

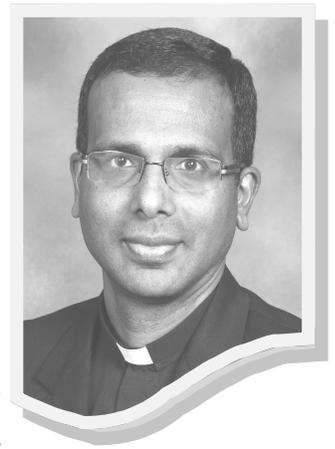


From the Pastor

Begotten—Not Made: Part 1

There was a couple who approached me with a question on bioethics. The question was specifically about the Catholic stand on in vitro fertilization (IVF) and the frozen embryos. It made me realize that this is not a subject much talked about, and there may be other Catholics who are not aware of the Church's teaching on this issue. So, being that it is Respect Life Month—when we reflect upon the sacredness of human life—I thought it would be the best opportune time to reflect with you about the Catholic teaching on this subject.

Most people know about the moral concerns with in vitro fertilization, although they are not sure about the specifics. The immorality of IVF is primarily due to the fact that the process turns human procreation into a method of production in which children are made, not begotten. Oftentimes, IVF involves fertilizing many eggs in the lab and freezing some of them. It would be wrong to produce and then store the embryonic sons and daughters in a deep freeze. Embryos certainly face grave risks whenever they are cryopreserved, and a significant percentage of them do not survive the steps of freezing and thawing. The cryostorage of embryos is a form of “collateral damage” that routinely occurs when IVF is done. Ethically speaking, doing IVF, and making extra embryos, would be more



offensive than doing IVF without making extra embryos. However, IVF does not become morally acceptable merely by eliminating the collateral damage associated with the process.

The heart of the IVF process itself, the practice of joining sperm and egg together in the fertility clinic, remains an intrinsic evil, flowing from the decision to allow our offspring to be “manufactured.” The domain of procreation is a delicate arena—one in which our human vulnerability is uniquely laid bare. We have a particular responsibility to safeguard our own sexuality and the origins of our children from damaging forces in this arena, which implies a duty to respect the marital act as the unique locus and setting for the engendering of new human life.

IVF is not really a “treatment” for infertility, given that the couple remains as infertile after doing IVF as they were before they started the process, with the underlying cause of their sterility remaining unaddressed and unresolved. By yielding to the project of fabricating our children in the cold, clinical, and commercial venture that is in vitro fertilization, we act against the human dignity of our offspring by sanctioning inequality and setting up a subclass of those who originate in petri dishes and test tubes rather than in the intimacy of the mutual spousal donation that receives life within the protective maternal hearth. It is a kind of programmed project, with the marital act no longer an essential part of the equation. Only when the bodies of our children arise as the immediate fruit of our own bodily and spousal self-surrender can we say they have been freely—and unconditionally “begotten” as gifts—rather than “made” as the result of human willfulness, financial planning, and scripted biological technologies.



—Fr. Jose Thomas Mudakodiyil