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From the Editor's Desk: In Vitro Fertilization, the Family and the Vatican

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From the Editor's Desk



In Vitro Fertilization, the Family and the Vatican

The recent "Instruction on Respect for Human Life and Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation", issued from Rome and authored by Cardinal Ratzinger who worked very closely with Pope John Paul II in conjunction with many experts, is a breath of fresh air for the modern world.

As biotechnological advances have progressed, there has been a literal vacuum and confusion in the world of medical-moral thought as we have witnessed the many babies brought into the world through in vitro fertilization techniques. While the world marveled at these miracles of reproductive technology, more thoughtful persons pondered the implications of these biological experiments and what they meant for society in general. It is with a sense of relief that the Vatican has finally taken a definitive stand on reproductive technology and reaffirmed its position as guardian of the truth where mankind's best interests lie. Positing its position in God as the Creator of life and reaffirming the dignity and sacredness of each individual person from its moment of conception, the Church has ruled on the licitness of such procedures. In short, it has condemned them all as they infringe on the dignity of the individual. In this issue, we have published the entire document and its footnotes for the benefit of our readers.

The document points out the dangers to society and the individual of these techniques. It hones in on the ineffable dignity given to each conceptus by its Creator and reaffirms the rights of each and every individual. It rightly condemns the discarding and freezing of embryos and experimentation on these innocents. It calls upon civil governments to enact laws to curtail and abolish such procedures.

In the delicate area of infertility, it is incumbent upon the medical profession to come up with methods which will preserve the integrity of sexual intercourse between husband and wife and overcome that infertility without using immoral means. The document encourages the medical profession to continue its research to achieve this objective. With the great versatility and ingenuity which the medical profession possesses, such means will undoubtedly unfold which will be found morally licit.

Subsequent issues of *Linacre Quarterly* will be devoted to various aspects of this document. Areas which raise questions and questions which are not answered by this document will be addressed. Prof. William May, a member of our editorial advisory board and a member of the Papal International Theological Commission, will coordinate this effort for *Linacre*.

At a recent board meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds (March 14, 1987), several days after the issuance of this document, the following resolution was adopted and issued to the media:

The document on *Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation* offers specific guidelines to medical scientists, legislators and the public at large for the ethical advancement of science. The Congregation for the Faith has reaffirmed principles for the preservation of the appropriate control of reproduction within the context of the marital embrace.

The instruction is particularly appropriate at a time when so many medical scientists have become preoccupied with the technological aspects of laboratory reproduction to the disregard of serious ethical, biological and societal implications.

The sanctity of human life and the integrity of the family and its procreative rights are particularly vulnerable to the initiatives of a technocracy.

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds wishes to express its appreciation to the Holy Father for the promulgation of this important document.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.
Editor