

INFERTILITY

127. It is an irony that so many methods of control of fertility exist side by side with the bitter experience of infertility. One in six couples experience difficulties conceiving a child at some time in their lives and this figure appears to be growing. Since 1978 a new technique has been developed to address this problem. *In vitro* fertilisation (IVF) brings the sperm and egg together in the laboratory and the newly conceived human embryo is then transferred into the mother. This has enabled many couples to become parents.

128. Sadly, the technique of IVF also has its darker side. Procreation does not come about as a result of the physical union of the couple in sexual intercourse, but reproduction occurs in the laboratory. The use of fertility drugs and collection of eggs from the woman can have complications. There are often multiple pregnancies, which carry health risks. While healthy and happy children are born, other human embryos are deliberately discarded because they have been judged 'unfit' or 'surplus to requirements'. The ability to screen embryos for genetic characteristics before transferring the ones who are thought desirable has far-reaching consequences. In the future it may be possible for embryos to be selected for sex, physical appearance and other characteristics. Instead of being regarded as a gift, a child would then be treated as a commodity, the product of parental choice. When children are conceived in the laboratory, however sincere the motivation, some form of quality control is a very likely result.

QUESTIONS

Medical advances have made it possible to conceive babies outside the womb. By divorcing sex from procreation are we treating children as commodities rather than God's gift? Discuss

Does it worry the group that part of the IVF treatment is deliberately discarding human embryos because they are judged 'unfit' or 'surplus to requirements'? Discuss

Could the process create a mentality where couples want 'babies on demand' with the preferred IQ or gender or even physical characteristics? Discuss

They say that infertility in both men and women is on the increase. Could there be an underlying reason for this situation? Could artificial contraception be causing women to be infertile? Discuss

Can the group throw light on the situation where on the one hand thousands of babies are aborted while on other hand couples who earnestly desire a baby are having great difficulty conceiving? Discuss

