

directly killed if they are the “wrong sex,” or have the “wrong genes” following pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, or simply don’t seem to be growing as vigorously as their siblings in the Petri dish. Some embryos die while frozen, or upon being thawed. Some are aborted during the fetal stage if “too many” children begin to grow in their mother’s womb. Some unused embryos are simply discarded once parents have reached their desired family or have given up trying to have a child.

Furthermore, we increasingly know that even those embryos who “make it” are subjected to serious risks. Very little testing was undertaken regarding the safety of IVF and related practices before these were offered commercially. Scientific literature over the last several years has begun to document the high rates of disabilities suffered from multiple gestation births from ARTs; over 38% of all ART births are of multiples. This figure does not account for the many additional ART pregnancies that began as multiple but were “reduced” before birth. Even “singleton” ART children seem to have higher rates of some rare genetic disorders than are found among natural births. These facts, coming to light only recently, underscore how ARTs may erode the notion of the family as the very sanctuary of human life.

Many people have difficulty understanding how an industry seemingly dedicated

to providing children could run afoul of Catholic social teaching about the well-being of families. Human beings naturally desire children. A married couple may easily come to think of procreation as a “right.” Thousands of fertility services will do everything scientifically possible to produce children for them. But a closer look at the practices and values of the ART industry shows how deeply it contradicts the real goods of the family and of society.

The flawed values and practices in ARTs are less widely known and understood than they should be—especially among couples lured by the promise that the industry can give them “a child of their own.” Spiritual strength and reverence for the mystery of God’s plan for creation will need to sustain us at times when our merely human reason and strength are not enough to resist this temptation.

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The full-length version of this article is posted at <http://www.usccb.org/prolifep/programs/rlp/alvare.pdf>.



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ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND THE FAMILY

Helen Alvaré, Esq.



Respect Life

At the beginning of the 21st century, it is impossible to avoid news reports on the subject of the “changing American family” – high rates of cohabitation, out-of-wedlock parenting, same-sex marriage debates. One lesser-noted phenomenon, changing people’s experience of family from the inside out, is the increasing use of assisted reproductive technologies (“ARTs”). In the United States alone, there are thousands of fertility clinics, sperm banks, egg brokers and surrogate mothers annually producing about 10,000 children.

Many people, including many Catholics, are unaware of the Church’s moral responses to these practices. Perhaps not surprisingly, many find it difficult to imagine that our faith would have moral objections to married couples “making babies” by any means. Yet the Church does firmly object. Church documents such as *Donum Vitae* and *Evangelium Vitae* explain the arguments against substituting a technological act for married love as the source of procreation. The ART industry tends to “commodify” children, and ART processes may also involve freezing, destroying or donating (for experiments) embryos “left over” from clients.

Another Catholic perspective on ARTs concerns their effects upon the family, and by extension, society. Parts of this teaching will appeal immediately to our commonsense. Other parts require one to accept with good will that God’s ways

are not our ways—that there is holy mystery in God’s choosing to bring human life into being in one manner and not another.

Catholic social teaching calls the family the “first natural community,” society’s first cell. As such, the family ought to be the prototype of a good society. At a very basic level, Catholic teaching holds that good social life requires every person to regard every other person as a gift from God—as a unique individual with his or her own talents and responsibilities, a person to be treated in accord with the dignity given by God Himself.

Catholics recognize that human beings are destined to live socially. We are meant not only to live in community, but to find in service to others the very meaning of our life, just as Jesus’ life was characterized and crowned by his complete service to others.

Families are to form human beings for this manner of social living. They do this in part when they form children by an act of the most profound and intimate love between the parents. Children so conceived are, from their very beginning, the gifts and fruits of this love. Children so conceived may be desired but cannot be “demanded.”

The ART industry is helping to blot out the notion that people ought to be accepted simply for who they are; rather, via ARTs, children’s traits may increas-

ingly be selected. More commonly, each year in the United States, thousands of paid donors possessing currently desired traits—height, certain levels of education, beauty, athletic or musical accomplishment, and ethnic type—sell their eggs or their sperm to fertility clinics to be purchased by individuals and couples after reviewing their “donor profiles.”

ARTs pose a second threat to building families who may serve as the prototype of a good society. Strong societies contain as many individuals as possible who are reared in stable, nurturing environments. Today, a vast amount of social science research indicates that the very best environment for children includes stable, married parents.

By their very nature, ARTs separate procreation from marriage physically. But they also accomplish this socially. Anyone—any individual or couple, single or married, young or old, heterosexual or homosexual—can buy sperm or eggs or even a custom-made embryo in the United States. The ART industry, in other words, is regularly and deliberately placing children in situations known to cause problems for them and for society.

A second aspect of Catholic Social Teaching on the family is also directly contradicted by the practice of ARTs: that the family based on marriage is the sanctuary of life, the place where life can best be welcomed and protected. Some embryos produced through ARTs are