Catholic perspective by Cynthia Jones-Nosacek, "Fertility Technology Research and the Use of Human Beings as Property," *The Linacre Quarterly* (2020) 87.4, 376 – 380.

the process of in vitro fertilization vividly illustrates how the replacement of the conjugal act by a technical procedure – in addition to being in contradiction with the respect that is due to procreation as something that cannot be reduced to mere reproduction – leads to a weakening of the respect owed to every human being. Recognition of such respect is, on the other hand, promoted by the intimacy of husband and wife nourished by married love.<sup>59</sup>

The promise and hope inherent in the Church’s prohibition of IVF is evident in this text. If the spouses nourish their intimacy in their married love, which requires among other things preserving the unitive and procreative meanings of their conjugal relations (which necessarily means not using contraception or IVF) then respect for human persons will be promoted. And indeed, children will be loved into existence by their parents<sup>60</sup> and will experience that love. I will develop this point further in the next section.

#### **4. A Reflection on the Beauty of Church Teaching on the Origin of Life**

I would like to focus now on the beauty of Church teaching on the origin life, which represents a stark contrast to the approach of the IVF industry as described above. This can be brought to evidence via unfolding the inner meaning of conju-

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<sup>59</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, par., 16.

<sup>60</sup> With this I do not mean to diminish the heartfelt yearning of parents who resorted to IVF to bring their children into the world, nor their beautiful desire to have a family. With respect to the profound pastoral dimensions of infertility, in particular the deep pain involved in the inability to have children of one’s own, many sensitive reflections have been offered by Catholic writers who have experienced this pain in the midst of following God’s will: Marie Cabaud Meaney, “Speaking from the Heart – Pastoral Care for Those Suffering from Infertility,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2023) 90.1: 55 – 63; Stephanie Gray Connors, *Conceived by Science: Thinking Carefully and Compassionately about Infertility and IVF* (Florida: Wongeese Publishing, 2021); Kimberly Henkel, Ann M. Koshute, and Stacy Huneck, “A Spring in the Desert: Infertility and Merciful Accompaniment,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 435 – 449; see also the Springs in the Desert website: <https://springsinthedesert.org/>.

gal union and the concepts of *person*, *gift* and *community*. In the following section, I will connect these insights to the Church teaching on the common good of human society.

In the prolife movement we often hear the phrase that “every human being should be respected from the moment of conception to natural death.” When we hear that, we typically think in terms of lovingly caring for the vulnerable along with the prohibition against killing them via abortion and euthanasia. And that is perhaps the most important meaning of the phrase. But an additional meaning of it is that to respect an embryo from the moment of conception includes *how that new person is brought into being*.<sup>61</sup> A profound respect is *also* shown to a new human being by the *way* in which he or she is created, namely, via a specific conjugal act between his or her married mother and father. In this context the Church speaks of the equal dignity of and mutual respect between parents and children, while of course also recognizing their proper roles within the relationship.<sup>62</sup>

While the critique of IVF presented above addressed many violations of the dignity of embryonic human beings, we will now address at greater length the relationship between the parents and the new baby. The idea here is to gain the insight that when human persons come into being via conjugal relations between their married mother and father this sets the relationship on the proper footing and trajectory. On the other hand, when a new human person comes into being via IVF there is from the beginning a morally problematic foundation built into the relationship that then warps an otherwise natural and safe trajectory.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Dignitas Personae* puts the point this way: “The human embryo has, therefore, from the very beginning, the dignity proper to a person. Respect for that dignity is owed to every human being because each one carries in an indelible way his own dignity and value. *The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family*, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Procreation which is truly responsible vis-à-vis the child to be born must be the fruit of marriage (Pars. 5 – 6, italics in original).”

<sup>62</sup> See *Dignitas Personae*, pars. 17 and 29 and *Letter to Families*, par. 15. See also Peter J. Colosi and William V. Williams, “Bill of Rights for Children,” *The Linacre Quarterly* (2014) 81.4: 298-301.

<sup>63</sup> In part 6 I will comment on the question of healing that problematic beginning.

