



The Ethics Of Ivf, Surrogacy And Family Planning: A Concerned Pastor's Perspective.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reproductive technologies have advanced significantly, and the ethical questions they continuously raise are complex, often involving considerations of life, morality, and the role of the church in guiding faithful decisions. As a Catholic priest serving in healthcare within the Diocese of Umuahia since 2007, I have witnessed first-hand, the profound struggles of couples grappling with infertility challenges, often compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and the weight of unfulfilled dreams. This experience has presented a stark moral dilemma: the unwavering traditional teachings of the Church on fertility and science and in contrast to the tangible, daily suffering of those who long to build a family.

It is within this very tension that I seek to open a dialogue by calling for thoughtful re-examination of the church's approach to reproductive technologies, including in-vitro fertilization (IVF), family planning, and surrogacy. In doing so, I wish to clarify that my intention is not to advocate indiscriminately for IVF as a universal solution. Rather, as a concerned priest who perceives "the smell of his sheep" I wish to offer a bridge between the Church's teachings and the personal struggles individuals face. Instead of categorically rejecting assisted reproductive technologies, in cases where nature's own mechanisms falter-whether due to infertility, genetic disorders, or other medical conditions-assisted reproductive science, when carefully and ethically applied, can indeed serve as a legitimate way of alleviating people's suffering.

For example, just as an individual with a weakened leg relies on a walking stick for support, persons with limited mobility benefit from the assistance of wheelchairs, and those whose vision is impaired find clarity through eyeglasses, so too can couples facing infertility harness scientific advances to nurture the gift of life. These examples are not acts of defiance against the natural order or a challenge to divine providence; they are instead practical expressions of our commitment to enhancing the human condition.

Of course, recognising the potential role of assisted reproductive technologies as a compassionate option in providing meaningful support for couples struggling to build a family cannot be understood as constituting a “battle with God”; rather, it is an acknowledgment that our Creator has endowed us with reason and innovation to tend to the vulnerabilities inherent in our nature. Thus, in leveraging these advancements, we honour the sanctity of life and extend compassion to those for whom traditional means have proven insufficient. So just as medicine has advanced to provide prosthetics, mobility aids, and corrective devices that enable individuals to lead fuller lives, so too should our approach to assisted reproductive technologies be seen as an extension of our duty to care for one another.

When done in a way that respects life and God’s plan for creation, and when the technologies are used ethically, assisted reproduction can be viewed as an extension of human cooperation with God’s gift of life which fosters the sacred pursuit of happiness in every family. It can also affirm that science and faith can coexist in harmonious service to humanity. The challenge lies in ensuring that any technology used aligns with the values of love, respect for life, and the sanctity of the marriage bond. Before proceeding, it will be useful to provide a brief survey of Catholic doctrines on fertility and science which reveals a nuanced and thoughtful approach to the relationship between faith, ethics, and the advancements of modern science, especially in the realm of reproduction technologies.

In his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation - *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis said that evangelisers should “smell like the sheep” a metaphor that means that evangelisers should get involved in people's lives and be willing to humble themselves. His message emphasises the importance of accompanying and supporting Christians face difficulties in life, highlighting the need for a compassionate and inclusive community.

2.0 REVIEW OF CATHOLIC DOCTRINES ON FERTILITY AND SCIENCE

I feel a profound moral burden as a Catholic priest when teaching the Church's position on IVF, surrogacy, and family planning. On one hand, our tradition emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and procreation within the natural order; on the other, I witness couples struggling with infertility and see how modern fertility science can offer them hope and a path to family life. This tension challenges me deeply, as I strive to balance fidelity to Church teaching with pastoral care and compassion for those in need.

2.1 CURRENT TEACHINGS

Catholic teaching on human reproduction is anchored in a profound vision of marriage and the sanctity of life, a vision articulated most forcefully in key doctrinal documents such as *Humanae Vitae*¹ (1968) and *Donum Vitae*² (1987). These documents stress that procreation is not simply a biological process but a sacred

¹ *Humanae Vitae* – The church promotes natural methods of family planning, emphasizing the importance of respecting the natural cycles of fertility and infertility, rejects artificial contraception.

² *Donum Vitae* – Human embryos are considered humans from conception, techniques such as IVF are morally considered problematic because they separate the procreative act from the marital act.

participation in God's creative work. The Church holds that life should originate from an unmediated union of husband and wife, a union that is both unitive and procreative, and sets strict limits on human intervention in this process.

2.1.1 In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

In Vitro Fertilization is an assisted reproductive technology where an egg is fertilized with sperm outside the body, typically in a laboratory dish. The resulting embryo is then transferred to the uterus of a woman which increases the possibilities of pregnancy.

The Church's stance on IVF is unequivocal. According to both *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae*, IVF is rejected because it dissociates procreation from the marital act. In IVF, gametes are removed from their natural context and combined in a laboratory, a process that not only divorces conception from the physical and emotional union of the spouses but also often results in the creation and subsequent destruction of multiple embryos. This is seen as a violation of the inherent dignity of every human life, which, from the moment of conception, is endowed with a soul and must be treated as an individual person. A statement attributed to Pope Pius XI³ states, "life should be conceived through an unmediated union of husband and wife". In effect, IVF not only subverts the proper context for procreation but also risks reducing human life to a mere product of technical manipulation.

