

Catholics and reproductive technology



No matter how a human being comes into existence, he or she is always a person to be loved. We should always try, however, to act in ways which respect human dignity from the very first moment of a human being's existence. Some forms of reproductive technology (RT) fail to show adequate respect for the value of human life and the meaning of procreation.

The Church teaches that ethically acceptable forms of reproductive technology respect:

1. *The dignity of newly conceived human life.* The human being is to be respected and cared for as a person from the first moment of his or her existence. Forms of RT which involve a willingness to expend or harm human life by discarding, freezing or subjecting embryos to excessive risk are morally unacceptable.
2. *The dignity of human life in its transmission (procreation.)* Human life should only be generated in and through acts of sexual intercourse between a husband and wife.

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 self 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. (*Donum Vitae II, B, 4, 7*)

Because of the inestimable value of the human person, technology should never dominate over our origin. The conception of a child should be the result of a marital act of self-giving love. Every human being must be accepted as a gift and blessing and not as a product of direct human control and the third party intervention of doctors and technicians.

The Church is particularly concerned about forms of RT which use donor sperm or eggs. This is held to be contrary to the unity of marriage, to the dignity of the spouses, to the vocation of parents, and to the child's right to be conceived and brought into the world in marriage and from marriage. (*Donum Vitae II, A, 2.*)

Forms of RT which *replace* or *substitute* for the role of the marital act (e.g. artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilization), even if the sperm and egg have come from a husband and wife, fail to show proper respect for the dignity of procreation and human life. However forms of RT which assist or help an act of intercourse to achieve its purpose may be morally permissible (e.g. treatment of underlying causes of infertility; low tubal ovum transfer; and possibly GIFT).

Appreciative of the suffering caused by infertility, the Church commends medical research and practices that, while safe-guarding the dignity of human life and procreation, work to prevent and treat fertility problems. The Church also reminds childless couples that their married life still remains a gift to the Church and provides them with many opportunities to serve human life.

Where can I find more information?

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation (Donum vitae)*, Feb 1987.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1987022_2_respect-for-human-life_en.html

Bishops of England and Wales and the Catechism of the Catholic Church: <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/faith/living/infertility.htm>

Assessing different methods of RT: <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/treatment.htm>