We could perhaps formulate the idea this way: The *origin* of someone refers to how a person came into existence; namely, what exactly the acts and the decisions of the creators were at the origin of a person's existence. The *relationships* of someone refer in this context to the relationships between the new person and those who created him or her. The origin and the relationships are intimately linked in that the relationships are formed into a certain structure from the beginning precisely because of the acts and decisions that brought the new person into being. The relationships then take specific trajectories because of that origin.

A real-life story can make the abstractness of this point clear. In 2006 Katrina Clark wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* in which she relates her experience of being a donor conceived child.<sup>64</sup> She describes in striking detail the confusing experiences, painful thoughts, and intense desires that go through the mind of a young girl growing up in that situation. These include yearning for a father via daydreaming, envy at friends who have a father, dealing with resentment towards her mother, and the intense search for her biological father. She does find her father and shares the mixed feelings that ensued, including relief and gladness at knowing and meeting him, and sadness at the realization that his interest in her, while present, was not as strong as she had wished for.

That the origin of someone sets the foundation and trajectory of their relationships with their creators comes clearly into focus in her comment that:

Those of us created with donated sperm won't stay bubbly babies forever. We're all going to grow into adults and form opinions about the decision to bring us into the world in a way that deprives us of the basic right to know where we came from, what our history is and who both our parents are.<sup>65</sup>

She observes further that in the process of donor conception all concern is fo-

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<sup>64</sup> Katrina Clark, December 16, 2006, “Who’s Your Daddy?” *The Washington Post*  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2006/12/17/whos-your-daddy/856d8f09-d17c-4a0c-be1b-5435190b084c/>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

cused exclusively on the adults involved; in her case her mother who wanted a baby, the donor who wanted anonymity and the doctors who do their work. After saying this she expresses with crystal clarity from personal experience the point that I am attempting to express philosophically:

It's hypocritical of parents and medical professionals to assume that biological roots won't matter to the "products" of the cryobanks' service, when the longing for a biological relationship is what brings customers to the banks in the first place.<sup>66</sup>

The example of Katrina Clark represents an obvious case when IVF sets up a broken relationship from the start. In this section I would like to explain the Church teaching that all cases of IVF necessarily contain structural brokenness. What I have called above the beauty of Church teaching on the origin of human life entails explaining why it is the case that the only way to honor and respect the equal dignity of parents and their children from the moment of conception is when the origin of children is confined to the conjugal union of his or her married mother and father, which sets the relationship on the proper footing.

In order to explain this, I will draw on Catholic philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand's book *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction*.<sup>67</sup> This book was very likely the first sustained defense of *Humanae Vitae*, appearing the

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<sup>66</sup> Katrina Clark, December 16, 2006, "Who's Your Daddy?" *The Washington Post* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2006/12/17/whos-your-daddy/856d8f09-d17c-4a0c-be1b-5435190b084c/>

<sup>67</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction. An Essay on Birth Control and Catholic Conscience*, (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2018 [1968]). In what follows I also draw upon a review of Hildebrand's book in which I summarized his views, see Peter J. Colosi, "Book Review of The Encyclical Humanae Vitae A Sign of Contradiction. An Essay on Birth Control and Catholic Conscience" by Dietrich von Hildebrand (Steubenville, Ohio: Hildebrand Press, 2018 [original German, 1968]) in *The Catholic Social Science Review*, 24 (2019): 212 – 15. In slightly revised form some paragraphs are reprinted here with grateful acknowledgement of permission from Stephen M. Krason, president of The Society of Catholic Social Scientists.

very same year. Although Hildebrand does not mention IVF, his arguments can be extended to defend Church teaching on that as well.<sup>68</sup> Hildebrand points out that it is right to resist the notion that marriage is merely a means for procreation,<sup>69</sup> as that would be to instrumentalize the spouses.<sup>70</sup> He then adds that, while it is a profound mystery, the inseparable connection between the love-communion of the spouses and the procreation of their children that flows from it can be brought to light.<sup>71</sup> He explains this inseparable link by first distinguishing between two kinds of relations: a “superabundant relation” and a “means/end relation”. The relationship between marital union and the coming into being of a child should never be thought of as a means/end relation as this would reduce conjugal relations to a kind of mechanism for creating new members of the species, thereby instrumentalizing conjugal relations. Rather, the relation is one of superabundance, which means that the child is a gift which arises mysteriously from the love of his or her parents. This passage of *Dignitas Personae* also expresses this idea,

