
MEDICALLY ASSISTED PROCREATION

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Abstract

This article is trying to focus on some important issues of Christian bioethics as assisted procreation and different problems raised around this matter like: 'in vitro' fertilization, post-mortem fertilization, sperm donors, procreation by surrogate mother, embryos selection, cryo-preservation of the embryos, embryos trade-mark, etc.

After clarifying the status of Christian family concept and its spiritual function, also as a Sacrament, the author shows that the real theme, content and object of this sacrament is not to establishing families, but love. The sacrament of marriage is wider than the family: it is the sacrament of divine love.

When a family could not have children, the Church approves the medical treatment of infertility in order to give birth. In this of assisted procreation the actors of these artificial procreation techniques are: the biologist, who does the research in the field, the physician, who assists procreation, the procreating agent, in general two spouses (one can even operate a person substitution: fecundation or heterogeneous artificial insemination), and finally that mysterious actor which is the embryo, the legislator, and why not, even society itself... so all of them must be responsible for a problem like that: giving birth or giving death.

Keywords: artificial fertilization, surrogate mother, Christian bioethics, sacrament

1. Introduction

The family based on marriage is the oldest social institution, being founded by God in Heaven (Genesis 2.18). It was raised by the Saviour to the status of Sacrament, sharing through the priest, the grace of the Holy Spirit, which sanctifies and elevates the natural bond of marriage to the honour of representing the spiritual union between Christ and the Church. Without showing contempt towards the necessity of the bodily union between man and woman, the Church considers that only in the marriage does the bodily relation become a means of promoting the union of souls. Only the Sacrament of marriage transfigures and spiritualizes the bodily union. Besides the transfiguration of the bodily union, marriage has the role of producing offspring. Giving birth and raising children is an important means of helping the two spouses to advance towards a growingly

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accomplished union of the souls. The responsibility assumed in raising children makes the acts of bodily union be imbued with an even more prominent spiritual element.

Neither is marriage exclusively of a bodily nature, just as it is not strictly of a spiritual nature. The Holy Scripture does not affirm anywhere that the only finality of marriage is procreation, just as it does not affirm that its only aim is the spiritual aspect. Christian marriage is, for the two persons involved, an indivisible spiritual and bodily union. In such a context, procreation contributes, in relevant terms, not only to the spiritual perfection, but – or, especially – to the salvation of the two spouses, as Saint Paul the Apostle says, as through childbearing “in faith, love and sanctifying self-restraint”, the unfavourable effects of transgression and disobedience are reversed (I Timothy 2.14-15). Through the procreative act, the mystery of the nuptial union is thus directly related to the mystery of life and creation and man, as co-creator with God, becomes a factor of inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. The purposes of Christian marriage

In such a soteriological and eschatological perspective of procreation, marriage goes far beyond the common idea of ‘Christian family’, as it is understood today by most people; it assumes not only cosmic and universal, but also spiritual and eternal dimensions. “As long as we visualize marriage as the concern of those alone who are married, as something that happens to them and not to the whole Church, and, therefore, to the world itself, we shall never understand the truly sacramental meaning of marriage: the great mystery to which Saint Paul refers when he says, ‘But I speak concerning Christ and the Church’. We must understand that the real theme, content and object of this sacrament is not family, but love. The sacrament of marriage is wider than the family. It is the sacrament of divine love, as the all-embracing mystery of the being, and it is for this reason that it concerns the whole Church and – through the Church – the whole world.” [1]

Usually, one asserts that producing offspring is *the second purpose of marriage*, whereas attaining perfection in love is *the first*. The decision to bring a child into the world plays an important, even fundamental role, in the accomplishment of one’s personality: an accomplishment which is in fact actualized ‘in communion and in love’. Thus, the procreative choice is not a marginal issue of marriage, but it implies essentially the will of man to follow a real interpersonal communion and a passage from the egocentric life in two, which is ultimately the individual’s selfishness, to the communion of the many, to the effusion of love and to the role of serving [2]. When the family faces the creative act of generating a new human being, through a responsible act, they serve God’s creation work. It is not the mere decision of giving birth to another human being, in the logic of natural or biological reproduction, of perpetuating species, as it occurs when there is no type of conscience, in the animal world, but it is an act of personal decision and of responsible procreation.

