

LESSON 56: LIFE ISSUES

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about how God created mankind as male and female for a purpose. We also learned about the perversions that have taken place in society as the Church's teaching about gender has been overtaken by ideologies that validate gender confusion in the modern world. In this lesson, we learn about how the Church also teaches the value of human life, which again has been overtaken by ideologies and modern practices that contradict this sacred teaching.

Current lesson:

1. The Holy Catholic Church teaches that human life is sacred. This means that the way society is governed should be based on the belief that every human person enjoys an intrinsic dignity.

CCC 356: "Of all visible creatures only man is 'able to know and love his creator'. He is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake', and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity..."

CCC 357: "Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone..."

2. However, the sanctity of human life is increasingly under assault today because of various practices that seek to either terminate life prematurely or create life artificially. Although the Church always encourages scientific development and progress, she sternly cautions society that practices such as contraception, abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, in vitro fertilisation, certain methods of stem cell research, and cloning, among others, involve mankind's presumptuous interference with human existence. Progress becomes dangerous when mankind begins assuming the prerogative of certain "experts" to decide on the life and death of other human beings.

(It is not possible to cover every issue related to this topic in one lesson. However, this lesson seeks to identify some of the most common and pressing matters on this topic.)

HUMAN INTERVENTION IN TERMINATION OF LIFE

3. **Contraception.** Contraception refers to unnatural measures that are taken to prevent conception and birth as a natural result of the sexual act between a man and a woman.

Humanae Vitae, 14: Defines contraception as "...any action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act (sexual intercourse), or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible."

Based on natural law, sex is ordered towards procreation, which means that the unitive and the procreative aspects of marriage must always come together. Therefore, the birth of

children as a fruit of the marital union between a man and a woman must be expected. When a husband and wife unite themselves in the sexual act, they must be open to life, which means that they must be open to the possibility that children may be conceived from that self-giving act of love. The bond that comes from the pleasure provided by the sexual act is meant to promote intimacy, respect, and love between husband and wife, which in turn gives rise to a loving environment for the healthy nurturing of children.

4. The sexual act between husband and wife becomes unnatural, even harmful, when it is desired for its pleasure but in exclusion of its basic purpose, that is, procreation. When the couple engages in the unitive act but attempts to take measures to prevent conception of life, such action denies the true meaning of love as a self-giving act. For this reason, even if birth prevention is undertaken with the most sincere intentions, it contradicts the virtue of chastity. To use birth prevention methods is always a self-serving act even if one subjectively does not intend for it to be so.

CCC 2366: “Fecundity is a gift, an *end of marriage*, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment. So the Church, which is ‘on the side of life,’ teaches that ‘it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life.’” This particular doctrine, expounded on numerous occasions by the Magisterium, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.”

CCC 2368: “A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the regulation of procreation. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality:

When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone; but it must be determined by objective criteria, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts, criteria that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is practiced with sincerity of heart.”

CCC 2369: “By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its orientation toward man’s exalted vocation to parenthood.”

CCC 2399: “Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means...for example, direct sterilization or contraception.”

5. If a couple is convinced in their conscience that they have already fulfilled their parental responsibilities and are sincerely unable to raise any more children, they may use natural ways of birth control which do not cause them to deny the true meaning of the sexual act.

- A) Sexual abstinence is a morally permissible method of ensuring that no conception takes place. Because this method involves abstinence from the unitive act, there is therefore no obligation imposed for the procreative aspect of their spousal union.
- B) Another permissible method would be to engage in the unitive act during periods when the female spouse may be infertile. Such infertile periods are divinely designed and can be used. But even so, there is no guarantee that conception of life will not result from this unitive act, in which case, the couple is still required to be open to life and not attempt to prevent the possibility of fertility.

CCC 2370: “Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom. In contrast, ‘every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible’ is intrinsically evil:

Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality...The difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle...involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality.”