*The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Procreation which is truly responsible vis-à-vis the child to be born must be the fruit of marriage.*<sup>72</sup>

Hildebrand asks whether anything more beautiful could be imagined than “this connection between the deepest love communion, the ultimate self-donation out of love, and the creation of a new human being?”<sup>73</sup> God has wonderfully linked these two, and this is certainly the beautiful underlying reason why *Donum*

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<sup>68</sup> See Maria Fedoryka “The Personalist Basis of the Church’s Teaching on Human Sexuality and the Natural Law in the Work of John Paul II Part I” *The Linacre Quarterly*, 91.4, 31 – 59, and Part II, *The Linacre Quarterly* 91.2, 168-80.

<sup>69</sup> Hildebrand, 5.

<sup>70</sup> See also Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, translated by H.T. Willets (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), 57–61 and 233–34 where he makes this same point.

<sup>71</sup> Hildebrand, 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, 6 (emphasis in original).

<sup>73</sup> Hildebrand, 41.

*Vitae* and *Dignitas Personae* say that children have a right to come into existence in and through a loving conjugal act between their married mother and father. When children have their origin in this way, *spousal love* and *receiving the child as a surprising gift* are the foundational bases which inform the relationships from the beginning, and from which they develop and grow. The point here is that this approach and reality is the furthest thing from utilitarian manipulation. Even further—and this is a mysterious dimension—the child’s very being in some way comes from the love of the parents (and also from God’s love); Pope John Paul II refers to the child as *the embodiment of the spousal love of his or her parents*.<sup>74</sup> Put simply, this means that when the married couple engages in conjugal union their spousal love is expressed, fulfilled, and deepened, and if the sperm and egg meet thereafter, then a surprise gift of new human life exists who flowed from the very spousal love present and experienced in that specific act of self-gift. This is how God arranged for new life to begin, and it is beautiful. When children come into existence in this way, the relationship between the parents and the child is truly grounded in their equal dignity as persons and the relationship is set on the proper trajectory.

IVF dismantles this structure and thereby violates the love between the spouses and harms the relationship between the parents and the children.<sup>75</sup> This is because, as Hildebrand shows, the utilitarian concept of “means to end” has no place in the realm of love between persons and contradicts the gift-character of human procreation.<sup>76</sup> In IVF the bodies of the spouses are treated as objects used for the

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<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane* [Letter to Families], 1994, par. 11. See also, *Dignitas Personae*, par. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Commenting on IVF, *Donum Vitae* notes: “Such fertilization 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.” See also *Dignitas Personae*, pars. 6 and 17. See also, Colosi and Williams, “Bill of Rights for Children”.

<sup>76</sup> This same idea to never treat persons in a utilitarian manner, but always only to affirm persons in love is the premise on which Wojtyła (1993) builds his entire teaching on marital/sexual ethics. His critique of the rigorist-puritanical approach which uses sex and

purpose of the technological production of a child, rather than as integral aspects of the spouses to be loved and cherished with the hope of the gift of a child flowing from that self-giving and receiving reciprocal love. Hildebrand points out that God’s plan is set up to avoid ever reducing spouses or children to objects or products: “to the sublime love-union [spousal conjugal relations] God has confided the coming into being of a new man, a cooperation with His divine creativity.”<sup>77</sup> St. John Paul II grounds his *Theology of the Body* in the idea that “[t]he dimension of gift...stands also at the very heart of the mystery of creation.”<sup>78</sup>

Once this vision of the two meanings of marital relations (union and procreation) as grounded in God’s very gift of creation is perceived, then couples can see, and even experience, the profound importance of keeping those meanings together, and they can see that any act deliberately separating them via contraception or IVF necessarily carries with it an instrumentalizing of all involved and constitutes a rejection of the gift character with which they have been imbued by God. And once that fateful step is taken, all of the further aberrations mentioned above follow as a matter of course. At the beginning of the chapter, I quoted *Veritatis Splendor* in which John Paul II asked the lay faithful to make the effort to explain the underlying reasons for Church teaching, which is often expressed concisely and needs development. I would like to share a somewhat lengthy quotation from *Donum Vitae* which concisely packs in the points I have been attempting to explain in this essay. Though somewhat long, it is worth meditating on now, keeping in mind all that has been said up to this point:

Only respect for the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and respect for the unity of the human being make possible procreation in conformity with the dignity of the person. In his unique and irrepeatable

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the body only for reproduction could be easily transposed to a critique of IVF. I have attempted to show this development of Wojtyła’s thought here, Colosi, 2008, 287 – 89.

