



SEMINARIANS FOR LIFE

A NEWSLETTER FROM HUMAN LIFE INTERNATIONAL®

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Dear Brothers studying for the priesthood:

I hope your studies and spiritual preparation for the priesthood are going well this semester.

In December, I had the opportunity to travel to Tanzania to bolster the efforts of our regional coordinator, Emil Hagamu, who is proclaiming the Gospel of Life and fighting off the attempts of Western elites who are trying to change Tanzania's pro-life laws and customs. I had the opportunity to speak to seminarians from all over Tanzania and one from Zimbabwe. Their eagerness to learn more and their commitment to the defense of human life and the family was very encouraging, and I will remain in communication with my new friends.

I ask you for your suggestions on how to make the most of this newsletter, so that it is truly helpful and useful to you. Some of our newsletters will have a particular theme, but in this newsletter I wanted to address a variety of issues related to life and family.



*Rev. Peter J. West,
Vice President for
Missions and Director
of Seminarians for Life*

In this edition is an article by Eric Schafer is studying for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia at Theological College in Washington, DC. Eric has written an excellent article about the moral difference between contraception and natural family planning. Because this is a question that many people will ask us as priests, we need to be able to help people to understand and help others to accept this teaching.

Melanie Baker, a HLI America fellow, addresses the important topic of same-sex "marriage" and how the Obama Administration is promoting this agenda throughout the world. Upholding the sanctity of marriage is not about hating anyone, despite the rhetoric used against those who defend marriage. Rather, it is about challenging all of us to live up to the demands of the Gospel.

Finally, Arland Nichols, the national director of HLI America, tells us why *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) is dehumanizing and anti-life. We must treat couples who are suffering from infertility with compassion, but IVF treats children like products instead of persons.

See our website www.hli.org for more information. We want to know how we can serve you better. If you have any comments on our articles or helpful suggestions, or if you would like to submit an article for publication, please email us at semsforlife@hli.org.

May God bless you with his peace and wisdom!

Rev. Peter J. West
Vice President for Missions
Director, Seminarians for Life





Sexual Ethics in the Modern World

By Eric Schafer

UNDERSTANDING THE MORAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NFP AND CONTRACEPTION REQUIRES AN EXAMINATION OF HOW THESE TWO METHODS WORK.

The promulgation of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 was a crucial moment for Catholic sexual ethics in the modern world. As the culture's view of sexuality was altered by the sexual revolution and the increasing availability of contraception, there were some who thought the Church would change her position on the issue of contraception. Pope Paul VI, however, was clear that the Church's position will not and cannot change on this issue. Contraception is never a morally acceptable means of preventing pregnancy.

As the culture continues to buy into the "contraceptive mentality," the Church has remained consistent. In almost every ecclesiastical document since *HV* that addresses the immoral character of contraception, there is mention of a morally acceptable alternative, namely Natural Family Planning (NFP). One of the most common misconceptions about NFP is that it is simply another form of contraception, and some have even labeled it as the "Catholic contraception," an unfortunate and inaccurate misnomer. While it is true that NFP and contraception can both be used to achieve the common end of avoiding pregnancy, the means chosen to achieve that end is considerably different in each case and has significant moral implications.

Understanding the moral difference between NFP and contraception requires an examination of how these two methods work. Contraception is a direct prevention of conception either through chemicals or a physical barrier. The most common form of contraception is the pill, which raises the body's estrogen and progesterone to levels that prevent the woman's body from ovulating. If a woman is not ovulating, it is impossible for her to conceive a child. The word contraception comes from combining the prefix "contra" and the word "conception." It literally means "against conception." It is an active thwarting of conception by altering fertility; thus when couples use contraception they are choosing to act against their natural and healthy fertility.

Natural Family Planning, on the other hand is not a form of "contra-conception." There are neither chemicals nor barriers that prevent conception of a new life. Rather, if a couple has a serious reason to postpone pregnancy they choose to periodically abstain from sexual intercourse.

The practice of Natural Family Planning involves becoming aware of the natural changes in fertility that occur in her body during the month. By recognizing the various changes in the woman's body, the couple knows when she is fertile and when she is not. Through this knowledge a couple then has the freedom to to avoid pregnancy or to achieve pregnancy. If a couple has, as Pope Paul VI states, a "just cause," they are free to abstain from marital intercourse when the

wife is fertile to avoid pregnancy. There is no forced modification of fertility and no prevention of conception. There is a harmony with nature and with God's plan, which includes a natural period of infertility in women. Therefore when couples use NFP, they are choosing when to engage in marital intercourse.

