

Dignitas Personae: On Certain Bioethical Questions

Introduction

1. The dignity of a person must be recognized in every human being from conception to natural death.
2. There are persons in the world of philosophy and science who view advances in biomedical technology from an essentially eugenic perspective.
3. The Church views scientific research with hope and desires that many Christians will dedicate themselves to the progress of biomedicine and will bear witness to their faith in this field.

First Part: Anthropological, Theological and Ethical Aspects of Human Life and Procreation

4. The body of a human being, from the very first stages of its existence, can never be reduced merely to a group of cells.
5. This ethical principle, which reason is capable of recognizing as true and in conformity with the moral law, should be the basis for all legislation in this area.
6. The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman.
7. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God confirmed the dignity of the body and soul which constitute the human being.
8. By taking the interrelationship of these two dimensions, the human and the divine, as the starting point, one understands better why it is that man has unassailable value.
9. The acts that permit a new human being to come into existence, in which a man and a woman give themselves to each other, are a reflection of Trinitarian love.
10. The ethical value of biomedical science is gauged in reference to both the unconditional respect owed to every human being, and the defense of the specific character of the personal act which transmits life.

Second Part: New Problems Concerning Procreation

11. Certain questions regarding procreation which have emerged and have become more clear can now be examined.

Techniques for assisting fertility

12. All techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization, as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization, which substitute for the conjugal act, are to be excluded. On the other hand, techniques which act as an aid to the conjugal act and its fertility are permitted.
13. Techniques aimed at removing obstacles to natural fertilization, as for example, hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, unblocking of fallopian tubes or their surgical repair, are licit.

***In vitro* fertilization and the deliberate destruction of embryos**

14. The process of *in vitro* fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos.
15. Cases are becoming ever more prevalent in which couples who have no fertility problems are using artificial means of procreation in order to engage in genetic selection of their offspring.
16. The Church holds that it is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act: human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, not capable of substitution. The desire for a child cannot justify the “production” of offspring, just as the desire not to have a child cannot justify the abandonment or destruction of a child once he or she has been conceived.

Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)

17. ICSI is intrinsically illicit: it causes a complete separation between procreation and the conjugal act.

Freezing embryos

18. Cryopreservation exposes embryos to the serious risk of death or physical harm, since a high percentage does not survive the process of freezing and thawing. The majority of embryos remain “orphans.”
19. It needs to be recognized that the thousands of abandoned embryos represent a situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved and the production of human embryos must be halted.

The freezing of oocytes

20. Cryopreservation of oocytes for the purpose of being used in artificial procreation is to be considered morally unacceptable.

The reduction of embryos

21. Some techniques used in artificial procreation have caused a significant increase in the frequency of multiple pregnancy. Embryo reduction in these cases is an intentional selective abortion.

Preimplantation diagnosis

22. Preimplantation diagnosis is directed toward the qualitative selection and consequent destruction of embryos, which constitutes an act of abortion.

New forms of interception and contragestation

23. The use of means of interception (interfering with the embryo before implantation) and contragestation (causing the elimination of the embryo once implanted) are gravely immoral.

Third Part: New Treatments which Involve the Manipulation of the Embryo or the Human Genetic Patrimony

24. A whole range of questions has emerged in the area of gene therapy, from cloning to the use of stem cells, which call for attentive moral discernment.

Gene therapy

25. Somatic cell gene therapy seeks to eliminate or reduce genetic defects on the level of cells other than reproductive cells. Germ line cell therapy aims instead at transmitting therapeutic effects to offspring.

26. In the present state of research, it is not morally permissible to act in a way that may cause possible harm to the resulting progeny, and therefore germ line cell therapy in all its forms is morally illicit.

27. Genetic engineering would end sooner or later by harming the common good, by favoring the will of some over the freedom of others.

Human cloning

28. Cloning seeks to give rise to a new human being without a connection to the act of reciprocal self-giving between the spouses and, more radically, without any link to sexuality.

29. The fact that someone would arrogate to himself the right to determine the genetic characteristics of another person is a grave offense to the dignity of that person and to the equality of all people.

The therapeutic use of stem cells

30. Advanced scientific studies and experimentation indicate that adult stem cells give more positive results than embryonic stem cells.

31. The use of embryonic stem cells or differentiated cells derived from them present serious problems from the standpoint of cooperation in evil and scandal.

Attempts at hybridization

32. Hybrid cloning procedures represent an offense against the dignity of human beings on account of the admixture of human and animal genetic elements capable of disrupting the specific identity of man.

The use of human “biological material” of illicit origin

33. The category of abortion is to be applied to the recent norms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for legitimate purposes, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos.

34. There is a duty to refuse to use such “biological material” even when there is no close connection between the researcher and the actions of those who performed the artificial fertilization or the abortion.

Conclusion

35. Man can make bad use of his abilities and become his own worst enemy by losing the awareness of his lofty and specific vocation to collaborate in the creative work of God.

36. Behind every “no” in the difficult task of discerning between good and evil, there shines a great “yes” to the recognition of the dignity and inalienable value of every single and unique human being.

The Christian faithful will commit themselves to the energetic promotion of a new culture of life by receiving the contents of this Instruction with the religious assent of their spirit.