<sup>77</sup> Hildebrand, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, translated by Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006) Audience 13.2.

origin, the child must be respected and recognized as equal in personal dignity to those who give him life. The human person must be accepted in his parents' act of union and love; the generation of a child must therefore be the fruit of that mutual giving which is realized in the conjugal act wherein the spouses cooperate as servants and not as masters in the work of the Creator who is Love. In reality, the origin of a human person is the result of an act of giving. The one conceived must be the fruit of his parents' love. He cannot be desired or conceived as the product of an intervention of medical or biological techniques; that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology. No one may subject the coming of a child into the world to conditions of technical efficiency which are to be evaluated according to standards of control and dominion. The moral relevance of the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and between the goods of marriage, as well as the unity of the human being and the dignity of his origin, demand that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses. The link between procreation and the conjugal act is thus shown to be of great importance on the anthropological and moral planes, and it throws light on the positions of the Magisterium with regard to homologous artificial fertilization.<sup>79</sup>

Let us now turn to a discussion of the link between the points just made and the common good of human society, which is the key concern of the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>79</sup> *Donum Vitae*, B.A.c.

## 5. The Origin of Life and its Link to the Common Good of Society<sup>80</sup>

The very first line of Pope St. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*, delivered as a Papal audience talk on September 5, 1979, refers to the preparations under way for the Synod of Bishops which was to take place the following year from September 26 to October 22, 1980.<sup>81</sup> The topic of that Synod was the Christian family and its indispensable role in the formation of a healthy society. The fruit of the Synodal reflections was the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, a profound meditation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world.<sup>82</sup> Pope St. John Paul II set his *Theology of the Body* in relation to the work of the Synod in this way,

The cycle of reflections we are beginning today...has...the goal of *accompanying, so to speak, from afar the work* in preparation for the synod, not, however, by directly touching its topic, but by turning attention to the deep roots from which this topic springs.<sup>83</sup>

What are the deep roots from which the topic of the Christian family springs? The answer is marriage, the union of a man and a woman who will then form a family. The inner core of the family is the love between the spouses and their mar-

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<sup>80</sup> I have developed the points presented in this section at greater length here, Peter J. Colosi, “Mother Teresa, John Paul II and Christian Personalism vs. Peter Singer and Utilitarianism: Two Radically Opposed Conceptions of the Nature and Meaning of Family.” Chapter 4 in *The Family in the New Millennium: World Voices Supporting the “Natural” Clan*, Vol. 3. Edited by S.A. Loveless and T.B. Holman. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2007: 49-65.

<sup>81</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Translated by Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), Audience 1:1, p. 131.

<sup>82</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* [On the Christian Family in the Modern World], 1981. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html)

<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Translated by Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), Audience 1:5, p. 133 (italics in original).

ital union. In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II offers profound reflections on that spousal love and union of a man and a woman. He seems to have presented his *Theology of the Body* in service of the Synod knowing that we cannot get the family right if we do not first get the spousal union of man and woman right.

It is a fundamental tenet of Catholic social teaching that the family is the indispensable foundation of a healthy society. Pope John Paul II expressed the reason why quite succinctly when he said, “If the family is so important for the civilization of love, it is because of the particular *closeness and intensity of the bonds* which come to be between persons and generations within the family.”<sup>84</sup> This means that the intensity of love which we feel for our family members and which blossoms within us in the home is brought with us when we enter society. This love “flows over,” influencing our relations with all people we relate to out in the world and works as leaven in society bringing about an ethos of love, a civilization of love.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, John Paul II followed the above beautiful insight with this dire announcement concerning broken families:

However, the family remains *vulnerable* and can easily fall prey to dangers which weaken it or actually destroy its unity and stability. As a result of these dangers families cease to be witnesses of the civilization of love and can even become a negation of it, a kind of *counter-sign*. A broken family can, for its part, consolidate a specific form of “anti-civilization”, destroying love in its various expressions, with inevitable consequences for the whole of life in society.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Letter to Families*, par. 13 (italics in original).