3. Body health and the progress of Medicine

The Church teaches us to take care of the body's health, to use it in the service of God and of our neighbour. Therefore, it approves of the medical treatment of infertility in order to give birth to children. Lately, in the cases when the medical treatment of infertility is not efficient, one has more and more frequently appealed to artificial reproduction, which substitutes the natural procreative act, "it opposes natural reproduction and it confuses the classical conceptions concerning the filiation parents -children" [3]. The so-called *progress* of Biology and Medicine facilitated the possibility of dislocating man, in his first days of existence, from his natural context. Man, through his technique, wants to become an absolute master of life and is indifferent to the price he has to pay. Little by little he loses any landmark, goes astray and orients towards *nowhere*. Congealed embryos are the symbol of this reality. Torturing these little beings, symbols in Christ of the victory of life over death, is the sign that man commits a sin, he denies God and tries to eat from the 'tree of life'.

In general, appealing to the new techniques of artificial fecundation takes place when the married couples do not succeed in having children after an appropriate period of attempts, or when artificial fecundation represents the unique possible treatment, an alternative for the couple considered sterile. The *actors* of these artificial procreation techniques are: the biologist, who does the research in the field, the physician, who assists procreation, the *procreating agent*, in general two spouses (one can even operate a person substitution: fecundation or heterologous artificial insemination), and finally that *mysterious actor* which is the embryo, *the legislator*, and why not, even society itself. In applying medically assisted procreation (MAP), two artificial technologies are used: artificial insemination (AI) and in vitro fertilization (IVF). These can be performed using either the gametes of the spouses (*homologous reproduction*), or donated gametes or embryos (*heterologous reproduction*). In this context, one must mention the fact that the aim of using such techniques is not the treatment of sick organs (of infertility), but this represents only "an alternative of the procreation act, a substitute for this" [4].

4. The artificial insemination (AI)

Artificial insemination (AI) is to be applied in cases of sterility, in the case of some transmissible diseases of the husband, in the case of women who are not married or who remained single, or in the case of lesbian women who claim more and more the right to have children. There is also post-mortem insemination. Medically assisted procreation comes into question only in families, more precisely in the case of one of the spouses' sterility, which can affect so much the psychological balance of the husband or wife that it might lead to the destruction of the couple's unity. In this situation, it is preferable to appeal to medically assisted procreation. Besides such justifiable and acceptable cases, there are also others which lead to the dangerous slopes of excesses: a) the desire to have a child

may be the desire to prove one's fertility, "as a criterion of virility or femininity"; b) the parents want a perfect child or one to be genetically programmed according to their wishes, so that it becomes for them "an idol endowed with a human face" [5]. We ought to say that the fertilization of the woman through insemination is done with her own ovule and with the sperm from her husband, deposited in a sperm bank. There are cases when the woman who wants and undergoes an artificial insemination, does not have a husband. She receives the fertile seed from someone else. From a juridical point of view, the right of the unmarried woman to procreate comes in conflict with the interest of the child to have a normal family, and from the point of view of Moral theology, the insemination of unmarried women is considered fornication. By forbidding artificial insemination in such circumstances, one prevents a child from becoming orphan at the very moment of his conception. Secondly, if the woman willing to become a mother no longer has ovulation, she will bear in her womb a child who does not belong to her being, becoming thus a *surrogate mother* or a *rented mother*. But whose mother? She has only the illusion of being a mother. Neither did others *order* the insemination. In such a situation both the mother and the foetus lose their identity.

The techniques of sperm collection from patients in agony or already dead ones led to the phenomenon of *post-mortem conception*. In such circumstances, the following question arises: Is it moral for a woman to conceive a child independently of a conjugal act of love? From the perspective of *natural theology* the answer is negative, as the conjugal act must be accomplished by two people who are alive. The American Orthodox theologian, reverend professor John Breck considers that this procedure is unacceptable from a moral point of view. In order to respect the sacredness of life it is necessary for the transmission of life to be accomplished through the union of two persons, bound "through a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, blessed by God" [6]. Consequently, through these requests, defining the concept itself of family will suffer changes. As long as the father is not the donor, sexuality no longer means procreation, this being thus disassociated from paternity. Procreation is a sacred act, as it represents a divine commandment and a participation to God's work in the world. It is undoubtedly a natural act, required by human nature and even by the purpose of life, but in order to fulfil its role completely it also has a moral character. And as a moral act, procreation is accomplished and fulfils its aim in the family life, where children achieve the legitimacy of sons of parents united through love, in the Mystery of the Holy Marriage. This love between spouses is received in a vital way by the foetus, who, when he becomes his parents' son, will support and accomplish it, strengthening the family unity and fulfil himself. To some up what we have stated so far, we must say that Christian moral does not accept artificial insemination as a means of procreation.