Every conception is a creative act of God. God *creates* a new immortal soul at conception, whereas man only *procreates*. Contraception is therefore protection against God. The act of contraception is also an act of lying, to say with the body, “I give myself wholly to you”, but to say with the contraceptive instrument, “Let no life come forth from our union”.

- 6. **Abortion.** An abortion is a procedure that is administered upon a pregnant woman in order to terminate her pregnancy. The use of medicine or surgery is applied to remove the embryo or fetus, together with the placenta, from the uterus of the pregnant mother.

Abortion, whether it is chosen as an end or a means to another end, is an objective mortal sin. Any formal cooperation in abortion, such as performing an abortion, encouraging or helping a pregnant mother to get an abortion, or paying for an abortion, is also gravely immoral and a mortal sin. There is no justification for abortion regardless of the circumstances or intention.

CCC 2270: “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.”

CCC 2271: “Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct

abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law...”

7. Since 1967, many countries in the West started legalising abortions when they were performed up to a certain number of weeks of pregnancy (ranging between 12 weeks and 24 weeks). Much of the arguments surrounding these legalisations was based on scientific opinions regarding when a fetus was to be considered a “person”. This meant that if a fetus was aborted prior to becoming a “person”, then the abortion would not be tantamount to murder.

However, the scientific community has never been able to emerge with a consensus on when a fetus is to be considered a “person”. The signs of life developing in a fetus points to the fact that once a human egg is fertilised by sperm, a new human person results from this process. From that point itself, the child’s sex, the colour of the child’s hair and eyes, and much more than that, are already determined.

- The baby’s heartbeat can already be detected 18 days after conception, and the heart can be seen to beat by day 22. Between the conception and the birth of the baby, this person’s heart beats around 54 million times.
- The signals from the baby’s brain can be detected 26 days from conception.
- The baby is able to hiccup by the time he is 28 days from conception. By 32 days from conception, the baby’s diaphragm muscle is completely formed and intermittent breathing motions can be detected.
- By the time the baby is 34 days old from conception, this baby is able to respond by squinting, moving his jaws, pointing to his toes, and perform grasping motions.
- The baby begins moving spontaneously between five and six weeks of conception, even though the mother does not feel that movement for another eight to ten weeks.

If these are not signs of the presence of a human being, what are they? For this reason, the Church has always insisted that every human being has an intrinsic worth and is a person from the moment of conception. It is a life that comes from God, who determines that this human person should be given a right to exist, to be born, and to be loved and respected.

Psalm 139:13-16: “You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb. For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. You knew me through and through, my being held no secrets from you, when I was being formed in secret, textured in the depths of the earth. Your eyes could see my embryo. In your book all my days were inscribed, every one that was fixed is there.”

Declaration on Procured Abortion, 12-13: “From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother, it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. To this perpetual evidence...modern genetic science brings valuable confirmation. It has demonstrated that, from the first instant, the program is fixed as to what this living being will be: a man, this individual-man with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization is begun the adventure of human life, and each of its great capacities requires time...to find its place and to be in a position to act.”

CCC 2275: “One must hold as licit procedures carried out on the human embryo which respect the life and integrity of the embryo and do not involve disproportionate risks for it, but are directed toward its healing the improvement of its condition of health, or its individual survival...”

8. The sin of abortion entails the penalty of *automatic excommunication* (CIC 1398), unless that individual involved did not know about this sin and its accompanying penalty, or was not allowed to freely follow her conscience, at the time of procuring the abortion.

(Excommunication is the most severe penalty imposed by the Church for particularly grave sins that are freely and wilfully committed. Excommunication does not mean that the person is kicked out of the Church or that the person can never participate in the life of the Church anymore. It is always imposed with the hope of bringing the person back into communion with the Church. It also serves as a reminder to all the faithful that the particular sins associated with this penalty are severe so that they are deterred from condoning them.)