<sup>85</sup> I have developed this further here, Peter J. Colosi, “Mother Teresa, John Paul II and Christian Personalism vs. Peter Singer and Utilitarianism: Two Radically Opposed Conceptions of the Nature and Meaning of Family,” chapter 4 in *The Family in the New Millennium: World Voices Supporting the “Natural” Clan*, Vol. 3. Edited by S.A. Loveless and T.B. Holman. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing (2007): 49-65.

<sup>86</sup> *Letter to Families*, par. 13 (italics in original).

Many saints have commented on the importance of the family for the health of society. St. Angela Merici noted that, “disorder in society is the result of disorder in the family,”<sup>87</sup> while St. Sharbel Makhlūf pleaded with the faithful to, “preserve the warmth of the family, because the warmth of the whole world cannot make up for it.”<sup>88</sup>

The family is an icon of the Holy Trinity and the place where God desires that all people experience and learn to love. In order to protect that, we must draw a line in the sand and say that the only way for human persons to come into existence, the only way to protect the warmth of the family and thus the common good of society, is for children to come into existence as a gift in, through and because of the loving embrace of their married mother and father. This does not mean that healing is not possible after IVF, as commented on below, but it does mean that we should not deliberately choose actions that inflict harm on the family; and it also means that we should certainly not legalize such actions enabling them to become structurally embedded into society and then exponentially grow into further horrific practices as described above.

## 6. Some Thoughts on Persons Conceived via IVF and Living Now

I would like to clearly state that the already existing babies, children and adults who have been created via IVF are human persons with the full dignity of human persons and have been loved into being by God and are loved with infinite Divine love by Him just as are all other human persons.<sup>89</sup> *Donum Vitae* expresses the point this way,

Although the manner in which human conception is achieved with IVF and ET [embryo transfer] cannot be approved, every child which comes

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<sup>87</sup> St. Angela Merici, cited in *Magnificat* (25.6), August 2023, 148.

<sup>88</sup> St. Sharbel Makhlūf, cited in *Magnificat* (25.5), July 2023, 200.

<sup>89</sup> See Maria Fedoryka “The Personalist Basis of the Church’s Teaching on Human Sexuality and the Natural Law in the Work of John Paul II. Part I, *The Linacre Quarterly* 2024: 91.4, 31 – 59 and Part II, *The Linacre Quarterly* 91.2, 168-80.

into the world must in any case be accepted as a living Gift of the divine Goodness and must be brought up with love.<sup>90</sup>

And *Dignitas Personae* expresses it this way,

[M]an has unassailable value: *he possesses an eternal vocation and is called to share in the Trinitarian love of the living God.* This value belongs to all without distinction.<sup>91</sup>

And so, although these persons were not conceived in a specific act of love between their married mother and father,<sup>92</sup> God did love them into existence and wants them to be in Heaven with Him for all eternity.

There are, in fact, very many ways in which human beings have come into existence other than in a loving embrace between their married mother and father, such as in fornication, adultery, incest, prostitution, and rape. It is a sign of God's merciful love in this regard that in the genealogy of Jesus we read that some of Jesus' ancestors were conceived in some of these ways.<sup>93</sup> God is all-loving, all-good

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<sup>90</sup> *Donum Vitae* II, B, 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Dignitas Personae*, 8 (Emphasis in original).

<sup>92</sup> With this I do not mean to diminish the yearning with which these parents brought their children into the world, nor their beautiful desire to have a family. With respect to the profound pastoral dimensions of infertility, in particular the deep pain involved in the inability to have children of one's own, many sensitive reflections have been offered by Catholic writers who have experienced this pain in the midst of following God's will: Marie Cabaud Meaney, "Speaking from the Heart – Pastoral Care for Those Suffering from Infertility," *The Linacre Quarterly* (2023) 90.1: 55 – 63; Stephanie Gray Connors, *Conceived by Science: Thinking Carefully and Compassionately about Infertility and IVF* (Florida: Wongeese Publishing, 2021); Kimberly Henkel, Ann M. Koshute, and Stacy Huneck, "A Spring in the Desert: Infertility and Merciful Accompaniment," *The Linacre Quarterly* (2022) 89.4: 435 – 449; see also the Springs in the Desert website: <https://springsinthedesert.org/>.