The moral problem of contraception, or choosing to impede fertility, is the separation of sexual intercourse from procreation. Conception is the natural end or *telos* of marital intercourse, thus separating the two is gravely disordered. NFP, however, leaves open for the sexual act to achieve its *telos*. There is a window in every woman's cycle where she cannot conceive, not because she is infertile, but because that is how her natural and healthy fertility functions. This is why NFP is "open to life," which is essential for a sexual act to be considered morally licit. While conception will not occur during that time in her cycle when the woman is not ovulating, the couple is open to the possibility of conception, as opposed to being closed to it and acting directly to prevent it.

The beauty of NFP is that it is a lifestyle, so it is important to remember that its purpose is not simply to avoid pregnancy. Postponing pregnancy is only one possible use of NFP, and to use NFP to avoid pregnancy requires a "just cause." Determining this is a matter of the couple discerning with a well formed conscience a legitimate reason to avoid children. *Gaudium et Spes* points out that children are the "supreme gift" of marriage, so a "just cause" to avoid this "supreme gift" would have to be a serious

reason. Accumulation of excessive wealth or goods would not be a just cause because an additional child would not be detrimental to the family. That would be a selfish motive because the couple is choosing material goods over the "supreme gift" God has to offer a married couple, namely a child.

There are occasions, however, when it is prudent for a couple to avoid getting pregnant: For example, if a pregnancy is detrimental to the health of the mother and child because of illness or if a couple is incapable of meeting their basic needs because of their financial situation. There is no easy answer when determining a "just cause" for NFP, but this is a decision made by the couple with "a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself (GS, 50)." Natural Family Planning should be used to avoid pregnancy only if the need arises, but to avoid children unnecessarily would be contrary to the purpose of marriage.

Contraception also raises concerns about objectification of both husband and wife because it speaks a language of demand and entitlement as spouses become mutual objects of pleasure, without respecting the life-giving orientation of the pleasurable act they have chosen. The natural ends of the marital act are purged from the couple's decision to enter into that act. The fundamental moral issues thus revolve around the need to respect the life-giving nature of the conjugal act. While contraception clearly acts against the good of fertility and renders the conjugal act barren, NFP respects and works with the natural fertility cycle and in turn respects both the marital act and husband and wife. ■

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In Vitro Fertilization is Dehumanizing

By Arland K. Nichols

Few things are as natural and good as the desire for a child. Unfortunately, however, many couples are unable to have children: Infertility is a cross that approximately 15 percent of couples bear. Anyone who has personally experienced infertility knows it is a true cause of sadness and suffering.

Today, many who face this difficulty turn to *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) — a process in which human beings are created in a laboratory, to be implanted in the womb.

IVF is increasingly perceived as a solution for couples desperate to have a child. As recent news stories have indicated, however, IVF is fraught with elements that dehumanize the child and fail to honor his or her God-given dignity.

Recent articles on “selective reduction” have sparked widespread concern. “Selective reduction” involves aborting one or more of the children conceived following IVF by injecting potassium chloride into the beating heart of the child. This is justified, as an ABC News article explained, because “if women are allowed to abort pregnancies based on personal preference, they cannot be denied the right to abort only part of a pregnancy.”

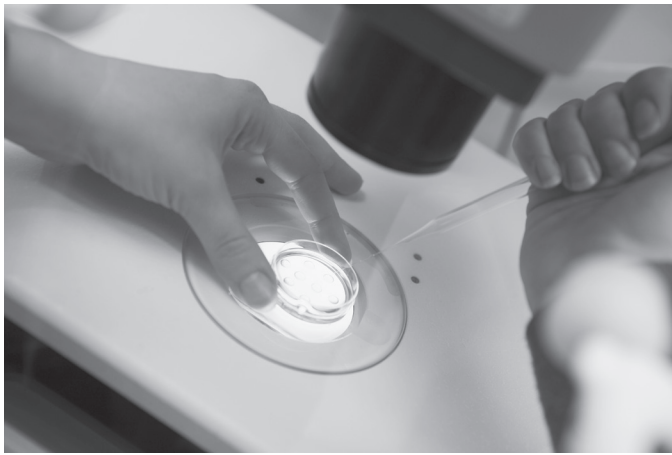
Notice how sad and dehumanizing this claim is — not once is the child described as a human being, but only as “part of a pregnancy.” The Church, in “Dignitas Personae” (The Dignity of a Person) says of selective reduction: “The decision to eliminate human lives, given that it was a human life that was desired in the first place, represents a contradiction that can often lead to suffering and feelings of guilt lasting for years.”

