

THE CENTRE FOR BIOETHICS

Position Paper on Assisted Reproductive Technologies

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Introduction:

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) has revolutionised child bearing by making it possible to create babies not only without sexual intercourse, but also without a partner. ART includes all techniques involving the direct manipulation of human eggs, sperm and embryos outside the human body.

Many assisted reproductive technologies may be appropriate expressions of mankind's God-given creativity and stewardship, while certain reproductive technologies could impinge on the fidelity of the marital bond and present direct or indirect dangers to the sanctity of human life.

Couples, especially those who are unable to have children, may choose adoption. However, others might choose Assisted Reproductive Technologies, which vary in their spectrum of potential utility. ART treatment should be started only after thoroughly explaining all risks and benefits to the couple. The medical options available and their ethical implications need to be considered. The greater the technology diverges from normal physiologic procreation, the greater the potential for perplexing moral dilemmas. Not every technological procedure is morally justified, and some technologies may be justified only in certain circumstances.

Theological Concepts:

Sanctity of Human Life

God created mankind in His image and declared it to be very good. Each human being is sacred, is unique among all creation, is of equal worth and immeasurable value from conception to natural death, irrespective of age, sex, religion, ethnic background, language, intelligence, socio economic status, etc. Each human being is made in the image of God and therefore should be respected, treated with dignity, protected, preserved, nurtured and developed at all ages and stages, in utero and after birth.

We Are of Value to God

Human beings are valuable because God created human beings. This value is intrinsic. He knows us from our conception. God cherishes us and has a purpose for our lives. God values human beings to that extent that He sent His Son to die for us to redeem us. We must value human life as God does, and choose to be life-giving in our views of and responses to other people, including the pre-born.

Family

It is the basic social unit instituted by God, consisting of one man, one woman – his spouse and their offspring or adopted children. It involves a commitment ordained by God for the lifetime of the members, for relationship, companionship and responsibility of stewardship.

Procreation is God's Design

When God created Adam and Eve, He blessed them and commanded them to multiply. Children are a blessing from God. Children are a gift from God to be unconditionally welcomed. At the fall Adam and Eve disobeyed God. This had consequences. They were physically separated from God and

became cursed. The impact of the fall is the corruption both of the blessing and also our desires and pursuit of the fruit of the womb.

Adoption

Adoption is an act of compassion and privilege with commitment for a child already born. We are adopted into the family of God. Receiving “one such little child in my name” is pleasing in God’s sight. Adoption emulates God's adoption of us as spiritual children.

Fertilization as the Beginning of the Human Embryo:

Human conception begins with fertilization of an egg by a sperm, creating a single-celled human life called a zygote with all the genetic material (DNA) required for full maturity of the human being. Fertilization is a decisive event as a new, genetically distinct human organism is formed when the chromosomes of the male and female gametes unite in the oocyte (egg). The embryo, from the time it is created, is a unified, unique, dynamic, self-directed whole, not just a collection of cells. There is evidence that organization exists from the first cell division. The fertilized ovum maintains continuity of identity through pregnancy (zygote, embryo, and fetus) and childhood to adulthood.

Principles that Should Guide the Use of ART:

- Fertilization is the beginning of a new human life
- Fertilization resulting from the union of a wife's egg and her husband's sperm, growing until birth in the wife’s own uterus is the biblical design of procreation.
- Embryos have intrinsic value as they are human beings.
- Each embryo should be given a chance of life in the womb, irrespective of whether or not they appear to be viable for life
- God holds us morally responsible for our reproductive choices

TCB finds the following may be consistent with God’s design for procreation:

- Medical interventions to facilitate production of sperms and ovulation, but not hyper ovulation
- Surgical correction of anatomical anomalies of male and female reproductive organs
- Artificial insemination of husband’s sperms (AIH)
- Intrauterine insemination with husband’s sperms
- Sperm sorting to identify healthy sperms and not for sex selection
- Intracytoplasmic sperm injection using husband’s sperms
- In-vitro fertilization (IVF) of wife's egg – maximum of three with husband's sperm, with subsequent:
 - Embryo Transfer to wife’s uterus
 - Zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT) to wife’s fallopian tube
 - Gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT) to wife’s fallopian tube
- Implanting couple’s own embryo and not any other
- Hatching eggs
- Cryopreservation of sperms, ovarian tissue and snap freezing of eggs (to avoid sterility via onco-fertility), with proper labelling and stringent measures to avoid intentional or accidental swapping of gametes.

- Prenatal hospice (where pregnancy is continued while plans are made for palliative care of the child after birth)
- Adoption of unwanted children already born

TCB considers introduction of a third party morally unacceptable:

- Artificial insemination by donor (AID)
- The use of donor egg or donor sperm for:
 - In-vitro fertilization (IVF)
 - Gamete Intra-Fallopian Transfer (GIFT)
 - Zygote Intra-Fallopian Transfer (ZIFT)
- Mixing donor gametes with couple's gametes
- Cytoplasmic & germinal vesicle transfer
- Gestational Surrogacy (both commercial and altruistic)

TCB opposes the following procedures as inconsistent with God's design for the family:

- Posthumous gamete harvesting and IVF using husband's sperms after his death
- Gamete donation
- Embryo selection / reduction
- Uterine transfer of excessive numbers of embryos
- Discarding embryos
- Destructive experimentation with embryos
- Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis done with the intent of discarding or destroying embryos
- Using ART for "social infertility"
- Human reproductive cloning using somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), embryo splitting, germ cell nuclear transfer etc.

Conclusion

In principle, TCB condones the use of Assisted Reproductive Technology to facilitate child bearing within the context of heterosexual married couples only. All human life, from conception deserves respect. ART should be used within the limits of God's design. As ART is a growing field, there is need for continued moral scrutiny in using existing and emerging assisted reproductive technologies.

Glossary:

- Cytoplasmic & germinal vesicle transfer - embryo will have genetic materials from 3 persons
- Gestational Surrogacy – third party carries child produced by wife's egg & husband's sperm
- Posthumous gamete harvesting – Collecting sperms from a person after his death
- Social infertility - Single parent, same sex couples, couples who could have their own, but choose not to
- Human reproductive cloning is the creation of a genetically identical copy of an existing human being, and who is allowed to develop to term and beyond.

*Disclaimer: This document is based on the current understanding of scientific evidence and is subject to revision from time to time.