2.1.2 Family Planning and Contraception

Family planning is the process of controlling the number of children one has and the intervals between their births. It involves making informed decisions about reproductive health, sexuality and the size of the family. Contraception is also known as birth control and refers to the methods or devices used to prevent pregnancy.

Family planning in the Catholic framework is inseparable from a deep respect for the natural law. *Humanae Vitae* famously reaffirmed that every marital act must remain open to the possibility of life, and any direct intervention aimed at preventing conception, such as artificial contraception, is contrary to God's design. Contraception, in this doctrinal view, interferes with the dual purpose of the marital act: the unitive and the procreative. Contraception is seen as a disruption of the divine plan for human sexuality and a reduction of the sexual act to an instrument for personal gratification rather than a sacred gift shared between spouses because it obstructs the natural gift of fertility.

Family planning is an essential aspect of reproductive health, enabling individuals and couples to achieve their desired family size and properly space pregnancies. While natural family planning (NFP) methods, such as the calendar method and basal body temperature tracking, rely on understanding a woman's ovulation cycle, a lack of education hinders many women from effectively utilizing these methods. This

³ Pope Pius XI in his *Casti Connubii* (1930) discusses the procreation of children emphasizing the marital act and the procreation of Children. He affirms the Catholic Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage and the transmission of life.

limitation underscores the necessity of scientifically developed family planning measures to ensure reproductive autonomy and improved maternal health.

While natural family planning methods can be effective, they require a level of education and consistency that many women, especially in underprivileged communities, lack. The inability to track ovulation due to educational limitations makes natural methods difficult to rely on, reinforcing the necessity of scientific family planning measures. By integrating education with modern contraceptive options, societies can promote informed reproductive choices, healthier families, and greater economic and social stability.

2.1.3 Surrogate Motherhood

Surrogate Motherhood is the act of a woman carrying and giving birth to a child for another person or couple. It could be traditional where the surrogate mother is genetically related to the child when her own eggs are used or gestational when the embryo created through IVF is carried by a surrogate without genetic connection to the child.

Surrogacy is similarly condemned because it further disjoins the intimate, unmediated bond that should exist exclusively between husband and wife. The Church teaches that every child has the right to be conceived, carried, born, and raised by his or her own parents, a process that affirms the unique character of the marital covenant. When a third party is introduced into the procreative process, as in the case of surrogate motherhood, the natural unity of marriage is undermined. This not only violates the natural law but also poses significant moral concerns regarding the exploitation of the surrogate and the rights of the child, who is reduced to a product of technological intervention rather than a gift from God.

2.1.4 Surrogacy by Necessity, Not Convenience: Clarifying My Advocacy

Surrogacy is a vital reproductive option for many individuals and couples who, due to medical or biological constraints, cannot carry a pregnancy themselves. My advocacy for surrogacy is firmly rooted in necessity, not convenience. It is crucial to distinguish between surrogacy as a last resort for those with genuine medical needs and surrogacy chosen merely to avoid the natural effects of pregnancy on the body. There are countless cases where surrogacy is the only viable option for aspiring parents. Women who suffer from severe health conditions, such as heart disease, uterine abnormalities, or a history of recurrent pregnancy loss, may face life-threatening risks if they attempt to carry a pregnancy. In such situations, surrogacy provides a safe and compassionate alternative, allowing these individuals to experience the joys of parenthood without jeopardizing their health.

However, my support for surrogacy does not extend to those who seek it purely for reasons of convenience, such as preserving body shape or avoiding the discomforts of pregnancy and pains of parturition. Parenthood is a profound responsibility, and the decision to bring a child into the world should be grounded in necessity, sacrificial love, and commitment rather than personal aesthetic preferences. It is essential to maintain ethical

and moral considerations when advocating for surrogacy. While I firmly believe in the right of individuals to make reproductive choices that best suit their circumstances, I also emphasize that surrogacy should be a solution for those facing legitimate medical barriers to pregnancy. By clarifying this distinction, I hope to encourage meaningful discussions about surrogacy, ensuring that it remains a compassionate and ethical choice for those who truly need it.

2.2 GAPS AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

While Catholic teaching on human reproduction is rooted in a rich theological tradition emphasizing the sacred union of husband and wife and the sanctity of life from conception (as expressed in documents such as *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae*), several gaps and unanswered questions emerge when these positions are measured against contemporary challenges. In particular, three critical areas highlight where further reflection or pastoral innovation may be needed:

2.2.1 Infertility and Maternal Health Risks

Advances in modern medicine now offer increasingly sophisticated treatments to address infertility and reduce maternal health risks. Techniques like individualized hormonal therapies and natural procreative technology (NaProTECHNOLOGY⁴) are showing promise in restoring fertility without completely bypassing the marital act. However, the Church's categorical opposition to methods such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) raises important questions.

- **Unaddressed Medical Innovation:** The strict opposition to IVF and related technologies, puts the Church at risks of neglecting treatments that could lessen the physical dangers of multiple gestations, reduce the use of invasive procedures (such as fetal reduction), and ultimately protect maternal health. Couples with severe infertility or those facing health risks related to conventional treatments may feel that the Church's doctrinal rigidity does not accommodate the benefits that modern reproductive medicine can provide.
- **Critical Uncertainty:** How can the Church balance its commitment to natural law with the need to adopt evolving medical practices that improve outcomes for both mothers and children? This gap suggests a need for further dialogue between bioethicists, medical professionals, and theologians on the ethical limits, and potential exceptions, within the current medical landscape.