Why do many women who undergo IVF end up carrying twins or triplets? Typically, doctors transfer multiple embryos into the mother in hopes that one will survive. Even so, the success rate of achieving pregnancy hovers around 33 percent. A recent Slate magazine article illustrates well how dehumanizing the process is. Rather than transferring a single embryo, the author says, “there are still good reasons to keep the old method of throwing a bunch of embryos into a uterus and seeing what sticks, particularly for women who wants to get pregnant as quickly and cheaply as possible.”

Perhaps seeing the mentality of this industry so coarsely and openly expressed may help us better understand the Church’s opposition to IVF. Dignitas Personae states, “The practice of multiple embryo transfer implies a purely utilitarian treatment of embryos.” The child is



Above: A woman undergoing egg retrieval procedure. Below: An embryologist adding sperm to egg in a laboratory. Right: An embryologist freezing embryos for storage.



treated, by this procedure, as a means to the parent's end — they are treated as less than human.

In the United States some 500,000 embryos have been abandoned by their parents in the laboratory freezer, as they were no longer “needed.” The great geneticist, Jerome Lejeune, famously described this laboratory freezer as a “concentration can.” Truly “cryopreservation is incompatible with the respect owed to human embryos” (“Dignitas personae,” 18).

There are many other ways in which the IVF process and industry treat these tiny human beings as less than human. “Unwanted” embryos are discarded as medical waste if they have genetic defects or are the “wrong” sex; under current law, embryos are under the purview of property law instead of child custody law; and children are often genetically manipulated while in the petri dish.

Prospective parents should reel at the fact that only one out of 30 embryos created by IVF is actually born. The others die or are frozen indefinitely. While most

parents would never consider something like “selective reduction,” in spite of their best intentions, IVF always treats the child as less than human. This is illustrated starkly by a woman who recently was interviewed by *The New York Times*: “If I had conceived these twins naturally, I wouldn’t have reduced this pregnancy. ... But we created this child in such an artificial manner — in a test tube, choosing an egg donor, having the embryo placed in me — and somehow, making a decision about how many to carry seemed to be just another choice. The pregnancy was all so consumerish to begin with, and this became yet another thing we could control.”

The desire to have children is good and beautiful, but IVF offends the humanity and dignity of the child and is an unjust way of becoming a parent.

Nichols is national director of HLI America, an educational initiative of Human Life International. Find out more about their mission at hliamerica.org.

What “feels right” is not always good for me; sometimes suffering endured in one area produces more fulfillment in another.

THE TYRANNICAL REIGN OF *Royal Emotion*

By Melanie Baker

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered an appallingly flawed address to the United Nations recently, declaring that, “Some have suggested that gay rights and human rights are separate and distinct; but, in fact, they are one and the same ... Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.” She likened efforts to “denounce gay rights” for religious reasons as synonymous with religiously motivated evils “towards women like honor killings, widow burning, or female genital mutilation.” Sec. Clinton then proceeded to explain that, as was the case with slavery, both sides claimed religious motivation, hence dismissing any appeal to religious belief to resist homosexual activity:

Yet, while we are each free to believe whatever we choose, we cannot do whatever we choose, not in a world where we protect the human rights of all ... Progress comes from changes in laws ... In many places, including my own country, legal protections have preceded, not followed, broader recognition of rights. Laws have a teaching effect ... And practically speaking, it is often the case that laws must change before fears about change dissipate.

The apex of her address was to announce the creation of a new law:

We are launching a new Global Equality Fund that will support the work of civil society organizations working on these issues around the world. This fund will help them record facts so they can target their advocacy, learn how to use the law as a tool, manage their budgets, train their staffs, and forge partnerships with women’s organizations and other human rights groups. We have committed more than \$3 million to start this fund, and we have hope that others will join us in supporting it.

Of all that could be said in response to this embarrassing address, delivered by a woman who represents the United States of America on the floor of an international assembly, there is only one point I wish to make. I wish to bemoan the tendency of our culture to elevate emotion to the status of a deity, to the point of either overriding or blatantly disregarding that which makes us specifically human: our ability to reason. (A second point would be to emphasize that the opposition to publicly endorsed homosexual activity is not only *religiously* but is first *rationally* motivated.)

