From A Catholic Perspective: Does In Vitro Fertilization separate the Unitive and Procreative Meanings of Marriage?

Megan Barefoot

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ABSTRACT: Infertility is a growing problem that causes the suffering of many married couples. Today, In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is a commonplace and important artificial reproductive technology that has aided in the birth of an estimated 5 million babies since the first “test-tube” baby was born in 1978. Recent advances in treating infertility raise important ethical questions for society and challenge the Catholic Church to rethink the meaning of marriage and the nature of parenthood. At present, the Catholic Church argues against IVF on the basis of its principle of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act of marriage. This paper questions the credibility of the inseparability principle in condemning IVF. Considering the arguments presented in "Artificial Reproductive Technologies" in Sexual Ethics, I elaborate on the essential claim that the physical act of sex is not required to fulfill the unitive and procreative ends of marriage when marriage, procreation, and parenthood are defined using the interpersonal model developed during the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Considering these arguments in their entirety and synthesizing them with the recent examples, I concur that IVF is a morally permissible technology. First, I define In Vitro Fertilization; Second, I critique the current teaching provided by the Catholic Church to morally prohibit IVF; Third, despite the argued moral permissibility of IVF, I acknowledge and evaluate unethical practices that are commonly performed in association with IVF. Specifically, I address the practice of embryo preservation and discard; Lastly, I implement the same argument used to morally justify IVF to offer embryo adoption as a solution to the ethical problem posed by frozen embryos.