<sup>93</sup> *Mt.* 1: 1 – 17. Scriptural scholars present Tamar as having engaged in a form of incest (she had relations with her father-in-law); Rahab was called a harlot; Ruth, the daughter of an incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters, a good person who adds a pagan name to the genealogy; and Bathsheba, who scholars debate wheth-

and all-powerful, and He truly can make *all* things new.<sup>94</sup>

The people who came into existence in all of these ways outside of a specific loving act between their married mother and father were loved by God into being, are called to live with Him in eternity and they have the full dignity of persons. But this truth and the love we bear for those thus conceived does not lead us as Catholics to then approve of, support or legalize fornication, adultery, incest, prostitution and rape, since those acts remain intrinsically immoral. While there are, of course, many moral differences between married couples who use IVF (many with sincere intentions<sup>95</sup>) and people who willfully participate in any of the above listed actions, the main point here is that the fact that God can and does bring good out of sin does not mean that we should willfully participate in, approve of or legalize sin.

One degree or another of disrespect and structural relational brokenness unavoidably enters the relationship between the human creators and the child due to persons coming into being via any act that is not a specific, loving conjugal act between their married mother and father. Therefore, the traditional Christian themes of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation would be the proper means of enabling a healing of that brokenness and of those relationships.<sup>96</sup> Perhaps the Church could write a prayer and formulate a process by which forgiveness and healing could be sought by those suffering from the brokenness of having been

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er David raped her or whether he coerced her into adultery using his position of power as King, both of which, obviously, are morally wrong. One can find innumerable detailed studies of these cases. For helpful and concise summary accounts of all five women listed in Jesus’ genealogy (Mary, the mother of Jesus, being the fifth) see, Wayne J. Edwards, “The Five Women in the Lineage of Jesus,” [https://theheritagechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/English-Tamar\\_-The-Seeker-of-Justice-Matthew-1\\_1-17-Genesis-38\\_1-30.pdf](https://theheritagechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/English-Tamar_-The-Seeker-of-Justice-Matthew-1_1-17-Genesis-38_1-30.pdf). See also, Carmen Joy Imes, July 18, 2022, “Blame David, Not Bathsheba. The Prophet Nathan Did,” *Christianity Today*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/july-web-only/rape-david-bathsheba-adultery-sexual-sin-prophet-nathan.html>.

<sup>94</sup> See *Revelation* 21: 3 – 5

<sup>95</sup> See Luniani, Albino/Pope John Paul I, *A Passionate Adventure: Living the Catholic Faith Today*, translated by O.F.S. Lori Pieper, New York: Tau Cross Books and Media (2014): 332 – 334.

<sup>96</sup> See Frey, 2004.

conceived via IVF. This would certainly be a delicate matter, but I do not see a contradiction in telling one's child, at the appropriate age, that you love them, are deeply grateful for their existence and cannot imagine the world without them, while simultaneously expressing sorrow for the way he or she was brought into being which set up the brokenness and caused pain in the relationship. If this can work with children, say, conceived via adultery, it can also work with children conceived via IVF.<sup>97</sup>

## 7. Conclusion: The Promise of Human Happiness

Though *Humanae Vitae* does not mention IVF, IVF is wrong for the same reason contraception is wrong: the willful attempt to separate the unitive and procreative meanings of conjugal relations. Contraception is an attempt to separate the unitive meaning from the procreative, while IVF tries to separate the procreative meaning from the unitive. Since neither meaning can be maintained in such attempts, the end result is the same in both cases: Relationships that are meant to be characterized by love and self-gift are changed into relationships characterized by a utilitarian and manipulative attitudes.<sup>98</sup>

A beautiful feature of *Humanae Vitae* is the priority it gives to human happiness.<sup>99</sup> There, with great pastoral sensitivity, Pope St. Paul VI notes that in the

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<sup>97</sup> A very helpful text in this regard is Wanda Skowronska, "Catholic Psychologists and the Spiritual Dimension" in *Catholic Witness in Health Care*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 2017), 367 – 392. See especially pages 377-81 and 384-89, in which Skowronska touches directly on the relational pain associated with IVF and develops a profound reflection and helpful guide on the nature and practice of forgiveness, distinguishing forgiveness from typical misunderstandings and guiding the reader through its challenging true steps that lead to healing and reconciliation.