5. The fecundation (fertilization) in vitro

Another aspect of the technology of artificial reproduction is represented by the technique of fecundation (fertilization) *in vitro* (IVF) of the ovules collected

through laparoscopy by the donor's spermatozoa, and the embryo resulted is implanted in the uterus eliminating the tubal trajectory of the ovule and of the embryo. (At a global level, the first test-tube baby - Louise Brown - was conceived in 1978 in Great Britain with the help of physicians Edwards and Steptoe. In Romania, the first IVF medical centre was founded in Timișoara in 1998, in the future, other centres will open in Iași and Cluj-Napoca.) According to some, this method might be ethical if the donor is the husband. But from a medical point of view, it has its risks. Thus, the hyperstimulation of ovulation increases the concentration of progesterone and of estrogens. The perturbation of the normal hormonal balance favours the development of thrombosis. There might appear an early menopause, the percentage of pregnancies rises significantly and also the number of prematurely born children, there might also appear a cancer, etc. It was also noticed that 10% of these pregnancies are ectopic ones [7]. The issue of assisted procreation becomes very delicate when a third person donor intervenes. Appealing to a donor can occur only in extreme situations, when practically there is no solution for the couple, and the consent of the spouses (or concubines) 'must be express'. In this case, cryopreserved gametes and embryos deposited in special banks can be donated. In this situation, the sterile couple will give birth to a child whose legal mother is not the biological mother, and the legal father is not the genetic father.

The third person, who donates sperm for the artificial insemination of the woman, cannot have any right in the family or as concerns the new child. The donor remains anonymous for the receiver and the receiver for the donor. However, the anonymity of the donor can have disastrous moral consequences, leading to incest in case, at a certain moment, a woman can receive the sperm of her father or brother. On the other hand, if the father is not the donor, it means that procreation is disassociated from paternity, and such a family, as in the case of lesbians, becomes a compromise. The ones who work in the IVFET program (in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer) track the origin of this practice in the attempt of the researchers to solve the problem of the sterility of the salpinx, recognized as a major cause of infertility in couples. They regard extracorporeal fecundation as a solution for this type of sterility. There are researchers who regard IVF and the research concerning it as having a prevalent scientific interest, connected to the recent studies on recombinant DNA, on hereditary infirmities etc. Dr. Jacques Testart, 'the French father of IVF', warned in 1986 on the dangers of opening Pandora's box of assisted procreation [8]. By using embryonic cells in research, by the commercialization of embryos and of substitute maternity one can end up in inadmissible and inconceivable abuses. The research in the field of Physics has highlighted that after an impulse is caused, it is very hard to change its direction.

6. The problem of the 'substitute mothers'

As concerns *in vitro* fertilization techniques, mention must be made of the issue of *substitute mothers*. Because of some malformations of the uterus or

