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**ADDRESSING BIOETHICAL ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT  
OF ADVENTIST PHILIPPINE EDUCATION**

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It was in a Christian Ethics class. A heterogenous class. Students came from different academic discipline, family background, cultural and educational exposures. But one thing is in common - they were all Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) learners.

Group discussion became an avenue of learning process in the middle of the school term. One group came up and discussed on bioethical issues such as *in vitro* fertilization, surrogate motherhood, cloning, etc. The members discussed these issues in relation to the capabilities of modern science and technology. The discussion was followed by an animated dialog in which the entire class participated. Some members of the class were inclined to accept the limitless advance of science and technology as God's providence. They construed that science and technology are parts of God's design for man to improve the quality of human species on the one hand, and to accomplish, as man's prerogative, the disposal of the undesirables on the other.

The class was not a total disappointment. A good number of them disagreed with the stance taken by other class members. They clung to the idea that science and technology should enhance the maintenance of the total welfare of man, not as a tool in his hand to operate as if he were the Creator. How should an SDA teacher meet the

challenge of courageously applying the eternal Bible principles for Filipino youth in this kind of classroom setting?

### INTRODUCTION

Modern science believes that almost everything is possible. Its advent makes people believe that new knowledge is remarkably valuable and is worth getting regardless of the means. Modern science makes people believe further that the right to knowledge is basic human freedom and to deprive their acquisition is an infringement of their basic liberties. The reason for this alleged human privilege is because "ethical decisions are not made in a vacuum. They are made from within a world view."<sup>1</sup> Many human beings have the attitude that they should be permitted to do anything that is possible within their capacity and are apt to know anything according to their ability to find out.<sup>2</sup> Modern science and technology admit not only to inform but to extend human knowledge and lift humanity from the "menace of avoidable ignorance."<sup>3</sup>

This approach to scientific knowledge in research has reached the Philippine system of education, both in secondary and tertiary levels, the past several years. Students whose eyes of knowledge are opened in an age of modern science and high-technological inventions seem to adjust their views to the all-convincing findings of science particularly those that pertain to biomedics. New developments

concerning the structure of genes in all the realms of life on earth are results of scientific endeavor. By the same token, today's science has gained foothold in Seventh-day Adventist classrooms in the Philippines.

This essay is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of all bioethical issues that confront Christians today. Our discussion focuses only on three methods of assisted human reproduction that were discussed in an actual classroom setting: *in vitro* fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and human cloning. We will discuss the process these methods are applied to human beings, the benefits human beings receive through these methods, the challenges Christian teachers face as a result of these methods, and propose an Adventist response.

#### ***IN VITRO* FERTILIZATION**

One technological intervention that could assist human process of procreation is *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). It is a technology that replaces natural process of reproduction. This process is believed not only as a solution to the infertility problem of wives, but also to their inability to procreate due to an obstruction in the fallopian tubes. Also, IVF enables men with low sperm counts to biologically father their own children.

IVF is defined by Mappes and Zembaty as "fertilization 'in glass',"<sup>4</sup> placed on flat culture dishes, exposing the egg to the sperm in a highly sterilized environment.

Microscopes and micromanipulating instruments are used in the process. This clearly explains that fertilization occurs outside of human body not in the fallopian tubes as in the case of natural process. Mappes and Zembaty further explain IVF by saying that "the sperm of a husband (or a donor) is united, in a laboratory, with the ovum of a wife (or a donor)."<sup>5</sup> This is followed by embryo implantation to the uterus. The process requires a high degree of sophistication from the moment of acquiring eggs from the ovary to the time of transferring a developing embryo to the uterus.<sup>6</sup> IVF is time consuming, expensive, and with some risks. Even if the numbers of fertilized eggs, implanted embryos, and frozen embryos are limited, still the risk of losing a number of them is high. The destruction of extra embryos to enhance survivability of the remaining embryos is at times paramount in this process.

One lady in that Christian Ethics class believed that God provides solution to infertility. And since there are a number of infertile couples, and that God wants them to live happily as families with offspring, she stressed with deep conviction, that God also approves child-bearing through IVF. Although she met some challenges from her fellow learners, she still was courageous enough to introduce another way of solving infertility - surrogacy.