⁴ Naprotechnology is a medical approach that focuses on understanding and working with the natural reproductive cycle to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

2.2.2 Pastoral Guidance

While doctrinal texts clearly delineate what is considered morally acceptable in assisted reproduction, many couples experiencing infertility report feeling isolated or unsupported by their faith communities.

- **Emotional and Spiritual Support:** Couples often find themselves torn between the desire for children and the Church's prohibition of certain reproductive technologies. Despite the Church's rich theological resources, there is a noticeable gap in practical pastoral care and tailored counselling for those navigating the tortuous waters of infertility.
- **Lived Experience Versus Doctrine:** Many infertile couples yearn for compassionate guidance that acknowledges the complex emotional and physical realities they face. The lack of consistent, empathetic pastoral support can lead to crises of faith and, in some cases, drive couples toward underground or ethically questionable alternatives.

2.2.3 Socioeconomic Considerations

The rigid application of Church teaching on procreation does not occur in a vacuum; real-world socioeconomic pressures often complicate decisions about fertility.

- **Economic Desperation and Underground Practices:** In many parts of the world, poverty and a lack of accessible, ethically sound fertility treatments drive desperate couples to seek unregulated or "underground" surrogacy arrangements. Such practices not only expose vulnerable individuals to exploitation but also occur outside the oversight that Church-supported ministries might provide.
- **Ethical Oversight:** The Church's doctrinal stance does not fully address the socioeconomic disparities that compel individuals to make choices contrary to its teachings. There is an unanswered question of how the Church might engage with broader social structures and healthcare systems to create safer, more ethically governed pathways for couples facing infertility in contexts of economic hardship.

3.0 HISTORICAL PRECEDENT: WHEN THE CHURCH EMBRACED SCIENCE

Throughout its centuries-long history, the Catholic Church has not remained static in its views on science and technology. While there have been moments of conflict, such as the infamous trial of Galileo, there are also compelling examples of the Church evolving its stance in light of new discoveries and innovations. This dynamic relationship between faith and science illustrates a broader theological principle that reason and revelation, rather than being in opposition, can work together to fulfill humanity's divine mandate.

3.1 CASE STUDIES OF EVOLUTION IN CHURCH THOUGHT

3.1.1 Galileo's Trial and the Acceptance of Heliocentrism

In the early 17th century, Galileo Galilei's support of heliocentrism, the idea that the Earth revolves around the Sun was met with stern opposition from Church authorities. Galileo's trial in 1633 (Finocchiaro, 2019) is often cited as a symbol of the Church's resistance to new scientific ideas (Pettersen et al, 2022). However, centuries later, heliocentrism is not only accepted but celebrated as a fundamental truth of our solar system. The Church's eventual embrace of this scientific model demonstrates its capacity to re-examine past positions and align its teachings with empirical discoveries. Today, the Catholic Church acknowledges Galileo's contributions, recognizing that the apparent conflict was more about the complexities of scriptural interpretation than an inherent opposition to scientific truth.

3.1.2 Medical Science: From Opposition to Endorsement

The history of medical science offers further evidence of the Church's evolving relationship with innovation. In earlier centuries, certain medical advances such as the use of vaccines, anaesthesia, and even organ transplants were met with scepticism and occasional outright condemnation by some within the Church (Furton, 2004). Concerns ranged from moral and ethical considerations to fears that such interventions might usurp divine authority over life and death. Over time, however, as these practices proved their efficacy and undeniable benefits in alleviating human suffering, the Church's stance shifted. Today, vaccines are hailed as lifesaving public health tools, (Vatican News, 2021) anaesthesia is standard in surgical procedures to protect human dignity and alleviate pain, and organ transplants are embraced as acts of charity and medical progress that restore and save lives (Farr,1980).

3.1.3 Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*: Engaging with Contemporary Science

Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*⁵ is a modern landmark that exemplifies the Church's proactive engagement with scientific discourse specifically in the realm of environmental stewardship and climate change. In *Laudato Si*, the Pope calls for an integrated approach to caring for our common home, urging humanity to use science and technology responsibly as instruments of divine stewardship. His encyclical illustrates that, far from rejecting scientific findings, the Church can offer a moral framework that compels us to innovate while respecting the natural order.

⁵ *Laudato Si* emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to environmental care, recognizing the intrinsic link between human well-being and the health of the planet.

3.2 THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR EMBRACING SCIENCE

3.2.1 Biblical Foundations: Genesis 1:28 and the Mandate of Stewardship

A key scriptural passage that underpins the Church's supportive stance toward scientific endeavor is Genesis 1:28⁶, which instructs humanity to "be fruitful and multiply" and to "have dominion" over the earth. This verse has been interpreted not as a call to exploit nature selfishly, but rather as a mandate to care for creation through wise and innovative stewardship. In this light, scientific research and technological development are seen as ways to enhance human life, protect the environment, and alleviate suffering, acts that align with God's plan.