because of its extirpation after a genetic pathology, some women cannot carry the pregnancy. Therefore, they need the uterus of other women who can carry the pregnancy to term. Thus, a surrogate mother or substitute mother refers to the woman who accepts to carry a pregnancy for another woman, either being inseminated with the sperm of the husband of the one who wishes to become a mother, or by the implantation of the *in vitro* embryo, with the couple's gametes, and who gives birth to the baby for the latter. In the USA, distinction is made between *total replacement*, when the child belongs from a genetic point of view to the infertile woman and her husband, and *partial replacement*, when the surrogate mother, being directly inseminated, is the mother of the child from a genetic point of view, too. The surrogate is accepted as a form of medical treatment, and in the case of women "with multiple spontaneous abortions or those who suffer from any disease for which a pregnancy might endanger their life" [9]. From a genetic point of view, the child will belong to the couple, the surrogate mother making only a demonstration of solidarity, 'a humanitarian gesture', without claiming a financial reward, so that the genetic mother and the surrogate one should have the same degree of dignity. In order not to be labelled as 'child-selling' or 'womb renting', the surrogate mother is not offered any compensation. Actually, one third of the women rent their uterus for economic reasons, receiving 10000\$ for a pregnancy [10]. Consequently, the surrogate mothers cannot be accepted from a moral point of view. Although hard to accept from a bioethical point of view, in the USA, only in 1990 more than 10000 babies were born using surrogate mothers. At the same time, one must also mention the fact that *in vitro* fertilization represents an extremely expensive technique, so that it is not available for any family. If we regard this issue from the point of view of the feminist claims as to the right of disposing of one's own body, we will notice that accepting surrogate mothers comes into contradiction with these claims. Renting the uterus and receiving money for this service means exactly the denial of the person's uniqueness, as well as a form of slavery of the woman.

Carrying the respective pregnancy, an affectional bond develops between the substitute mother and the baby, so that there might appear serious psychological and affective conflicts. There were cases in which the substitute mothers refused to give the genetic mothers the child they had carried in the womb for nine months and there were genetic mothers, who, at the moment of the birth proved incapable of accepting the son they had so eagerly wanted. Besides this reality, we must also not ignore the situations in which, appealing to this method, children with severe malformations were born, being refused both by the surrogate mother and by the genetic one. In order to avoid such situations with serious juridical and psychological consequences, an even more erroneous path is being followed – they study and experiment the possibility of using chimpanzee uteruses, experiments whose final aim is the creation of the artificial uterus [4]. The American Orthodox theologian, Father Stanley Harakas rejects the possibility of using the artificial uterus, considering it against nature, being in fact "a sad attempt of the creature to imitate the unique function of the Creator..., a denial of the plenitude of our physical existence, sanctified through the Incarnation of our

Lord and destined to serving God in all its aspects, including the sexual and reproductive functions”. Using the artificial uterus or a substitute mother calls into question the identity of the child. As concerns the first situation, Father Stanley Harakas adds: “we must preserve the sacredness of the maternal womb if we wish to preserve our humanity fully” [11].

7. A technical and medical point of view upon in vitro fecundation

From a technical and medical point of view, *in vitro* fecundation is done in three stages, as follows: 1. the therapeutic stimulation of ovulation, a complex procedure which lasts more than a month; 2. the aspiration of oocytes collected through ovarian puncture; 3. the collected oocytes are put in a test tube together with the sperm prepared previously; 4. the implantation of the embryo in the uterus, 48 hours after the aspiration of oocytes. As the IVFET technique is made up of a succession of complicated stages and procedures, its cost being too high, they transfer in the uterus, simultaneously, a number of up to four embryos, preserving, at the same time, through freezing, other spare embryos. This procedure avoids, in cases of failure, repeating laparoscopy in order to collect oocytes and the risks associated to anaesthesia. The cryopreservation of embryos involves the interruption of the maturation of embryos and it can be used in donation programs, avoiding the rigorous and extremely difficult to accomplish synchronizations between the ones who donate and the ones who receive in the situation of donating ovules. Congealing embryos automatically generated the existence of ‘human embryos banks’. The seriousness of the moral issues raised by the existence of these is easy to understand. The question is: can embryos be considered living creatures? The French National Ethics Committee called these ‘potential human beings’, as one could not anticipate precisely whether the embryo would develop in normal conditions. The American Convention of Human rights considers the right to life of every person from the moment of conception. All the Orthodox theologians who approached the issue of artificial procreation were against conceiving spare embryos. The French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, analyzing this procedure, says that in order to bring a person to life others are killed [12].