Those who have obtained an abortion or helped someone to perform or obtain an abortion have committed a grave sin and should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The reception of this Sacrament, in a case where the penitent is in a state of automatic excommunication, has to be accompanied by the lifting of the excommunication by the priest in the course of the confession. In the past, the authority of lifting the excommunication in such cases was invested only in the bishops, who could also grant the power to the priests serving under their authority. Since 2016, Pope Francis has permanently allowed for priests to simultaneously lift the penalty of excommunication and absolve those confessing to have procured abortions, without the intervention of their local bishops. The priest says, “By the power granted to me, I absolve you from the bond of excommunication. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit”.

9. **Euthanasia.** Euthanasia is also commonly called “mercy killing”, and it refers to some kinds of intervention that are intended to prematurely end the life of a person in order to eliminate suffering. Euthanasia may take place either by direct action (such as lethal injection) or by omission (such as starvation or dehydration) to provide an “easy death”.

Euthanasia is strictly forbidden by the Church because human life is sacred and no one has the right to dispose of human life at will.

Declaration on Euthanasia:

“1. No one can make an attempt on the life of an innocent person without opposing God’s love for that person, without violating a fundamental right, and therefore without committing a crime of the utmost gravity.

2. Everyone has the duty to lead his or her life in accordance with God’s plan. That life is entrusted to the individual as a good that must bear fruit already here on earth, but that finds its full perfection only in eternal life.

3. Intentionally causing one’s own death, or suicide, is therefore equally as wrong as murder; such an action on the part of a person is to be considered as a rejection of God’s sovereignty and loving plan. Furthermore, suicide is also often a refusal of love for self, the denial of a natural instinct to live, a flight from the duties of justice and charity owed

to one's neighbor, to various communities or to the whole of society - although, as is generally recognized, at times there are psychological factors present that can diminish responsibility or even completely remove it. However, one must clearly distinguish suicide from that sacrifice of one's life whereby for a higher cause, such as God's glory, the salvation of souls or the service of one's brethren, a person offers his or her own life or puts it in danger (cf. John 15:13)."

Declaration on Euthanasia: "It is necessary to state firmly once more that nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly, nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action. For it is a question of the violation of the divine law, an offense against the dignity of the human person, a crime against life, and an attack on humanity."

CCC 2276: "Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible."

CCC 2277: "Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable."

Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded."

10. In Christian understanding, suffering that is brought about by illness or old age, despite being unavoidable, presents an occasion for people to share in the sufferings of Christ and to unite themselves to His sacrifice for the redemption of the world. Therefore, there is dignity even in suffering.

Declaration on Euthanasia: "According to Christian teaching, however, suffering, especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God's saving plan; it is in fact a sharing in Christ's passion and a union with the redeeming sacrifice which He offered in obedience to the Father's will."

11. Ordinary means, or proportionate measures, of treatment should always be administered to the sick and the aged which offer a hope of benefit to the suffering. Where *extraordinary* measures are administered and are found to be lacking in proportionate benefit, or unduly burdensome to either the patient or the family, the patient or the guardian can choose for these procedures to be discontinued.

CCC 2278: "Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of 'over-zealous' treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is

competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.”

CCC 2279: “Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.”

12. **Death penalty.** Also termed “capital punishment”, the death penalty is the killing of a human person as punishment imposed by the state (civil government) for a serious crime. In the past, it was taught that there were situations in which the state had to impose the death penalty on criminals who would otherwise have posed a danger to society. This view was found in the teachings of some saints who are also Doctors of the Church (such as St Augustine of Hippo, St Thomas Aquinas, St Alphonsus Liguori, and St Robert Bellarmine). It was also found in the teaching of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (also known as the *Roman Catechism* of 1566).

Roman Catechism: “Another kind of lawful slaying belongs to the civil authorities, to whom is entrusted power of life and death, by the legal and judicious exercise of which they punish the guilty and protect the innocent. The just use of this power, far from involving the crime of murder, is an act of paramount obedience to this Commandment which prohibits murder. The end of the Commandment is the preservation and security of human life. Now the punishments inflicted by the civil authority, which is the legitimate avenger of crime, naturally tend to this end, since they give security to life by repressing outrage and violence.”

