

Forum

Glass Wombs?

By Anna van Gogh

Washington (RT) — The first laboratory for "in vitro" fertilization to be certified for operation in the United States is in Norfolk. The procedure for test tube fertilization was demonstrated by valid scientific methods and proven to be clinically safe for human reproduction. The certification was justified by Virginia health officials on solid scientific evidence.

So, now we are asking ourselves, how much longer are we going to try to use modern science to answer religious questions.

At first glance, the certification of a laboratory for in vitro fertilization may seem like a blessed event. With in vitro fertilization the egg comes from the to-be mother, the sperm from the to-be father. The test tube fertilization takes place under immaculate clinical conditions, with participation of a fully qualified physician.

Many young couples who otherwise would be without children, would be able to produce their own families, and these children are long-sought-after products of two very loving parents.

The only anomaly that has taken place is that these children started "life" in a test tube.

Indeed, to start life in a test tube has been demonstrated to be scientifically sound. Scientists can measure temperature. They can measure specific gravity of body fluid. And they can determine chemical composition and electrolyte balance. All of these things can be done with great precision.

But what is it that we are starting in this test tube? What is

Anna van Gogh has been honored by the U.S. government for her research in space technology.

"life?" Life is more than a pH meter, and it is more than an incubator and the father is more than a donor. Could it be that life is something about which modern science knows absolutely nothing?

At the very least, life is an electric field, a magnetic field and, in varying degrees of intensity and wavelength, a source for electromagnetic radiation. Life is a wave packet of energy that arrives when a certain biological process begins and leaves when that biological process comes to an end.

Oh, yes, life is quantized. It comes in bundles of joy.

Life is an ability to experience emotion. A young mother may be happy or sad. She may sing and dance or she may just sit and meditate. She may read a poem or smell a flower or enjoy a cup of tea.

All of these emotions are known to alter hormone levels in the blood and change body chemistry. In turn, these changes will modify the aura, or radiation pattern of a living being. The radiation pattern, we can record-photographically.

But does that radiation field influence the fertilization of an egg or the survival of a sperm? No one has even begun to answer these questions.

Where human life is concerned, we are going to have to admit to the limitations of modern science.

Let us now try addressing our questions to the proper authorities: Questions about in vitro fertilization belong to the Church. Questions about the miracle of life belong to God.

The Way We Were

Looking back on my life, I recognize that a whole series of external religious practices — undertaken before I was old enough to think much about their meaning — shaped my early attitudes toward God, church, self, values and decisions in life.

For example, from the time I was old enough to understand anything, the coming of Lent involved a changed mood — a somberness, self-restraint, attention to religious observance that was deeper than in the rest of the year.

At first it was giving up candy and movies, not because I saw what candy and movies had to do with Lent, but simply because most of the people I knew were giving up things at this time.

There was no way I could be unaware of Lent. The frequency of meatless spaghetti, salmon croquettes and scrambled eggs was an almost daily reminder. The sisters in the parochial school always came up with observances and lessons which reinforced the Lenten atmosphere of our home.

Early in grade school, Lent involved short breaks before the first class to allow for brown bag breakfasts for those of us who wanted to receive communion each day at the school Mass.

When I was old enough to serve Mass, there were a lot of very cold mornings, getting up in a quiet home and hurrying through the chilly darkness to serve the 6:30 Mass — always attended by a meager scattering of regulars.

What does all this external observance do to the attitudes, the values, the

beginnings of faith in a young child?

Apparently, it does different things to different people. In recent years a number of Catholics, who grew up in the same atmosphere, have denounced this kind of conditioning which they came to see as an unfair pressure, a kind of brainwashing exercised on them before they were able to form their own judgments.

They look back on the experience with bitterness and resentment.

I don't. If the external observances remained at the childhood level of awareness, simply my conformity to a set of cultural observances, there might be some basis for resentment.

But as I grew older I found myself discovering and accepting a meaning and purpose for the external observances. It didn't take long for me to realize that doing what I saw as right often involved difficulty and hardship, that some practice of self-restraint and voluntary acceptance of difficulties was helpful when I was confronted with serious decisions.

Nor did it take long to associate my acceptance of mortification with the church's deliberation on the suffering and death of Jesus.

There were oversimplifications, vanity in endurance tests, some elements of superstition. With maturity and reflection, these distortions became pretty obvious; most were corrected.

But my growing knowledge and experience of the Christian life was filling in, maturing basic attitudes

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

and values which had been shaped at a very impressionable age.

At that age, we are going to absorb some kind of attitudes and values whether they are deliberately programmed for us or not. We are going to develop emotional attitudes about whether there are higher values than self-satisfaction, about how we look on frustrations and difficulties in life, about the effort called for in responding to the Father's gift of His Son.

This is not just an exercise in nostalgia. It's a recognition that the

Christian community, if it is to be truly a community, needs appropriate customs, observances, folklore to reinforce and transmit its faith in forms other than words.