8. Ethical considerations upon the medically assisted procreation

It is enough to look at this reality from a juridical perspective in order to realize the dimension of its monstrosity: the fate of the embryos is determined or remains undetermined, according to the agreement or disagreement of the spouses; their fate must be determined through a will in case of the death of one of them. When they no longer want their transfer in the uterus or when this is no longer possible, do the parents have the right to decide the death or the donation of the embryos to a sterile couple? Obviously, the parents have no right to decide the destiny of such embryos and this is the reason why they must not contribute to the conception of the embryos in the first place. Father John Breck asserts that all

those who accept experiments on embryos in favour of Science are wrong and they find no justification from a scientific point of view, all the more so from a theological point of view. *In vitro* fecundation, just like any experiment on embryos, constitutes a manipulation which violates the individual's right to protection. Moreover, setting aside the way in which it was conceived, the intention of interrupting the pregnancy during any period also constitutes an illicit act, as it prevents the development of the human person. This way of thinking raises important issues as to the morality of IVF procedures or abortions, be they *therapeutic* or of another nature. In case there is a surplus of embryos, Dr. Leon Sheean suggests that, in such situations, these embryos should be donated to an infertile couple. Although by adopting this attitude one would not respect the principle of the refuse of a third party in the procreation process, "this might still be called an adoption of the embryo by the woman who will carry it" [6, p. 235]. In this situation, the embryo has the same moral status as an adopted child, with the advantage that the new parents will experiment the gestation period and the birth of the baby.

Some ethical problems arise as concerns collecting and using human embryos. Producing more embryos has the following serious practical consequences: a large number of untransferred embryos; a large number of abortions caused after the transfer; a large number of abortions caused by the decongealing procedures (today the possibility of *bringing back to life* congealed embryos oscillates between 60 and 75%); a large number of congealed embryos exist today in the *embryos banks* and their fate is uncertain. Despite the fact that from the very moment of fecundation the embryos carry the life of the human person, they are used in research, just like animal embryos; others are used in industry, in order to obtain cosmetic products. In this sense, a deputy declared in 1986 in the Belgian parliament: "We all know this: pregnant women who do not want the babies are paid to prolong the pregnancy up to the sixth month, if not the seventh, in order to offer scientific research and cosmetics industry a foetus as well developed as possible. International commerce is a fact." [13] As life begins in the moment of conception, it means that not transferring embryos and 'reducing' them after implantation is homicide. The Church must oppose medical research on embryos, as these are human persons who must be treated and respected as human subjects and not as objects for study. IVFET represents nothing more than the effort of the autonomous man to mend fallen nature, and paradoxically, this reveals to him his failure: the multitude of sacrificed embryos reveals man as a mere imitator of the 'harsh nature' which carries death.

The various techniques of artificial reproduction, apparently in the service of life, actually open the door to new attacks on life. Olivier Clément mentions that "the progress of these techniques risks encouraging the instauration of a sort of biological totalitarianism at a global scale in our society, the promethean or mercantile exploitation of the subjectivity of the couple and especially of the woman. One notices, thus, the emergence of non-ethics of desire or rather of caprice, which the technique will do everything possible to satisfy: 'I do not want a child' says this woman now, 'I will have an abortion'. Some other time she says:

‘I want a child, I want to be inseminated with the sperm of a Nobel prize winner and I will entrust carrying the pregnancy to another woman, so that I don’t endanger my career, or I might entrust the baby to a «carrying cow», for example’... so that there will be more and more children from unknown fathers and multiple mothers.” [12] In this context, it is relevant to mention the fact that in 1980, R. Graham founded a *special bank* in which was deposited the sperm collected from Nobel Prize winners. He declared that he founded it with a humanitarian purpose: ‘a more intelligent world will certainly be a better world than this one’. It is not hard to notice that by selecting donors, this artificial insemination technique leads to the stimulation of eugenics (the selection of individuals according to genetic criteria). The purpose of this selection is that of giving the couple which asks for this reproduction modality, not only the desired child, but also the perfect child, or anyway, a child resembling as much as possible the genetic parent. This problem is not new, if we consider that such a eugenic method was suggested, together with other methods at the turn of the twentieth century by a eugenistic movement led by the English Francis Galton. This type of selection of parents was defined by Charles Richet (Nobel Peace Prize winner), in his work *La sélection humaine* (1919) as ‘peaceful racism’ [14].