13. However, this does not mean that the Church was propagating the default permissibility of the death penalty. The Church was not saying that the death penalty was always the right punishment to impose. In fact, the teaching was that the death penalty should *not* be imposed on anyone except if it was absolutely necessary. If there were non-lethal ways to protect society from a dangerous person, which there almost always were, these non-lethal ways should be used instead of putting a person to death.

CCC 2267 (before amendment in 2018): “Assuming that the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm – without definitely taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself – the cases

in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity ‘are very rare, if not practically nonexistent.’”

14. Unlike in the past, it is certain that there are now effective ways of ensuring that dangerous criminals no longer pose a danger to society without them having to be put to death. Because of this, the death penalty cannot be justified by the principle of the common good anymore. Pope Francis, in 2018, decreed for an amendment in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to reflect this position.

Putting a person to death would mean that the offender would no longer have an opportunity to repent and live a better life after that. More importantly, putting a person to death would also mean that the intrinsic dignity of the human person is not respected.

CCC 2267 (since amendment in 2018): “Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.

Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person’, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.”

Fratelli Tutti, 263: “Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible’ and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.”

Fratelli Tutti, 268: “The arguments against the death penalty are numerous and well-known. The Church has rightly called attention to several of these, such as the possibility of judicial error and the use made of such punishment by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes as a means of suppressing political dissidence or persecuting religious and cultural minorities, all victims whom the legislation of those regimes consider ‘delinquents’. All Christians and people of good will are today called to work...for the abolition of the death penalty, legal or illegal, in all its forms...”

HUMAN INTERVENTION IN CREATION OF LIFE

15. **In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).** Infertility, or inability to conceive children, is a problem that is quite commonly faced among married couples. There exists quite a number of techniques today used to overcome this problem of infertility, one of which is IVF. IVF is a process of bringing about new life in a petri dish in a laboratory. Children produced through IVF are sometimes nicknamed “test tube babies”. Some eggs are taken from the woman’s ovary

after she has consumed a fertility drug, and semen is collected from the man (usually through masturbation, which in itself is already an immoral act). The egg and the sperm are joined in the petri dish, where conception takes place and the new life is allowed to develop over a few days. The resulting embryos are then transferred into the mother's womb with the hope that one of them will survive to term.

IVF eliminates the need for the unitive act (sex between husband and wife) by helping pregnancy to take place through a laboratory procedure. Husband and wife are merely sources for the raw materials of eggs and sperm, and the eggs are fertilised with the aid of a technician. Quite frequently, donor eggs and sperm are used, which means that the genetic father or mother of the resulting child could come from outside of a couple's marriage.

Even in cases where the eggs and sperm are obtained from husband and wife, IVF poses serious moral implications. A few embryos are usually brought into existence, and only those which show potential for survival are implanted in the womb, while the others are either discarded or used for further experiments. This means that even if a baby is born from the procedure, other lives are terminated without being given an opportunity to develop. This is considered by the Church to be a grave offence against human life.

This process sometimes results in more babies in the womb than a couple desires. Therefore, doctors often undertake "fetal reduction" or "selective reduction", which essentially means that they eliminate the less healthy or desirable babies in the womb by injecting potassium chloride into the hearts of those unwanted babies. The potassium chloride kills the babies very swiftly and they are expelled as "miscarriages". Once again, we see here a grave offence against human life.

16. Because of the immorality involved in the process, IVF is not permissible by the Church. Embryos developed through IVF are subject to the arbitrary choices of the people who bring about their existence. The process denies "the right of every person to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage" (*Donum Vitae*, I-6). In this process, humanity seems to exercise a godlike prerogative over the lives of other human beings. Procreating turns into manufacturing, and persons (children) are turned into objects.