#### **SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD**

Another technology that provides hope to childless

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couple due to the infertility of a woman is surrogate motherhood. This is also done by a wife who cannot carry pregnancy because of old age, physical abnormality, illness, and body injury. This is a process whereby a surrogate (a third party outside a married couple) contracts with married couple to be artificially inseminated, usually with the husband's sperm. A surrogate mother is a substitute mother who receives sperm from an infertile woman's husband. This is how it was done and how surrogate mother worked in the early '90s:

For a fee of \$5,000-10,000 a broker (usually a lawyer) will put an infertile couple (or less often, a single man) in contact with women whom he has recruited and screened who are willing to serve as surrogates. If the parties strike a deal, they will sign a contract in which the surrogate agrees to be artificially inseminated (usually by a physician) with the husband's sperm, to bear the child, and then at or soon after birth to relinquish all parental rights and transfer physical custody of a child to the couple for the adoption by the wife. Typically the contract has provisions dealing with parental screening, abortion, and other aspects of surrogate's conduct during pregnancy, as well as her consent to relinquish the child at birth. The husband and wife agree to pay medical expenses related to the pregnancy, to take custody of the child, and to place approximately \$10,000 in escrow to be paid to the surrogate when the child is transferred. The lawyer will also prepare papers establishing the husband's paternity, terminating the surrogate's right, and legalizing the adoption.<sup>7</sup>

In some cases the surrogate provides not only the uterus where the fetus matures but eggs as well. With the advance technology such as *in vitro* fertilization and intracytoplasmic sperm injection, plus the use of micromanipulative techniques, it is possible for the surrogate to have no biological genetic relation with the child. Hence, a surrogate in this case serves as a gestator of some body's child.

In this part of the discussion, a senior theology student in the class bravely disclosed his disagreement. He argued that surrogacy is a form of adultery by proxy. He further posited that by this means of intervention, technology has gone beyond the parameter of God's design in procreation. Some learners stood guard against the challenge he presented and the class went to another issue.

### HUMAN CLONING

Cloning includes processes by which living plants are reproduced asexually. This process does not involve the fusion of sperm and egg. Common yeast reproduces by splitting into two daughter cells that are cloned of the parent cell. Propagation of cut twigs or vines that turn into complete plants are clones of the original stuck. Other simple form of animals, like starfish, can multiply from a small part of the original one. Thus, the understanding of the basic principles of cloning is a matter of the past.

Cloning is an aspect of genetic engineering. Its aim is to produce a "radically altered or completely new individuals."<sup>8</sup> In the truest sense of the word, cloning is "accomplished by the removal of the nucleus of an ovum and replacing it by the nucleus of an asexual cell, that is, a skin cell. The resulting being would be genetically identical with the donor of the nucleus."<sup>9</sup>

It explains that cloning extracts a genetic material from a cell by removing the cell's nucleus then inserts it

into an egg whose own nucleus is removed. The new cell soon divides and gradually develops into being similar to the donor cell. In this sense, cloning is theoretically possible to create an identical twin without sexual parenting. It is a means of reproduction without sexual union. This process has been called a "carbon-copy" reproduction,<sup>10</sup> or "somatic cell nuclear transplantation."<sup>11</sup>

Several years ago cloning has not been part of human's technology specially as applied to human being. To think of cloning human beings was a very strange idea then. With the advent of genetic engineering and reproductive biology, the possibility of cloning even human beings may soon be very possible. What would be the responsibility of Christian teachers confronted with this ethical issue concerning human cloning?

At the end of the term some students voiced their disagreement on the use of these modern technology in the process of procreation, while others raised their thumbs in agreement. Both groups posed a challenge.

#### **MORAL, ETHICAL CONCERNS**

Because of the developments of medical technology, there are a number of modern scientific interventions designed to assist human procreation of which *in vitro* fertilization, surrogacy, and human cloning are some of the few examples. These process of interventions raises moral, ethical issues for both God-fearing teachers and students.



Let's start with the way ova are handled. It is very possible that most of these die in the process of manipulation in the laboratory. In the early development of embryo some are lost unnecessarily. During and even after the implantation, host of the developing embryo die. In effect there is spontaneous abortion process in all these different developmental stages of fetuses.

If the current technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer were to be used in human, ova would need to be obtained from donors. Most of this would perish because of cellular manipulations during early embryonic growth in the laboratory. Others would be lost after implantation, spontaneously aborted at various stages of fetal development. In this respect, sensitivity to the value of embryonic and fetal life would be similar to the development of other methods of assisted reproduction such as in vitro fertilization. There would likely be an increased risk of birth defects in children brought to term. At present concern about physical harm to developing human lives is sufficient to rule out the use of this technology.<sup>12</sup>

The high and noble value placed on man by no less than the Creator Himself requires man's utmost respect. Since the success rate in these scientific procedures is unimpressive and "has proven to be technically more difficult,"<sup>13</sup> the unnecessary loss of fertilized eggs becomes unavoidable. The potential human beings are as valuable in the sight of the Creator as those who now exist.

