

EMBRYO EXPERIMENTATION

177. *In vitro* fertilisation raises issues about procreation and parenthood, but it also raises concerns about society's attitudes to the lives of those embryonic human beings it creates. While in principle every embryo conceived in the laboratory could be transferred to its mother, in practice of the many conceived only a proportion are given the chance of life. Most are discarded or frozen, perhaps to be transferred later, perhaps only to be discarded or used in experiments. This is a great injustice. Even worse is the practice of conceiving human embryos for the sole purpose of scientific experimentation.

178. Cloning is the deliberate production of genetically identical offspring. Scientists have now succeeded in cloning some animals, the most famous being Dolly the sheep. However, in the case of Dolly, hundreds of embryos had to be cloned before a reasonable number of pregnancies could be achieved, and there were many miscarriages and lambs born with abnormalities before one healthy lamb was born. Even that one apparently healthy lamb, Dolly, subsequently developed premature arthritis. If something similar was attempted in human beings the most likely results would be miscarriage, stillbirth and children born with severe disabilities. The human cost would be enormous and for no good reason. Even if it became safe, the surviving cloned babies would be deprived of a genetic mother and father and would live in the shadow of their genetic original. They would be objects of manipulation that had been produced to a pre-existent specification and would not have been received as a gift as children deserve to be. This would be invidious and unjust.

179. It has recently been suggested that cloned human embryos could be used as a source of stem cells which could be useful in future medical advances. This is usually termed 'therapeutic cloning', though it would not be therapeutic for the cloned embryos who would be destroyed for their cells. The process is also euphemistically called 'cell nuclear transfer': a title which disguises the fact that the aim is to produce human embryos and then make use of them. Therapeutic cloning would be far worse than full pregnancy cloning as it would set up a system in which human embryos were cloned only to be destroyed so that their cells could be 'harvested'. Medical research which involves the destruction of human embryos is 'a crime against their dignity as human beings' (*The Gospel of Life*, paragraph 63). It should also be noted that there are good alternative sources of stem cells which do not require cloning or the destruction of embryos. Stem cells taken directly from adults are already being used in medicine and appear to represent the most promising way forward for stem cell therapy. seeking forgiveness, reconciliation and absolution. As a result of such experiences some have been able to become 'among the most eloquent defenders' of everyone's right to life.

QUESTIONS

Is embryo experimentation the start of the 'slippery slope' which fails to see children as gifts of God, but designed by man and made to order? Discuss

Why is experimentation which involves the destruction of human embryos a crime against our dignity as human beings? Discuss

Is it immoral for a couple who long for a child to make use of IVF. Is the church a bit harsh here? Discuss

Some women rent their wombs over the internet and charge thousands for the service. Are they merely offering a vital service for women who cannot conceive or a service for men who are impotent? Discuss