Donum Vitae, II: "The connection between in vitro fertilization and the voluntary destruction of human embryos occurs too often. This is significant: through these procedures, with apparently contrary purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus sets himself up as the giver of life and death by decree."

CCC 2375: "Research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged, on condition that it is placed 'at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, and his true and integral good according to the design and will of God.'"

CCC 2376: "Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus), are gravely immoral. These techniques (heterologous artificial insemination and fertilization) infringe the child's right to be born of a father and mother known to him and bound to each other by marriage."

CCC 2377: “Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another, but one that ‘entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children.’”

17. The Church has compassion for couples who suffer from infertility. She teaches that morally acceptable means of addressing infertility may be explored. Some examples are:

- A) Surgery to overcome tubal blockages in the male or female reproductive system which prevent fertilisation from taking place.
- B) Prescription of fertility drugs, but with the caution that they may cause a mother to be pregnant with multiple fetuses, thereby endangering the lives of the mother and the babies.
- C) Various ways of tracking natural reproductive rhythms to optimise the probability of achieving pregnancy.

Not all problems of fertility can be solved through technology. Children must not be created by the hands of man. They should be the natural result of an act of love between husband and wife who participate in God’s creative act. God is the one who creates, while human beings are called only to “procreate”. Conception of children is therefore a cooperative act.

18. **Stem cell research.** Stem cells are raw materials of the body. They are cells that divide in order to generate more cells called “daughter cells”. These “daughter cells” will either become new stem cells or specialised cells that have specific function (for example, blood cells, brain cells, heart muscle cells, or bone cells). Other than stem cells, there is no other cell in the human body that is able to generate new types of cells.

The scientific community is extremely interested in researching stem cells because:

- A) Watching stem cells mature into other specialised cells helps them to understand how diseases develop;
- B) Stem cells can be developed into specific cells used to regenerate and repair diseased and damaged tissues in the human body;
- C) Some types of stem cells can be used to test newly developed drugs to ensure their safety and quality.

Stem cells can be obtained from several different sources:

- A) *Embryonic stem cells.* Embryos that are three to five days old are called blastocysts, and they have about 150 cells. Stem cells from these embryos are versatile and can be used to regenerate or repair diseased or damaged tissue and organs.
- B) *Adult stem cells.* Some stem cells can be found in most adult tissues such as bone marrow and fat. Researchers are increasingly discovering that adult stem cells can also create various types of cells, unlike previously where they thought that these stem cells could only generate similar types of cells. Researchers have also successfully attempted

to transform regular adult cells into stem cells using genetic programming so that these cells start behaving like embryonic stem cells.

- C) *Perinatal stem cells*. Researchers have discovered that stem cells are found in amniotic fluid (a clear yellow fluid that surrounds and protects a fetus in the uterus) and also blood from umbilical cords. These stem cells also have the ability to transform into specialised cells.

19. The Church does not condone stem cell research when it is done by extracting stem cells from embryos (usually formed through in vitro fertilisation), since this method involves exploitation and destruction of human embryos.

CCC 2275: “...It is immoral to produce human embryos intended for exploitation as disposable biological material...”

However, this does not mean that the Catholic Church totally opposes stem cell research. When research is undertaken using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood, it poses no moral dilemma and is fully supported by the Church. In many instances, Catholic institutions have prominently supported such constructive research, and these efforts have already provided excellent treatments for suffering patients.

Some examples of such instances of support from Catholic institutions:

- In 2004, the Thomas Hartman Foundation for Parkinson’s Research, founded by Monsignor Thomas Hartman, raised millions of dollars for adult stem cell research as well as other methods for curing Parkinson’s disease.
- In February 2005, Caritas St Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Boston announced that they had “identified adult stem cells that may have the capacity to repair and regenerate all tissue types in the body”.
- The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney awarded a grant of AUD50,000 leading to a breakthrough in research on adult stem cells in March 2005.
- In June 2005, South Korea’s Catholic Medical Centre announced that they had successfully treated stroke and vascular disease in 64 patients using adult stem cells.
- In October 2005, the Catholic bishops of South Korea announced that they would raise and donate USD10 million to support adult stem cell research.
- Throughout 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops put in great effort to pass federal legislation creating a nationwide public bank for umbilical cord blood stem cells in order that research and treatment of various diseases could be made possible.

