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The family is the sanctuary of life 3 – Assisted procreation

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Many people feel that because they desire to have children, they are entitled to have them. Many will have children at all costs, turning to artificial means such as surrogate motherhood, donation of sperm or ova and artificial insemination.

There is often no consideration in the decision-making about the needs and rights of the child or God's will. Something many people often forget is that the child is entitled to best possible conditions that will allow him/her to grow into a well-adjusted, contributing member of society. Having children is not only about the couple or the mother-to-be. It is part of the whole process of spouses giving themselves to each other mutually physically and spiritually which makes them one flesh, of which children are the fruit.

Procreation is not only physical in nature, where sperm and egg meet, it is spiritual. Sometimes artificial methods of procreation remove the spiritual dimension of procreation from the process and therefore deny children the right to integral dignity of the human person.

“The desire to be a mother or a father does not justify any ‘right to children’. The unborn child must be guaranteed the best possible conditions of existence through the stability of a family founded on marriage, through the complementarities of the two persons, father and mother (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). The rapid development of research and its technological application in the area of reproduction poses new and delicate questions that involve society and the norms that regulate human social life.” It is important for all of us to keep up-to-date and educate our consciences in this area.

“It must be repeated that the ethical unacceptability of all reproductive techniques – such as the donation of sperm or ova, surrogate motherhood, heterologous artificial fertilisation – that make use of the uterus of another woman or of gametes of persons other than the married couple, injuring the right of the child to be born of one father and one mother who are father and mother both from a biological and from a legal point of view.

Equally unacceptable are methods that separate the unitive act from the procreative act by making use of laboratory techniques, such as homologous artificial insemination or fertilisation, such that the child comes about more as the result of an act of technology than as the natural fruit of a human act in which there is a full and total giving of the couple (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

Avoiding recourse to different forms of so-called ‘assisted procreation’ that replace the marriage act means respecting – both in the parents and in the children that they intend to generate – the integral dignity of the human person (*Donum Vitae*). On the other hand, those methods that are meant to lend assistance to the conjugal act or to the attainment of its effects are legitimate (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)”.

Human cloning

“An issue of particular social and cultural significance today, because of its many and serious moral implications, is human cloning. The term refers *per se* to the reproduction of a biological entity that is genetically identical to the originating organism.

In thought and experimental practice it has taken on different meaning which in turn entail different procedures from the point of view of the techniques employed as well as of the goals sought. The term can be used to refer to the simple laboratory replication of cells or of a portion of DNA.

But specifically today it is used to refer to the reproduction of individuals at the embryonic stage with methods that are different from those of natural fertilisation and in such a way that the new beings are genetically identical to the individual from which they originate.

This type of cloning can have a reproductive purpose, that of producing human embryos, or a so-called therapeutic purpose, tending to such embryos for scientific research or more specifically for the production of stem cells.”

“From an ethical point of view, the simple replication of normal cells or of a portion of DNA presents no particular ethical problem. Very different, however, is the Magisterium’s judgement on cloning understood in the proper sense. Such cloning is contrary to the dignity of human procreation because it takes place in total absence of an act of personal love spouse, being agamic and asexual reproduction (*L’Osservatore Romano*). In the second place, this type of reproduction represents a form of total domination over the reproduced individual on the part of the one reproducing it.”

“The fact that cloning is used to create embryos from which cells can be removed for therapeutic use does not attenuate its moral gravity, because in order that such cells may be removed the embryo must first be created and then destroyed.”

“Parents, as ministers of life, must never forget that spiritual dimension of procreation is to be given greater consideration than any other aspect. “Fatherhood and motherhood represent a responsibility which is not simply physical but spiritual in nature; indeed, through these realities there passes the genealogy of the person which has its eternal beginning in God and which must lead back to him” (*Gratissimam Sane*)”.

Welcoming human life in the unified aspects of its physical and spiritual dimensions, families contribute to the “communion of generations” and in this way provide essential and irreplaceable support for the development of society.

For this reason, “the family has a right to assistance by society in the bearing and rearing of children. Those married couples who have a large family have a right to adequate aid and should not be subjected to discrimination (*Charter of the Rights of the family*).”

Next week’s article will deal with the task of educating.