There is a marked difference between honor killings and refusing to endorse homosexual activity. There is a marked difference between “hating” a person and disagreeing with that person’s homosexual lifestyle. There

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is a marked difference between sex and love. Yet what do all three comparisons have in common? All three are emotionally charged, so much so that the emotional “cry” embedded in the first part of each sentence transfers over to the second.

It is true that at times certain persons have actively sought to physically torture or kill other persons with homosexual inclinations; this is wrong, and despicable, and should never happen. But it is certainly not an act of murder, or torture, to refuse to endorse a homosexual way of life. And, far from being an act of “hate” the refusal to endorse homosexual lifestyle should be and often is motivated by love and a sincere care for the true well-being of the person with the homosexual inclination.

Yet why is it becoming harder and harder culturally to make such distinctions in our speech and understanding? Because we are fast losing the priority that should rightfully belong to reason over emotion. Virtually every product for sale, every jingle we hear, every ad we read emphasizes my “right” to convenience, comfort and “my way.” Culturally, we have placed so much emphasis on “feeling good” that we are losing the ability to judge rightly or see clearly.

Paradoxically, sometimes what is truly good for me makes me suffer. A very simple example is diet. I might love chocolate and crave it, but if I indulge my desires and eat only chocolate for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the suffering I will experience will far outweigh the initial suffering of not having the chocolate to begin with. If I storm and stomp and insist that everyone only ever agree with my ideas, and cancel friendships with those who dare to stand up to me, the day that I have a truly disastrous idea, I will be left to the mercy of my own

stupidity, either from the false friendship of those who would sycophantically mollicoddle my moods, or from having closed myself to any reasonable advice from those who were true friends. Sometimes being corrected, though painful, is good for me. The basic point: what “feels right” is not always good for me; sometimes suffering endured in one area produces more fulfillment in another.

For love of our brothers and sisters with homosexual inclinations, we must continue to proclaim the truth about human nature, even if this truth hurts. We were made for love, and love is self-giving, the sincere search for the true good of the other; it is also always fruitful and open to new life, to other persons. True love never excludes, but welcomes. Love that would present itself under any other form is deception. Only in giving do we receive; “only in a sincere gift of himself does man find himself” (*Gaudium et spes* 24). Erroneously, the Obama administration has painted opposition to homosexual behavior as a religious issue, but it is firstly a rational issue. The voice of reason is quickly being overthrown by the tyrannical reign of royal emotion.

Melanie Baker is a contributing writer of HLI America. She writes for the Truth and Charity Forum.



Recommended Resources

Written materials

Casti Connubii (1930). Papal encyclical by Pius XI:
www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P11CASTI.HTM

Humanae Vitae (1968). Papal encyclical by Paul VI:
www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P6HUMANA.HTM

Evangelium Vitae (1995). Papal encyclical by John Paul II: www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/JP2EVANG.HTM

John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" conferences. Includes original unity of man and woman and reflections on *Humanae Vitae*. Available though HLI's bookstore: www.hli.org.

Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality (1995), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_08121995_human-sexuality_en.html

Educational Guidance in Human Love by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19831101_sexual-education_en.html

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994)

Links

www.humanaevitae Priests.org Great information about *Humanae Vitae* as well as many good articles and resources.

www.hli.org Human Life International's website. Of particular note are the pages:

www.hli.org/contraception_resources.html
Good articles about contraception.

www.hli.org/condom_expose.html
Exposes many of the myths about condoms. Shows the condom's high failure rate for preventing sexually transmitted diseases.

Bishops Pastoral Letters and Articles

Human Sexuality from God's Perspective: Humanae Vitae 25 Years Later, by The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB): www.usccb.org/prolife/humanae25.shtm.

Marriage: A communion of Life and Love, Bishop Victor Galeone (Bishop St. Augustine Florida USA). The pastoral letter can be found at the following sites: www.ewtn.com/library/prolife/zbodtrut.htm and at www.staugcatholic.org/archives/july-aug2003.pdf.

Electronic Resources:

Human Life International Pro-Life CD Library The world's first pro-life library on CD. A comprehensive and unparalleled resource for pro-lifers. Produced and distributed by Human Life International (HLI) and available at www.hli.org.

Most of the above cited materials are available through Human Life International. Go to www.hli.org or call 540-635-7884.