The above examples are just a few cited to demonstrate that stem cell research can be undertaken in ethically responsible ways, and in such cases, the Church fully supports such initiatives.

20. **Cloning**. Cloning refers to the manufacturing of a human person who is a genetic copy of an individual already in existence. An egg is taken from a woman’s reproductive system, and the DNA of the egg is removed and discarded. The DNA extracted from somebody else’s cell is inserted into the egg instead. After that, an electrical pulse is used to activate cell division, which results in the creation of a cloned embryo or a new human life (which is actually a genetic copy of the individual whose cell the DNA was extracted from).

Efforts to clone human beings have not yet succeeded at this point, but scientists opine that it is merely a question of time. A cloned person has no parents because he/she was unnaturally manufactured. Such a method of procreation takes place outside of the conjugal act of marriage. Instead of cooperating with God's act of creating, scientists become creators with the power to predetermine the specifications of the lives that result from the cloning process.

21. There are two main methods of cloning:

- A) *Therapeutic cloning*. Cloned embryos are placed in a dish in the laboratory to produce embryonic stem cells that are genetically identical to someone who needs them. These stem cells are then transplanted into the individual to replace diseased or damaged cells without the risk of the body's immune system rejecting them. Such stem cells can be used to treat a variety of diseases, for the study of embryonic development, as well as for drug testing.
- B) *Reproductive cloning*. Cloned embryos are implanted in a woman's uterus so that they are carried to term and eventually develop into a whole copy of the original individual. Dolly the sheep was the first successfully cloned creature in July 1996 in Scotland. Since then, reproductive cloning has been attempted on monkeys as well as human beings but without much success. Most of the time, these embryos are also subject to scientific research and are therefore killed in the process.

22. Cloning is immoral because it disrespects the dignity of the human being.

- A) It imposes the image and likeness of a donor on another human being, which is tantamount to imposing one's dominion over a slave. Every human being has a right to be unique and equal in dignity to others. Even if cloning may be done with the intention of possibly solving the problem of human disease and illness, a human person cannot be created as an instrument for another human person's relief. When a human being is created as a pale extension of another or for the service of another, it deprives the clone of the right to being treated as a person.

Reflections on Cloning: "The idea is fostered that some individuals can have total dominion over the existence of others, to the point of programming their biological identity – selected according to arbitrary or purely utilitarian criteria... This selective concept of man will have, among other things, a heavy cultural fallout beyond the – numerically limited – practice of cloning, since there will be a growing conviction that the value of man and woman does not depend on their personal identity but only on those biological qualities that can be appraised and therefore selected."

Reflections on Cloning: "Human cloning must also be judged negative with regard to the dignity of the person cloned, who enters the world by virtue of being the 'copy' (even if only a biological copy) of another being: this practice paves the way to the clone's radical suffering, for his psychic identity is jeopardized by the real or even by the merely virtual presence of his 'other'...since the 'clone' was produced because he resembles someone who was 'worthwhile' cloning, he will be the object of no less fateful expectations and attention, which will constitute a true and proper attack on his personal subjectivity."

- B) Creating human embryos for scientific research, which inevitably causes them to be destroyed, contradicts the dignity of the human person. In most industrial and scientific circles, these efforts are undertaken with purely economic interests, which even more clearly reflects the immorality of the activities that cloning involves.

Reflections on Cloning: “If the human cloning project intends to stop ‘before’ implantation in the womb, trying to avoid at least some of the consequences we have just indicated, it appears equally unjust from the moral standpoint. A prohibition of cloning which would be limited to preventing the birth of a cloned child, but which would still permit the cloning of an embryo-foetus, would involve experimentation on embryos and foetuses and would require their suppression before birth – a cruel, exploitative way of treating human beings.”

