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Letters to the Editor

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to Dr. Alexander Lozano's article, "Human Cloning and Donum Vitae" (*Linacre Quarterly*, Aug. 1999).

I believe it is essential to acknowledge that it is scientifically recognized that there is no such term "pre-embryo." The late Professor Jerome LeJeune - the eminent geneticist from the University of Paris - argued that not only is there no such term but there is no need for a subclass of the embryo to be called "pre-embryo" because there is nothing before the embryo; all that exists is sperm and egg. When the egg is fertilized by the sperm the entity becomes a zygote. When the zygote divides it is an embryo. The findings regarding DNA studies definitely prove differentiation and that from the very beginning there exists an embryo.

It is essential that the role of a Catholic theologian be represented accurately and precisely in light of the Catholic Church's teachings as well as the moral right of the faithful to receive authentic Catholic teaching in the realm of faith and morals. Catholic theologians have a moral obligation to conduct their research and present their findings in the realm of faith and morals in accordance with the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church. The Church teaches, as demonstrated in *Lumen Gentium* at the Second Vatican Council, that the faithful are obliged in matters of

faith and morals to loyally submit their will and intellect to the authentic teaching of the Roman Pontiff even when he does not speak *ex cathedra*.

Catholic theologians who reject or show doubtful acceptance of teachings in faith and morals as revealed by the ordinary and universal Magisterium commit a grave injustice to the faithful, who have a fundamental right to the teachings of the Church in their entirety. It must also be recognized that the authority of the Magisterium extends to the specific precepts of the Natural Law because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation. In recalling the prescriptions of the Natural Law, the Magisterium of the Church exercises an essential part of its prophetic office of proclaiming to all what they truly are and reminding them of what they should be before God.

The gift of life - a child - is precisely a gift given by God as willed in marriage; there is no moral right to a child. The prevalent idea today of a so-called "right to a child" has led many individuals to employ any means to achieve a desired end. There is no question that in many cases this type of ideology reduces human lives to objects or commodities which are not afforded absolute respect, exploits them, and even destroys them. Procedures which violate the Natural Law, such as IVF, Artificial Insemination, Cloning, and Somatic Cell Nuclear

Transfer fail to see each human life as a gift from God, bestowed freely through the act of conjugal intercourse in marriage, as willed and designed by God. This cannot help but damage and even destroy the inherent respect due to each human life brought into existence.

On the other hand, procedures which respect the Natural Law, such as the use of fertility medications and Lower Tubal Ovum Transfer (LTOT) generate respect for new human life brought into existence by assisting the conjugal act in achieving its natural end. The reality is clear that not one of us is conceived or born with a perfect genome (DNA). As all of us age, particular genes will be "turned on" resulting in various disease processes. Yet when that happens, each of our lives is still a gift from God and in no manner loses the intrinsic dignity placed there by God Himself.

In closing, the laity have a moral right to the fullness of the teachings of the Catholic Church in faith and morals as defined by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church. Throughout the centuries, the Church has maintained that the promise of Christ is fulfilled as the Church teaches in faith and morals with authority given to her by Christ: "Whoever hears the Church, hears Christ. Whoever rejects the Church, rejects Christ. And whoever rejects Christ, rejects the Father." (New American, Luke 10:16).

- Fr. Joseph C. Howard, Jr.
Executive Director
The American Bioethics
Advisory Commission

Tribute to Monsignor Justinus Bertasius :

News of the death of Monsignor Justinus Bertasius was met with sadness throughout the Winnipeg Archdiocese. Regarded as a kind and holy priest, he was remembered as the parish priest of St. Casmir's Church and as the shepherd of Winnipeg's Lithuanian community. Less known was his ministry to the medical students who frequented his Masses. Within walking distance of the University of Manitoba Medical School, his parish became a Sunday hub for numerous students during the 1980s.

When I met Monsignor during my first year of medical school, I was inspired by his immense charity, his devotion to Our Lady, and his love for the Eucharist. He warmly welcomed me to his fold; several of my Catholic classmates joined me. Later, students of other denominations would follow; even "agnostics" became regular attendees during university examinations. Monsignor was a friend, teacher, and confidant. He offered Holy Masses for success in our studies; he reminded us to say our prayers, carry our rosaries, and make good confessions. Often he invited a group of students for lunch in his rectory, and there he discussed medical ethics. The Church's teaching on marriage, human sexuality, contraception, abortion, and euthanasia was clearly articulated. Monsignor never compromised truth. Elegant and dignified, he was a true ambassador of Christ. He loved Christ, and he instilled that love in us.

When we graduated from medical school and accepted jobs across Canada and the United States, Monsignor gave us his final blessing and challenged us to be faithful to the sacred truths he valiantly defended. Today, I realize he knew we were about to enter a world of spiritual and moral darkness. He had tried to prepare us. For this, I am grateful.

May the light of truth burn in our hearts and in our medical practices; and may the soul of this noble priest, who so lovingly ministered to medical students, rest in peace.

- **Dr. Barbara Ann MacKalski**
Brandon, Manitoba
Canada

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