9. The procreation – a theandric act of love and parental responsibility

On the other hand, as concerns the significance of procreation, this must be acknowledged in the dimension of a theandric act. Father professor Ilie Moldovan says that “in the act of love there is an encounter of the Mystery of Marriage with the mystery of giving birth to children”, which is a mystery of the creating divine-human love. “Christian marriage finds in the Trinitarian communion a sign of ultimate significance regarding its role of uniting love and life, the love of spouses and producing offspring”... Thus, in order to effuse freely, the Trinity creates outside itself and other persons who are capable of becoming subjects to the eternal divine love. The new hypostases brought by God to existence pertain to the way in which God relates love to life through a creation act and that are accomplished through a leap exterior to the natural realization of the Trinitarian community... Love is hence united to life through the connection of a ‘divine knot’ [15]. From this perspective, IVFET appears as a profanatory technique which breaks the ‘divine knot’ of the relation love-life. It operates an unnatural reversal of the value of an ontological existential fact of life: life has its origin in the divine creation work and not in the condition of an agreement or consensus between spouses.

From the perspective of IVFET, procreation is no longer founded on ‘the divine meaning of an act, that is, on the meaning of the personal offering’, but on a mere act of will or on the ‘desire to have my child at any price’. Procreation as an act of will or desire, even when these are founded on satisfying a noble paternal feeling, destroys its condition of personal act. Procreation cannot be the object of a game between intellect, will and satisfying some physical, psychological and spiritual needs. ‘The origin of life is in love’; once dislocated from this context, it

will certainly be profaned and become the victim of all kinds of negligence. If in the case of animals the reproduction instinct is only sexuality, in the case of people, it is psychosexuality. Animal also have eros, but only during the reproduction period. In humans, eros becomes an act of conscience which unfolds in an axiological form, involving not only the reason, but also the heart; eros becomes lasting tenderness, shame and guilt. This makes us hesitate in the case of homologous fecundation, even when all the necessary measures to avoid the death of the embryo are taken. The sexual act unites the spouses physically, affectively and opens the procreative possibility for them. "Separating the unitive from the procreative moment equals breaking the unity of love and life of the conjugal act." [14, p. 200]

Through the technique of medically assisted procreation, biological reproduction is affected and we can assist, because the donor is anonymous, to the implantation of the ovule from mother to daughter, who thus becomes the sister of her own child. We can also assist to incest if a woman receives the sperm of her father or brother, or if fecundations are done using the congealed sperm of a deceased subject, thus the generation leap occurs, when a child can be the son of his grandfather. As concerns IVFET, it is better to warn against the risks of the technique, such as vascular ruptures, intestinal lesions etc., as well as against other accidents, such as: death in the uterus, malformations, chromosomal abnormalities, and in the case of surrogate mothers, there is the risk of giving birth to physical anomalies [16]. We must also think of the ethical and social consequences of the artificial fecundation techniques. Having still the appearance of an experimental procedure, the baby will have three mothers (genetic, uterine and social) and two fathers (biological and social). Therefore, many countries in Eastern Europe (England, France etc.) consider *in vitro* fertilization a violation of natural laws. It is good to know that in the intrauterine life the baby develops not only his biological entity, but also sketches (especially in the last term of pregnancy) the first contours of his psychological life, at a sensory, intellectual and affective level. It has been established that the intrauterine stage and the first three years of life are decisive for the ulterior development of the whole life. An author remarks: "Your blood – the young mother is warned - nurtures the baby, the forces of your soul influence him, your thoughts and emotions are transmitted to him" [17]. Maternity, a quality which is deeply rooted in the moral, affective and physical personality of the woman has a great influence on the pre and postnatal development of the child. The IVFET procedure treats maternity in an instrumental and commercial way.

Although in the artificial insemination with seminal fluid from the husband, filiation is preserved, one must remark that what lacks is the complete bodily and spiritual relation of the spouses and also the conjugal communion and the love at the moment of conception. Artificial insemination dissociates procreation from sexuality, which leads to the dissociation of the biological filiation from the affective one. In artificial insemination with seminal fluid from the donor there appear problems concerning the rights of the baby that is to be born, especially in the case of single or lesbian women, therefore, with a deviant sexual behaviour. In