3.2.2 Science as Divine Stewardship

The Church teaches that God entrusted humanity with the responsibility to care for His creation. Within this framework, technology is not viewed as a threat or a means of playing God but rather as an instrument that, when used ethically, fulfills the divine mandate of stewardship. From medicine to environmental conservation, scientific progress can be harnessed to serve the common good, advance human dignity, and express the compassion at the heart of Christian teaching. The Church's willingness to revise its stance on topics like heliocentrism and medical procedures exemplifies this principle. It underscores that the proper use of science is not inherently in conflict with faith, instead, it is a means to achieve human flourishing as envisioned by the Creator.

4.0 THE HUMAN DIMENSION: INFERTILITY, MARRIAGE, AND HAPPINESS

The challenges of infertility resonate deeply within the Christian understanding of marriage and human flourishing. Rooted in a rich theological tradition that views marriage as both a partnership of companionship and a divine avenue for procreation, Catholic teaching provides a framework for understanding the profound impact that infertility can have on personal and communal life. Yet, when real human suffering meets ideal doctrine, critical questions emerge about pastoral care, social justice, and the Church's moral responsibility. This article examines these issues through three interconnected lenses: the dual nature of marriage, real-life case studies from the Diocese of Umuahia, and the relationship between happiness and human dignity.

⁶ Genesis 1:28 – God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

4.1 MARRIAGE AS COMPANIONSHIP AND PROCREATION

Catholic Theology on Marriage

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1601-1666) eloquently affirms that marriage is a vocation intended to serve dual purposes: the unitive aspect, which forges a deep, lifelong companionship between spouses, and the procreative aspect, through which new life is entrusted to the couple as a gift from God. This theological framework is not merely abstract, it underpins the Church's long-held view that the marital act is sacred, designed to mirror the self-giving love of Christ for His Church.

Infertility's Emotional and Spiritual Toll

When a couple experiences infertility, the ramifications extend far beyond biological limitations. Infertility challenges the very ideal of marriage as both a source of intimate companionship and a channel for the blessing of new life. Couples may experience deep emotional and spiritual turmoil as they grapple with a sense of incompleteness or failure to fulfill what they believe to be God's plan for their union. This internal crisis can strain the marital relationship, leading to feelings of isolation, despair, and even doubts about the validity of their marital commitment. The tension between the Church's high ideals and the lived reality of infertility necessitates compassionate pastoral intervention that recognizes both the profound value of the marital bond and the vulnerability that infertility introduces.

Okoro (2020) in his book *African Women and the Shame and Pain of Infertility*, highlights that infertility is disproportionately seen as a woman's problem in African societies. Women are often blamed, shamed and socially stigmatized, regardless of medical findings. This pressure makes the pain of infertility not just personal but public and communal.

4.2 CASE STUDIES FROM UMUAHIA DIOCESE

4.2.1 Real-Life Impact of Strict Doctrines

In Umuahia Diocese, where cultural and socioeconomic challenges often intersect with rigid doctrinal norms, the impact of infertility on couples has been particularly acute. While working as hospital manager in the diocese, I have seen cases where couples, overwhelmed by the strict interpretation of Church teachings on procreation, have faced severe consequences such as fear of excommunication or the breakdown of their marital bonds. When the Church's stance leaves little room for nuanced pastoral care, couples are left to navigate through their grief and disappointment largely on their own, leading to despair and a sense of spiritual abandonment.

4.2.2 Economic and Educational Disparities

In many communities, including those in Ohafia and Umuahia, economic hardship and limited educational opportunities exacerbate the challenges of infertility. Couples from poorer backgrounds may be more vulnerable to making desperate reproductive choices, sometimes resorting to underground surrogacy or other unregulated practices that expose them to exploitation. Limited access to comprehensive reproductive health education further compounds the issue, leaving many couples without the resources or guidance needed to make informed decisions. In such contexts, the intersection of strict doctrinal adherence with socioeconomic disparities creates a vicious cycle where the very policies meant to uphold human dignity inadvertently contribute to further suffering and marginalization.

4.3 HAPPINESS AND HUMAN DIGNITY

In Thomistic thought, *beatitudo* (or happiness) is not a fleeting state of pleasure but the fulfillment of one's nature and purpose in union with God. Parenthood, within this framework, is seen as a profound source of *beatitudo* because it participates in the divine act of creation (Haldane, 2003). When couples are able to welcome a child into their lives, they not only experience joy but also embody a key aspect of their vocation as co-creators with God. The natural joy of parenthood, therefore, is integrally linked to human dignity and the fulfillment of the marital covenant (Aquinas, 1969).

4.3.1 The Church's Moral Duty to Alleviate Suffering

Given this understanding of true happiness, the Church has a compelling moral duty to alleviate the suffering of couples who experience infertility. Rather than compounding their anguish through harsh doctrinal penalties or an uncompromising stance on reproductive innovations, the Church must work to provide comprehensive pastoral care. This includes counselling, support groups, and practical assistance that respect both the sanctity of the marital union and the real, lived experiences of its members. A compassionate response acknowledges that while the Church's teachings on natural procreation are founded on deep theological principles, they must also be applied in a manner that upholds human dignity and nurtures genuine happiness.

As Ekennia (2003) argues in his *Bio-Medical Ethics, Issues, Trends & Problems*, ethical discourse around reproductive technologies must engage not only with abstract principles but also with the real human suffering and cultural realities at stake. He insists on the need for dialogue between the church's moral vision and advances of biomedical science, especially in an African context where infertility carries deep social consequences.