<sup>98</sup> See, *Humanae Vitae* pars. 11-12.

<sup>99</sup> Paul VI opens and closes the encyclical with discussions of happiness. The first paragraph reads:

The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties

transmission of human life married couples have always experienced great joy and sometimes also difficulties and hardships. Recent developments, he notes, have added new problems of conscience which concern the transmission of life and the very happiness of married couples and families. One senses that the pope wrote the encyclical motivated by a fatherly concern that married couples and families find and experience that true happiness for which we all yearn.<sup>100</sup> He therefore is-

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and hardships.

The fulfillment of this duty has always posed problems to the conscience of married people, but the recent course of human society and the concomitant changes have provoked new questions. The Church cannot ignore these questions, for they concern matters intimately connected with the life and happiness of human beings.

And the final paragraph reads:

Venerable brothers, beloved sons, all men of good will, great indeed is the work of education, of progress and of charity to which We now summon all of you. And this We do relying on the unshakable teaching of the Church, which teaching Peter's successor together with his brothers in the Catholic episcopate faithfully guards and interprets. And We are convinced that this truly great work will bring blessings both on the world and on the Church. For man cannot attain that true happiness for which he yearns with all the strength of his spirit, unless he keeps the laws which the Most High God has engraved in his very nature. These laws must be wisely and lovingly observed. On this great work, on all of you and especially on married couples, We implore from the God of all holiness and pity an abundance of heavenly grace as a pledge of which We gladly bestow Our apostolic blessing.

<sup>100</sup> In *Letter to Families*, par. 11, John Paul II reiterates this point: “This is why the Church never tires of teaching and of bearing witness to this truth. While certainly showing maternal understanding for the many complex crisis situations in which families are involved, as well as for the moral frailty of every human being, the Church is convinced that she must remain absolutely faithful to the truth about human love. Otherwise she would betray herself. To move away from this saving truth would be to close ‘the eyes of our hearts’ (cf. *Eph* 1:18), which instead should always stay open to the light which the Gospel sheds on human affairs (cf. *2 Tim* 1:10). An awareness of that sincere gift of self whereby man ‘finds himself’ must be constantly renewed and safeguarded in the face of

sued a summons to bishops,<sup>101</sup> priests<sup>102</sup> and to doctors and nurses<sup>103</sup> to carry out the great work of education so that married couples are enabled to wisely and lovingly observe the laws which God has engraved in our very nature because they are good and true, and also because this is the only way to attain the true happiness that God offers human beings.<sup>104</sup>

Once fully understood through such education, the beauty of Church teaching on the origin of human life can inspire loving obedience to the moral law and a profound respect for the dignity of all persons, even those not-yet conceived, with the faith-filled expectation that living these truths will produce a superabundant harvest of joy.

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the serious opposition which the Church meets on the part of those who advocate a false civilization of progress. The family always expresses a new dimension of good for mankind, and it thus creates a new responsibility. We are speaking of the responsibility for that particular common good in which is included the good of the person, of every member of the family community. While certainly a ‘difficult’ good (*‘bonum arduum’*), it is also an attractive one.”

<sup>101</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, par. 30.

<sup>102</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, par. 28.

<sup>103</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, par. 27.

<sup>104</sup> *Humanae Vitae* pars. 1 and 31. See also Wojtyła (1993), 60 – 62, where he makes this same point, distinguishing masterfully between “uti”, on the one hand, which designates using the body of one’s spouse as a means to an end in the case of the “sensualists” for sexual pleasure, and in the case of the “rigorists” for the goal of achieving a child, and “frui”, on the other hand, which designates the joy that results from spouses loving each for their own sake in line with the personalistic norm. I have developed this passage of Wojtyła at Colosi, 2008, 287 – 89.