Another concern is the dignity and uniqueness of human beings. The protection of confidentiality must be part of that concern. The possible surge of genetic testing necessitates this ethical concern. Problems such as psychological and social in nature will remain disturbing

upon the knowledge that human beings could be mechanically produced outside father and mother relationship. This will heighten the moral complication in the family circle at the same time lower the morale of its members especially when a third party is involved in the process. The lose of personal identity and human dignity might be the ultimate result.

Another concern related to human dignity is the alteration of human gene pool. This intervention is to extend possibly beyond the treatment of disease. This might as well include the alteration of defective cells or reproductive cells to enhance human intelligence and physique different from the original human characteristics.

#### **ADVENTIST RESPONSE**

The ability to procreate is a gift from God. This ability should be used to make human family on earth happy and should ultimately glorify God. The Bible gives eternal principles<sup>14</sup> that will guide human beings regarding the use of modern technology that pertains to assisted human reproduction.

1) One principle that needs a careful consideration is the one that pertains to Christian stewardship. "Honor the Lord from your wealth . . ." (Prov 3:9).<sup>15</sup> Here God desires his honor every time man decides on monetary matters whether it be little or enormous. The need to seek the Lord in earnest prayer regarding the use of money is foremost. That's why when Jesus Christ reiterated to His followers the

test of discipleship He said: "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it." (Lk 14:28). Christians should earnestly seek God in fervent prayer to see for themselves whether or not submitting to the scientific procedures is financially wise and reasonable. To submit to it may, at times, mean a price of a soul atoned for by Christ. How many precious souls are in want? How many young men and women have genuine desire to obtain Christian education but could not because of financial restraints? There are millions who are in dire need to hear gospel stories. Money is an indispensable avenue to help and reach them.

2) Sensitivity to the value of human life is another principle that should be considered. The development of human life from the very start needs utmost respect. God said to prophet Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."(1:5). As the Creator of man and Giver of life God is acquainted of every unborn child. He knows the usefulness and potentiality of every human being even before birth. For this reason man should place high respect and value in all the stages of human's life development. The Psalmist recognizes this fact:

For thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and

skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:13-16).

God places upon man moral responsibility to preserve human lives and to enhance the development of physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of his whole being.

3) Part of Christians consideration is a principle that children must belong to a stable family and receive a strong support from both father and mother. When the whole nation of Israel was reminded to love God foremost in their lives and to keep His commandments in their hearts, they (parents specially) were reminded of their sacred responsibility to their children. The children must be taught about God's law if they are expected to become faithful and stable family members. (See Deut 6:4-7). "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6). Assisted human reproduction should be thought of only within the principle of strenghtening the bond of family heritage.

4) For man and woman to procreate is part of God's plan for humanity. After blessing the first couple (Adam and Eve) God commanded them and said: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it. . ." (Gen 1:28). The Creator would like them to enjoy to the fullest beyond the circle of father and mother by giving them the gift of humanity. The Bible declares that children are God's gift. "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a

reward." (Ps 127:3). So, human reproduction when assisted with modern scientific procedure should be practiced in accordance with these Bible principles and in good conscience.

5) Childlessness should not be looked at as a deprivation of blessings from God, neither should it be regarded as a curse. The apostle Paul say: "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand." (Rom 14:4). Why should childlessness bear a negative social impression when no one is forced to bear children whether assisted or unassisted by present technology? When the disciples suggested that to remain unmarried is better than to marry and practice immorality, Jesus said, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept it let him accept it." Matt 19: 11-12). There are circumstances that may lead some Christians to limit, if not to refrain from, bearing children and remain contented. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim 5:8). Paul further says, "But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things

of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife." (1 Cor 7:32,33). It is a personal matter, to be discussed between husband and wife, whether childlessness is to be solved with the use of modern reproductive technology. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to take a vital role in the discussion in order to reach to a decision approve of God.

6) Christians should acknowledge the wisdom of God and His power to create. Genesis 1:31 says; "And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. . . ." This acknowledgment would lead human beings to submit to human intervention that only treats genetic disorder and not the alteration of human reproductive cells. The alteration of human reproductive cells may affect the image of God in man in the succeeding generations. Of all God's creation it is only human being that is created in His image. "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. . ." (Gen 1:26). For genetic reason, all interventions should be taken with great care so as to protect human life in all its process of development.

7) "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speaking truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." (Eph 4:25). This Bible principle requires Christians to be truthful when it comes to the result of genetic testing. The result should be honestly explained to the person or any member of the family capable of understand-

ding medical findings. It would greatly benefit the person if the corresponding monetary expense could also be a part of the information.