4.3.2 Toward an Integrated Vision

The challenge lies in integrating doctrinal purity with pastoral sensitivity. The Church's long history of engaging with science from the eventual acceptance of heliocentrism after Galileo's trial to embracing advances in medical science like vaccines and organ transplants, demonstrates that tradition and innovation can coexist. The Church can honour both its theological commitments and its mission to promote human

flourishing by re-examining its approach to infertility and reproductive health. In doing so, it affirms that true happiness in marriage and family life arises not from rigid adherence to abstract norms, but from a deep, compassionate engagement with the realities of human experience.

4.4 THE AFRICAN MAN AND FERTILITY

In many traditional African societies, including those influenced by Catholicism, family life is the cornerstone of social identity and stability. For the African man, the ability to have children is not merely a personal desire, it is a cultural imperative that reinforces lineage, social status, and community cohesion. Infertility, therefore, can lead to profound emotional distress, marital discord, and even social ostracism. When couples face the heartbreak of infertility, the resulting strain may contribute to higher rates of divorce or extramarital relationships as they struggle to fulfill a deeply ingrained cultural expectation.

4.4.1 Preserving Family Unity

In African societies, where children are central to family life, the use of fertility science can mitigate the social stigma of childlessness, helping couples remain together and maintain the social fabric of their communities.

4.4.2 Preventing Marital Discord

The availability of ethical fertility options can reduce the incidence of extramarital affairs and divorces that sometimes arise when one partner struggles with infertility, thereby promoting a more stable and loving family environment.

For the Catholic Church, especially in regions where traditional values place a high premium on procreation, reconsidering its stance on fertility science could serve as a powerful example of adapting timeless moral principles to address contemporary challenges. By prioritizing love and the concrete outcomes of its ethical decisions, the Church could embrace fertility science as a means of supporting families, reducing the societal pressures of infertility, and ultimately strengthening the community bonds that are so vital in traditional African settings.

5.0 SCIENCE AS “HELP MATE”: HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY AS DIVINE STEWARDSHIP

The Catholic Church’s rich intellectual tradition has often embraced science as an instrument of human flourishing when it is employed with discernment and ethical rigor. Technology, when rightly ordered, can serve as a “help mate” a partner that aids human beings in realizing God’s creative plan rather than challenging it. This perspective can be divided into several interconnected themes: reframing science and technology as expressions of divine stewardship, establishing ethical guardrails instead of outright rejection, and addressing common counterarguments with theological insight and compassion.

5.1 REFRAMING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AS DIVINE STEWARDSHIP

The story of Bezalel in Exodus 35:30 – 36:1⁷ stands as a potent symbol of divinely inspired innovation. Chosen by God and endowed with wisdom and skill, Bezalel was tasked with crafting the sacred furnishings of the Tabernacle. His artistry was not merely human ingenuity but a direct participation in God's work. This biblical precedent affirms that technological innovation, when guided by divine inspiration, can serve a sacred purpose. Bezalel's craftsmanship exemplifies how God values creativity and skill; these gifts, when nurtured and applied ethically, can bring about tangible benefits for the community. In today's context, the same principle suggests that scientific advancements, whether in medicine, engineering, or environmental science can be embraced as long as they honour the intrinsic dignity of human life and creation.

5.1.1 Fertility Science: Tools for Ethical Human Progress

Modern fertility science offers innovative ways to help couples overcome infertility, a condition that can impose profound emotional and physical burdens. Techniques such as natural procreative technology (NaProTECHNOLOGY) (Zegers-Hochschild et al, 2017) do not seek to replace the marital act but instead work with the body's natural rhythms to address underlying health issues. When these methods are used, technology becomes an extension of the natural order rather than a force that disrupts it. Fertility science, therefore, should be harnessed as a tool for ethical human progress, enabling couples to experience the fullness of life and parenthood while remaining true to the principle of the sacred union of marriage. In this view, scientific breakthroughs become expressions of the human mandate to "subdue the earth" (Genesis 1:28) by responsibly using our intellect and creativity to alleviate suffering and promote life.

5.2 ETHICAL GUARDRAILS, NOT OUTRIGHT REJECTION

The Church does not call for a wholesale rejection of scientific progress but rather advocates for its morally guided application. For example, while the Church unequivocally opposes practices such as embryo destruction in conventional IVF, it supports the development of fertility treatments that avoid this ethical pitfall. By setting clear moral guardrails, such as ensuring that reproductive technologies do not replace the marital act or reduce human life to a mere product, the Church encourages innovation that upholds human dignity. These ethical parameters are designed not to stifle scientific inquiry but to ensure that technology remains a means to enhance, rather than compromise, the sanctity of human life.

5.2.1 Differentiating Ethical Surrogacy from Exploitative Arrangements

Surrogacy, when approached ethically, presents another opportunity for science to serve as a "help mate" to marriage. The Church differentiates between ethical practices such as those that involve genuine, informed consent and respect for the surrogate's dignity and exploitative arrangements that commercialize

⁷ Then Moses said to the Israelites, See the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the lord has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work exactly as the lord has commanded.

or undermine the familial bond. Ethical surrogacy practices should protect the rights of all parties involved: the intended parents, the surrogate, and most importantly, the child.

The following table outlines the key conditions and requirements that help protect the rights of all parties involved in ethical surrogacy arrangements, in contrast to those that characterize exploitative practices.