In recent years the Catholic community has suffered a heavy loss in these traditions. Perhaps the times and the changing culture made some of the changes inevitable. But at least we should be aware of what we've lost. We should recognize the value of developing community practices which express in shared observance the words of faith we proclaim.

Looking Back . . .

Items as reported in the pages of the Courier-Journal down through the years:

75 years ago this week — The Public Comfort Committee of the Knights of Columbus in Washington, D.C., has made arrangements to provide rooms, etc., for brother Knights and their friends who will visit the Capital City on the occasion of the inauguration of President Roosevelt on March 4th.

The Voce della Verita of Rome, the oldest Catholic newspaper, has just ceased publication and the staff has gone over to the Osservatore Romano, now the only Catholic paper which the capital contains and which is but little read.

50 years ago this week — With the solemn opening of the Forty-Hours Devotion on Sunday, March 2, the new church of the Most Precious Blood, corner Lexington Avenue and Stenson Street, will be blessed by the Rt. Rev. John Francis O'Hern, Bishop of Rochester, assisted by the Rev. Anthony Pece, CPPS, the rector of the Church, and several priests from nearby parishes. . . . The Fathers of the Most Precious Blood from Niles, Ohio, will be in charge of this mission. From there they will go forth to preach missions to the Italian people in various parts of the diocese.

The Sacred Congregation of the Council at a recent meeting approved of 12 rules on instructions to be sent to all bishops of the Church in regard to indecent or immodest feminine dress. These rules have been published in the Apostolic Sedes, the official bulletin of the Holy See and they are most important and very explicit.

(The rules really were not that explicit but number 9 may have been the most interesting). Rule 9 — However parents are instructed to keep their daughters from public exercises and gymnastics. If, however, their daughters must be present at such exercises, they should see that they use clothes that are decent.

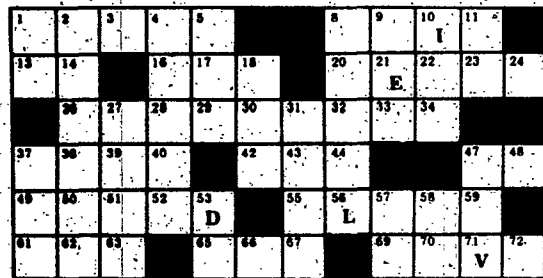
25 years ago this week — Organizing Auburn branch office of Diocesan Catholic Charities meeting was held in St. Alphonsus rectory Feb. 8. Temporary officers were elected and an executive secretary was named. Meeting was set for March 1 to elect permanent officers and to choose name. Participating in organizing: Rev. Arthur E. Ratigan, director of Catholic Charities; Victor Favasuli, new executive secretary; Mrs. Louis W. Merna, temporary treasurer, and the Very Rev. Frederick G. Straub, Cayuga dean, temporary chairman.

10 years ago this week — The nation's Catholic bishops cabled Pope Paul VI their total support on upholding priestly celibacy. Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, informed the Pope that the American bishops are holding to the "unwavering position" they adopted before.

Bishop Hogan addressed nearly 300 persons at the annual St. Margaret Mary Altar Rosary Society mother-daughter breakfast in the parish hall. . . . Bishop Hogan who had been pastor of the parish for 17 months prior to his installation as bishop last November said he missed parish work. "It was a big job," he related, "to be pastor of a parish with 5,000 souls. Imagine how I feel now as bishop of the diocese with nearly 100 times that number."

Sunday Scripture Quiz

I. Gospel Reading: Luke 4:1-13 — Jesus professes faith in his Father against the evil one. Below is a key passage from Sunday's Gospel reading. You can determine what this passage is by finding the answers to the questions below the puzzle and then putting the letters in their appropriate box. The first one is done for you.



- 1. Tempted Jesus: D E V I L
- 2. Jesus fasted here: 20 2 26 59 50 16
- 3. Mystical being: 40 30 70 28 23 44
- 4. A rock: 3 31 43 48 34
- 5. Our savior: 1 51 6 4 37
- 6. Force out: 49 66 42 29 5 17

Based on scripture readings for Sunday, February 24, 1980, C Cycle.

Following are key passages from Sunday's scripture readings. Fill in the missing words.

II. First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10 — Israel professes its faith in God after its temptations in the desert.

Phrase: He _____ us out of _____ with his strong _____ and outstretched _____ with terrifying _____ with _____ and wonders; and bringing us into this _____ he gave us this _____ flowing with _____ and honey.

III. Second Reading: Romans 10:8-13 — Paul describes early Christians making their baptismal promises in a profession of faith.

Phrase: For if you _____ with your _____ that _____ is _____ and believe in your _____ that God _____ him from the _____ you will be saved. _____ in the heart leads to justification, _____ on the _____ to salvation.

Passage I words: Spirit, stone, devil, tan, Jesus, cave, one, baniah, crayola, desert, man, loud.

Passage II words: country, brought, Egypt, arm, hand, sign, milk, land, power.

Passage III words: Lord, Jesus, confession, lips, lips, raised, heart, confess, dead, Faith.

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