- C) The prospects of cloning have given rise to all sorts of possibilities which make it possible for life to be created without involving the unitive act proper to a marital relationship. For example, same sex couples may find this to be a suitable way of getting children since it excludes the need to have sex with the opposite gender. Some parents may also wish to clone their dying children in order to perpetuate the lives of these children whom they love, without realising that the new persons created by the process are not actually continuations of their dying children. Some individuals may also think highly of themselves enough to wish to create clones of themselves as “gifts” to humanity. But all these instances contradict the dignity of human procreation as well as the dignity of marital union.

Donum Vitae, I-6: “[A]ttempts or hypotheses for obtaining a human being without any connection with sexuality through ‘twin fission,’ cloning or parthenogenesis are to be considered contrary to the moral law, since they are in opposition to the dignity both of human procreation and of the conjugal union.”

23. Related to cloning also is the act of genetic engineering (or genetic modification or genetic manipulation), although it is actually different from cloning. In genetic engineering, genetic technology is used to alter the genetic makeup of cells, which means that the individual resulting from this process is “custom-made”. Through this process, scientists enhance or modify the characteristics of the individual. It is an advanced way of controlling breeding and injecting potential offspring with certain traits that are found desirable. This process has been applied in a couple of ways thus far:

- A) Parents selecting the sex of their child using a process known as sperm sorting. A technician sorts male sperm and female sperm (female sperm is heavier because it carries more DNA), and a woman is artificially inseminated with the sperm of the gender she chooses. This process is successful 75 percent of the time.
- B) Scientists produce multiple embryos in the laboratory by IVF and analyse their genetic makeup to discover genetic disorders. Those embryos with genetic disorders are discarded, and one or two of those that are free of genetic disorders are implanted in the woman’s womb, while other embryos may be frozen for later use.

This process is immoral because it involves creating and destroying human lives, and it replaces the conjugal act with scientific procedures conducted through third-party intervention.

CCC 2275: “...Certain attempts to *influence chromosomal or genetic inheritance* are not therapeutic but are aimed at producing human beings selected according to sex or other predetermined qualities. Such manipulations are contrary to the personal dignity of the human being and his integrity and identity’ which are unique and unrepeatable.”

24. There are also grave concerns that arise from this practice of genetic engineering and producing “custom-made kids”:

- A) A human being’s dignity comes by virtue of God being the one who creates the person in His image and likeness. A person’s unique traits are all given by God. The value of a human being cannot be manipulated as if an enhancement of the person’s traits would determine the value of the person’s dignity.
- B) There is no guarantee that when genes are engineered, a child would turn out having the traits expected by his “creators”. When unrealistic parental expectations are not met, what happens to the perceived value and dignity of this child who has been genetically manipulated?
- C) The possibility of genetic engineering gives rise to further social inequality. If genetically engineered “super-children” can be created, then they might become an “elite class” that renders those conceived and birthed naturally as “lesser beings”. Since it is the rich who would be able to afford genetic engineering, children of the poor would be relegated to an even lower societal status.
- D) Genes have multiple functions which are not yet truly understood by scientists. Creating genetic alterations could very possibly bring about unforeseen disasters suffered by the individual caused by this process.

25. The Holy Catholic Church involves itself in moral teaching regarding all these scientific issues, and constantly seeks to update its pronouncements in tandem with scientific progress, because man’s efforts must always give rise to the common good as well as the sanctity of human life.

CCC 2258: “*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”



2021 Sherman Kuek. Distribution of this work in its original form is freely permitted for all catechetical work but not for profit purposes. No modifications to the original form of this work are permitted except with the consent of the original author. Where modifications have been consented in any form, legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict the use of this work in ways that the licence permits may not be applied. For further enquiries, contact admin@splendourproject.com.