### Summary and Conclusion

A technology that replaces natural process of reproduction is called *in vitro* fertilization. This process is believed to be a solution to the infertility problem of women. It enables men with very low sperm count to father their own children. This technology explains that fertilization takes place outside human body instead of taking place in the fallopian tubes as in the case of natural process. The husband's sperm is united with the ovum of a wife then followed by embryo implantation to the uterus. Every step needs extra care from acquiring the eggs to the transferring of the developing embryo to the uterus. *In vitro* fertilization is time consuming, expensive, and with high risk of losing several embryos.

Surrogate motherhood is said to provide hope to childless parents due to infertility and inability to carry pregnancy. A surrogate mother (third party) contracts with a couple to be artifically inseminated usually with the husband's sperm. In this process the surrogate mother provides uterus where a fetus grow until birth. In some cases, when in fact, the surrogate mother provides the eggs herself and may have no biological relation with the child.

Cloning which is an aspect of genetic engineering

proves possible to produce an identical twin without sexual parenting. It is accomplished by the removal of the nucleus of an ovum, replacing it with a nucleus of an asexual cell. The result would be identical with the donor of the nucleus. This process is also called "carbon copy" reproduction.

Man should admit a Biblical fact that he is created in the image of God. As God's creature, man is given the responsibility over the rest of His creation. That responsibility should maintain and deepen his relationship with God as faithful steward. Faithful stewardship calls for proper maintenance of life.

Childlessness should not bear negative social imprint in the eyes of our society. No one is compelled to bear children even by means of assisted procreation because there are times when circumstances may lead Christians to limit or refrain from child-bearing, and yet remain happily contented.

God's plan includes procreation process between man and woman. The basic reason for this is the fact that God gives gifts to parents in a form of their offspring. By this means God intends human family to achieve complete joy and peace in a home where love and stable support exist between parents and children.

To acknowledge God's wisdom and His power to create leads human beings to submit to modern medical intervention that treats genetic disorders and physical diseases. Then, and only then, the alteration of human reproductive cells is



easily, and with good conscience, avoided.

Man, specially created in God's likeness, is given an imperative to preserve the dignity and sanctity of human life. Any modern medical intervention for man should be seen from the perspective of God's original plan for him. Technology, therefore, if used according to these Bible principles, would serve humanity to the best of its capacity to serve, and ultimately give glory to God, the Creator of mankind. Technology is to be done as a form of service to human beings. This means that it is to be developed in such a way that the blessings, riches, and potentials God has put in human beings are allowed to flourish. Man is called to do technology in such a way that the creativity and joy for which God created human beings can exist in abundance, the riches of the knowledge in science and nature can be perceived and used for what they are and for what God intends them to be.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 173.
2. James M. Gustafson, *Genetic Engineering and the Normative View of the Human* (USA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1973), p. 47.
3. Paul E. Freund, *Experimentation With Human Subjects* (New York: George Braziller), p. xiii.
4. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty. *Biomedical Ethics*. 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1991) p. 485.

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4. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty. *Biomedical Ethics*. 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1991) p. 485.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. "The physician obtains (recovers) the eggs, generally from woman's hormonally hyperstimulated ovaries using a needle (transvaginal needle aspiration). Multiple ova can be harvested, and it is possible to freeze and later thaw some of them." Gary P. Stewart, William R. Cutrer, Timothy J. Demy, Donal P O'Mathuna, Paige C. Cunningham John F. Kilner, Linda K. Bevington. *Basic Questions on Sexuality and Reproductive Technology*. BioBasics Series. (Philippines: Christian Literature Crusade, 1998) p. 28.
7. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty, p. 508.
8. Ismael Ireneo Maningas. 1996-97. An Ethical Perspective of Genetic Engineering in Modern Science. *Religious Studies Journal*. Vol. XIX(1), p. 106.
9. Ibid, 106.
10. Norman L. Geisler, p. 190. "Cloning has already been done on some animals. Given the humanistic quest for scientific progress, eventually someone will apply the advanced technology to produce a human clone." Ibid.
11. Anthony J. Zuccarelli and Gerald R Winslow. *In Our Own Image? Ethics and Human Cloning*. Dialogue 11:1, 1999, p. 5.
12. Ray Dabrowski (ed.), Statements, Guidelines & Other Documents: A Compilation of the Communications Department of the General Conference. (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), pp. 38,39.
13. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty, p. 485.
14. Ray Dabrowski, pp. 38-42; 89-92. [Dr. Albert Whiting] The Seventh-day Adventist Focuses on Ethical Issues developed by The Christian View of Human Life Committee sposeded by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist.
15. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible verses are from New American Standard Bible, (Colorado Spring, CO: International Bible Society, 1977).