Key Area	Ethical Surrogacy	Exploitative Surrogacy
Consent	Informed, voluntary, and documented consent from all parties.	Coerced, uninformed, or inadequately documented consent.
Compensation	Fair compensation that covers medical costs, lost wages, and reasonable stipend.	Underpayment or commodification of the surrogate for profit.
Legal Protections	Clear legal framework protecting surrogate, child, and intended parents.	Lack of enforceable laws or legal ambiguity leading to rights violations.
Medical Care	Access to quality prenatal, delivery, and postnatal care.	Neglect of surrogate's health needs or unsafe medical conditions.
Psychological Support	Availability of counseling services before, during, and after pregnancy.	No psychological support, increasing emotional and mental harm.
Autonomy	Respect for surrogate's autonomy and bodily integrity throughout process.	Surrogate treated as a means to an end with limited decision-making power.

Transparency	Transparent agreements and ethical oversight by independent bodies.	Hidden terms, unclear responsibilities, or unethical intermediaries.
Child Welfare	Commitment to ensuring the child's best interests and legal status.	Neglect of the child's legal or emotional well-being post-birth.

6.0 ADDRESSING COUNTERARGUMENTS

One common objection is that any technological intervention in human reproduction amounts to “playing God.” Critics argue that by intervening in natural processes, humanity oversteps its bounds and challenges divine will. However, this objection overlooks the biblical mandate for stewardship. As seen in the example of Bezalel’s divinely inspired craftsmanship, God entrusts human beings with the responsibility to work with creation. In this light, using technology responsibly to heal and restore human health is not an act of hubris but an act of faithful cooperation with God’s creative power.

6.1 POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

6.1.1 Surrogacy

Another concern is that assisted reproductive technologies, particularly in surrogacy, risk turning human life into a commercial commodity, thereby weakening the sanctity of marital bonds. The commercialization of surrogacy could lead to exploitative practices that diminish the intrinsic value of human beings. This risk is significant if technology is used without ethical oversight, resulting in relationships based on transactions rather than genuine love and commitment.

A common argument against surrogacy is that it prevents the natural bond between a mother and her developing child (Golombok, 2015). Critics claim that because the intended mother does not carry the baby in her womb, the essential emotional connection is lost. However, this perspective overlooks the profound reality of parenthood, which extends far beyond biological gestation. A powerful counterargument lies in the example of adoption. Parents who adopt do not love their children any less simply because they did not experience pregnancy. Love, care, and commitment are the foundations of parental bonding, not the act of carrying a child in the womb. Many adoptive parents form deep, nurturing relationships with their children, proving that the biological connection is not the sole determinant of parental love and attachment.

Similarly, intending parents who opt for surrogacy go through an intense emotional and psychological journey, deeply investing in their child’s well-being even before birth. They prepare for parenthood, provide support to the surrogate, and eagerly anticipate the arrival of their child. This process fosters a strong

parental connection that continues after birth, just as in adoption. Furthermore, research in developmental psychology has shown that the postnatal environment plays a critical role in shaping a child's emotional and psychological development. The love, security, and care provided after birth are far more influential than the gestational period alone. Thus, the argument that surrogacy diminishes the mother-child bond fails to acknowledge the broader and more meaningful aspects of parenthood. Just as adoptive parents form strong, loving families, so too do parents who welcome their child through surrogacy.

6.1.2 IVF

In the case of IVF, where sperm maturation is required for extraction, some argue that God disapproves of this process, citing the example of Onan in Genesis 38:8-10. Onan was punished for spilling his seed on the ground. However, a counterargument is that sperm retrieval through masturbation in IVF is done with the explicit intention of procreation. Additionally, it is important to consider that men sometimes ejaculate during marital foreplay. If sperm release in this context is not condemned, should we then condemn its retrieval for the noble purpose of conception or are we now condemning foreplay in marriage, considering its importance for married couples?

A counterargument to the religious objection that IVF involves the destruction of developed embryos is that modern IVF techniques strive to minimize embryo loss (Scott et al, 2019). Many couples choose to freeze unused embryos for future use, preventing unnecessary destruction. Additionally, some religious and ethical perspectives acknowledge that not all fertilized eggs result in implantation naturally, as seen in early miscarriages. If natural conception involves embryo loss, it is inconsistent to single out IVF as uniquely problematic. Moreover, for couples facing infertility, IVF provides the only viable path to parenthood, fulfilling the moral good of creating and nurturing life rather than preventing it (Geyter et al, 2018).

The Church should advocate for ethical scientific practices that align with respect for human life. Specifically, scientists should be encouraged to fertilize only the minimum number of embryos necessary for a successful pregnancy. This approach would help reduce the ethical concerns surrounding the destruction of excess embryos after fertilization.

Furthermore, individuals or couples who choose IVF should be encouraged to consider donating any viable fertilized embryos to others who struggle with infertility and are in need. This act of generosity would not only provide hope to those unable to conceive naturally but also ensure that embryos created through the IVF process are given a chance at life, thereby upholding the dignity and sanctity of human existence.

6.2 RESPONSES ROOTED IN THEOLOGY, COMPASSION AND SCIENCE

Theologically, humans are called to cooperate with God in the ongoing act of creation. Using science responsibly is, in essence, an act of faith. It acknowledges that while we do not control life, we have been

given the gifts of reason and innovation to serve God's plan. Pope Francis has often emphasized that the role of the Church is to accompany and guide its faithful rather than simply punish or restrict them. This compassionate approach means that the Church seeks to educate and support couples facing infertility, helping them navigate through the complex intersection of faith and modern medicine. Rather than imposing blanket prohibitions, the Church should advocate for a nuanced and empathetic response—one that respects human dignity while upholding doctrinal truth.