this way, the baby is at a disadvantage because of the absence of the father, or more seriously, because of deviant family relationships. Consequently, some consider the insemination with a donor's sperm adultery, intellectual forgery in birth documents, or violation of adoption procedures. "Heterologous artificial fecundation is contrary to the unity of marriage, to the dignity of the spouses, to the vocation specific to parents and to the right of the son to be conceived and brought into the world within and through married life. Moreover, this represents an offence to the common vocation of spouses, who are called to paternity and maternity..., it operates and manifests a rupture between genetic parentality, gestative parentality and educational responsibility." [14, p. 195] According to Moral theology, heterologous insemination is not allowed. Stanley Harakas considers that the sacred unity of marriage is broken when the genetic material comes from a third person. From a genetic point of view, the child must belong to the two spouses, otherwise, this leads to 'the betrayal of conjugal fidelity'. In these circumstances, such a procedure is incriminated as a form of adultery, 'unacceptable from a moral point of view', whereas the artificial insemination of unmarried women is considered fornication [18].

10. The point of view of the Orthodox Church – human life is a gift from God

Man's life is a gift from God and not a manufactured product, and the traditional framework for the perpetuation of life is the family. According to the teachings of our Church, the new human persons are born from other human persons through the power of God, Who intervenes in the life of the family and plays a part in bringing to existence each new human subject, who bears the image of the Creator. As any form of medically assisted procreation (MAP), artificial insemination (AI) calls into question the spiritual meaning of procreation. For the Church, this is not a purely biological act, but a synergy between God and parents. Procreation is one of the purposes of marriage and it is blessed in the Mystery of Marriage, which inaugurates Christian marriage (the prayers refer to 'the joy of producing offspring', 'the fruit of the womb, for good use'), so that infertility appears as a lack of fulfilment of marriage, but whose cause is not simply a biological one, but one related to God. The fact that God is involved in man's coming into the world (as continuation of the original creation act) makes infertility be the sign of a divine intention, to which spouses must show obedience and submission ("Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven"). The Church cannot accept the ideology of *the right to free reproduction* (which lies at the origin of MAP and of the fertility control techniques). In this sense, the basic moral problem of AI (and all the more so of IVFET) is represented by the intrusion of technology in the most intimate conjugal act, thus undermining its personal character (in the theological sense): the human act of love and procreation is detached from its direct relation to God and is placed in an artificial, technological framework. Although it seems to serve a human accomplishment, this instrumentalization calls into question acknowledging the dignity of man as

son of God. The child conceived in this way appears (although it is not) as a son of technology.

Although it seems that medically assisted procreation would be a reply to abortion, ultimately we have to remark that it identifies with abortion when embryos are destroyed through scientific research, or in the case of manufacturing cosmetic products. If abortion used as contraception method is a murder attempt, using donated gametes or surrogate uteruses constitutes a violation of the integrity of the conjugal union and of the rights of the child to a life in his natural family. As we have seen, medicine “cannot offer a treatment of sterility, but only a technicization and a depersonalization of procreation” [4]. The people who are eager to feel fulfilled in a family with children are recommended the alternative of adopting either a child coming from a family with many children and with limited financial resources, or an abandoned child. Let us think of abandoned children, of homeless children, who have never felt the caress of a mother and to whom nobody has smiled and let us imagine the joy they would live in a family that would surround them with a love they have never had. Only adoption can substitute artificial procreation.

The radical difference which exists between adoption and substitution maternity is the following: the natural mother does not ask for money when she offers her child for adoption, whereas the surrogate mother is almost always paid (with a great sum of money). With the money used for the artificial procreation techniques one might help a great number of poor families with many children, as well as many abandoned children, taking into account the fact that the price of carrying a pregnancy by a surrogate mother varies between 66000\$ and 144000\$, “depending on the woman’s age or on the causes of sterility” [19].

The Orthodox Church warns on the potential damage that children born with such techniques might suffer, as well as the danger of forming a new mentality as a result of these techniques, a mentality which might be considered a possible step to the dehumanization of life and to the dramatic separation of the personal relationships of the married couple from pregnancy. Starting from the fact that God created only human nature for procreation, the Orthodox Church rejects any artifice, incriminating it as a sin against human nature. Consequently, according to the Orthodox moral theology, the only conception method allowed is the natural one, based on the sexual relations between husband and wife. Any procreation act done with other means than the natural ones must be considered illicit or immoral.

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