7.0 A PASTORAL CALL TO ACTION

In our rapidly evolving world, the challenges of infertility and the emerging frontiers of reproductive science call for a renewed pastoral commitment that bridges the gap between unwavering doctrinal principles and modern scientific innovation. The Church's mission to foster life, hope, and joy compels us to re-examine established teachings and create compassionate support systems for couples in need. This pastoral call to action can be divided into three main areas: proposals for doctrinal development, bridging faith and science, and a closing appeal that reaffirms the Church's overarching mission.

7.1 PROPOSALS FOR DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

7.1.1 Establishing a Vatican Commission to Reassess Fertility Technologies

The historical record shows that the Church has not been static in its understanding of science and technology. The eventual embrace of heliocentrism after the Galileo affair and the subsequent acceptance of modern medical practices such as vaccines, anaesthesia, and organ transplants highlight the Church's capacity to revisit its stances in light of new evidence. In a similar spirit, a dedicated Vatican commission should be established to reassess contemporary fertility technologies. This commission would:

- Examine the ethical, scientific, and social dimensions of fertility treatments.
- Evaluate modern advancements such as improved techniques in natural procreative technology (natechnology) and other non-invasive interventions against the backdrop of traditional teachings found in documents like *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae*.
- Ensure that any recommendations are rooted in both sound theology and the latest empirical research, thereby balancing doctrinal integrity with compassionate pastoral care.

Such a commission would not only provide clarity for the faithful but also demonstrate that the Church's teachings can evolve responsibly, reflecting a commitment to human dignity without compromising fundamental values. This approach is in keeping with the Church's historical willingness to engage with scientific discovery as a partner in the stewardship of creation.

7.1.2 Developing Comprehensive Pastoral Guidelines for Couples Facing Infertility

Couples struggling with infertility often endure profound emotional and spiritual turmoil. The lack of robust pastoral guidelines compounds their suffering, leaving many feeling isolated and unsupported by their faith community. Comprehensive pastoral guidelines would:

- Provide practical, empathetic counselling resources that help couples navigate the complexities of infertility within the context of Church teaching.
- Integrate spiritual care with practical advice on natural family planning and other morally acceptable fertility treatments.
- Offer training for parish ministers and counsellors to address both the doctrinal and emotional dimensions of infertility, ensuring that the Church's response is both doctrinally sound and pastorally sensitive.

7.2 BRIDGING FAITH AND SCIENCE

In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*⁸ Pope John Paul II (1998) explores the relationship between faith and reason, emphasizing their complementary and mutual support. He argued that faith and reason are not opposed, but rather, they are interconnected and interdependent. He acknowledges that human reason can be flawed but he also emphasizes its potential to discover truth. In addition, he warns against fideism – the rejection of reason, calling on the need for a balanced approach.

A strong theme in Ekennia (2003) *Bio-Medical Ethics – Issues, Trends & Problems*, is encouraging dialogue between religious traditions and scientific advancements. He advocates for a “faith-informed, but science-aware ethical approach, especially on bioethical issues.

7.2.1 Encouraging Catholic Hospitals to Lead Ethical Research in Reproductive Health

Catholic hospitals have long been at the forefront of medical care and ethical decision-making. In the field of reproductive health, these institutions are uniquely positioned to conduct research that upholds the highest moral standards while addressing real-world challenges:

- They can pioneer studies that refine fertility treatments in ways that preserve the integrity of the marital act, such as enhancing natural procreative methods or improving diagnostic techniques that identify and treat underlying causes of infertility.
- By spearheading ethical research, Catholic hospitals would not only contribute to medical advancement but also serve as models for how science can be harnessed in accordance with divine

⁸ *Fides et Ratio* encourages a renewed dialogue between faith and reason, emphasizing the importance of intellectual inquiry and philosophical reflection in understanding the human condition and the mysteries of faith.

stewardship. This ensures that progress in reproductive medicine is aligned with the Church's vision of human dignity and the sanctity of life.

7.2.2 Fostering Dialogue Between Theologians, Scientists, and the Laity

A vibrant and constructive dialogue among theologians, scientists, and lay people is essential for reconciling faith with contemporary scientific challenges. Such dialogue should:

- Create interdisciplinary forums and conferences that allow experts from various fields to share insights, raise ethical questions, and collaboratively develop guidelines that are both scientifically informed and theologically robust.
- Encourage the laity to participate actively, ensuring that the lived experiences of ordinary believers inform the debate. This inclusive approach can help demystify scientific advancements and alleviate fears that technology undermines faith.
- Highlight case studies where ethical use of technology has led to positive outcomes, thereby reinforcing that responsible innovation can be an expression of cooperation with God's creative power.

7.3 CLOSING APPEAL

7.3.1 Emphasizing the Church's Mission to Foster Life, Hope, and Joy

At its core, the Church is called to be a beacon of hope, a sanctuary where the vulnerable are uplifted and life is celebrated. In the face of challenges such as infertility, the Church's mission is to foster an environment of love, support, and resilience. The closing appeal of this pastoral call to action is a reminder that:

- The ultimate goal of all pastoral and doctrinal efforts is to enhance human flourishing and ensure that every individual experiences the joy and fullness of life as intended by God.
- Whether through refined doctrinal understanding or compassionate pastoral care, the Church must strive to alleviate the suffering of its members and create a community where every person is valued.
- This mission is not merely a duty but an expression of the Gospel—one that calls us to “love one another” and to “serve the least of these” (Matthew 25:40).

7.3.2 Reaffirming Openness to Science as an Extension of Divine Commandment

The notion of science as “help mate” underscores that technology, when used responsibly, is not in opposition to God but an extension of His divine mandate. This perspective is deeply rooted in the understanding that:

- Human beings are created in the image of God, endowed with creativity and reason to improve the human condition.
- Responsible use of technology is an act of cooperation with God's creative power, a way to fulfill our mandate to care for creation and alleviate suffering.
- Embracing ethical scientific innovation reinforces the Church's message that life, in all its forms, is sacred and must be nurtured.

In the light of the foregoing call for openness to science, there is a pressing need for a reassessment of situational ethics. The Church and scholars must critically review ethical frameworks to ensure they adequately address contemporary challenges while upholding moral values.

Situational ethics emphasizes the importance of context and the specific needs of individuals in moral decision-making. In matters such as assisted reproductive technologies, a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach may not sufficiently consider the struggles of faithful couples yearning for parenthood. A more nuanced ethical discourse, one that acknowledges advancements in science alongside the Church's commitment to the sanctity of life can provide morally sound yet compassionate guidance. Openness to dialogue and re-evaluation of ethical principles in light of real human experiences, will help the Church reaffirm its role as both a guardian of moral truth and a source of pastoral care for those facing complex reproductive challenges.

Joseph Fletcher (1966) argues that morality should not be governed by rigid, universal rules but by the context of each situation, with love as the guiding principle. According to Fletcher, the right action in any circumstance is the one that expresses unconditional love and promotes human well-being. In the case of couples who have difficulty conceiving naturally, choosing science-backed fertility options (such as IVF, fertility treatments, or surrogacy) can be framed as an act of love. The decision is not about circumventing nature but about compassionately addressing a couple's unique struggle to build a family. If the chosen method is safe, effective, and rooted in a genuine desire to nurture life, then, by Fletcher's standards, it is morally justifiable because it prioritizes love and care over adherence to traditional norms.

Carol Gilligan (1982) appeals that women's happiness be considered. In relation to this subject, their quest for childbearing through scientific means, such as IVF, surrogacy, and family planning should be considered with care and compassion. He argues that women's reproductive choices, including the decision to pursue childbearing through scientific means, should be respected and supported as a fundamental aspect of their care and compassion for themselves and their potential children. Gilligan's theory also emphasizes the importance of contextual thinking, which involves considering the specific circumstances and needs of individuals. Women's reproductive choices should be evaluated in the context of their unique circumstances, including their age, health, financial situation, and personal goals.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented herein is not an unqualified endorsement of in vitro fertilization (IVF) for all couples but rather a call to recognize that when faced with significant deficiencies such as infertility challenges, responsible scientific intervention can serve as a valuable option. Just as a man with a weakened leg benefits from the support of a walking stick, people who rely on wheelchairs for mobility or eyeglasses to see clearly are not seen as defying nature but as wisely utilizing available resources to improve their quality of life, so too can couples leverage modern reproductive technologies when natural processes fall short.

This perspective does not imply that humans are fighting God; rather, it reflects a commitment to nurturing nature as part of our divinely ordained stewardship of creation. The biblical mandate found in Genesis 1:28 encourages us to "be fruitful and multiply" and to exercise dominion responsibly, a command that includes the thoughtful application of science and technology. Historical precedents, such as the Church's eventual acceptance of heliocentrism and modern medical advancements, demonstrate that faith and reason can coexist harmoniously when guided by ethical principles.

Therefore, I call on the Church to re-examine its position on reproductive technologies in light of contemporary challenges. By establishing dedicated commissions and fostering dialogue between theologians, scientists, and the laity, the Church can work with medical experts to develop pastoral guidelines that both respect doctrinal integrity and address the real suffering of couples facing infertility. Embracing such an approach would not only honour the Church's longstanding commitment to human dignity and a culture of life but also exemplify a compassionate and pragmatic response that empowers couples to experience the fullness of marriage and parenthood.

Sirach 38:1-8 from the Catholic Bible (NABRE or Douay-Rheims translation):

1. Honour the physician with the honor due him, for the Lord created him;
2. For healing comes from the Most High, and the king will reward him.
3. The skill of the physician lifts up his head, and he is admired in the presence of the great.
4. The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and a sensible person will not despise them.
5. Was not water made sweet with a twig, so that the power of the Lord might be known?
6. He gave knowledge to human beings, so that he would be glorified in his wondrous works.
7. By these medicines the physician heals and takes away pain,
8. Through them the pharmacist makes a mixture, so that God's works may not be discontinued, and well-being may spread over the earth.

This passage highlights the **divine origin of medicine and the importance of physicians**, showing that medical treatment aligns with God's plan for healing. Would you like an application of this to surrogacy or IVF?

"Let us open this window a little, let us breathe fresh air" Pope John XXIII during the Second Vatican Council

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