

Bioethics

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married couple and the child of their dignity."

Specifically, the document attempts to offer guidelines to regulate such procedures as prenatal diagnosis, experiments on embryos and fetuses, and genetic manipulation.

Few theologians would argue that such guidelines are not needed. "In the United States, we have a tendency to think that whatever can be done technologically is probably good," Sister Schoelles said. "The moral meaning of these new sorts of procedures has not kept pace with our technological capabilities."

While they agree in principal with the need for regulation, some theologians dispute the degree to which the Vatican's guidelines go.

Jesuit Father Richard McCormick, a moral theologian at the University of Notre Dame, praised the document's prohibitive positions on surrogate motherhood, the use of donor sperm, and other "third-party" procreation.

He also agreed that the document should limit experimentation on embryos. "Many experimenters are, for all practical purposes, treating the embryo as a blotch of matter," he said.

But Father McCormick disagrees with the document's "sweeping" prohibition of experimentation that is not directly therapeutic. He notes that it thus condemns what could be a permissible middle category of experimental activity that was neither harmful nor therapeutic, but aimed at furthering knowledge.

Sister Schoelles likewise believes that the document may be premature in firmly dismissing any positive applications for new biomedical technology, such as genetic manipulation, in the treatment of genetically induced diseases.

"Moral pronouncements should commence from experience," she said. "It would seem that there could be moral uses for such technology. I hope we won't prematurely write off the sorts of technology that could be of use."

Theologians are also thoroughly divided over the issue of in-vitro fertilization, which the document terms illicit, even in the so-called "simple cases," in which the couple is married and where there are no other complicating moral factors, such as the destruction or storage of embryos.

Jesuit Father John Connery, a professor emeritus at Loyola University in Chicago, noted that the document's stance on in-vitro fertilization is the mirror-image of the

Vatican's earlier prohibition against artificial contraception in *Humanae Vitae*. In short, intercourse not open to procreation is illicit, and procreation without intercourse is illicit as well.

Others, including Father McCormick, believe that the document makes a leap of logic when it moves from the principle that every child should come from a loving act within marriage to the conclusion that conception must be the direct result of marital intercourse.

"Sexual intercourse is not the only loving act" of a married couple, he said.

Marvin Mich agreed that such an approach may draw too narrow a definition of a personal act.

"The document takes the approach that the unitive dimension is blocked when procreation becomes a semi-public procedure rather than a private expression of love," he explained. "In other words, the intervention of a third party separates it from the unitive dimension."

"Maybe we should be acknowledging that as a good ideal. But what do you do for people who can't reach the ideal?" he wondered.

Sister Schoelles believes the document's position on in-vitro fertilization will be particularly difficult for those who offer pastoral counseling.

"I myself would favor statements that give us sound guidelines without drawing conclusions such as this," she said.

Father Horan, on the other hand, believes that the document will help people of faith to

face "the challenge of childlessness."

"I think couples who are infertile, but who receive this document in faith, will view this as God's will, which is a share in the Cross of Christ at times," he said. "From the physical and spiritual surrender of the conjugal act, there comes a new human being, and that's the plan of God."

"A good intention is not sufficient for making a positive moral evaluation of an intervention," he added.

Theologians say that the scope of issues covered in the document indicates that its writers must have consulted with experts in the field of bioethics and medicine. But who those people were and how they were selected remains largely unknown.

"I don't know what their process was, but they at least raised the issues I would have expected, so they must have asked somebody," Sister Schoelles said.

Some believe the secrecy surrounding the consultative process has hurt the document's credibility, particularly in the United States, where people are accustomed to participating with their bishops in developing such teaching documents as the pastoral letters on peace and the economy.

"I think that the Church has to engage in this discussion. The tradition of the Church has to be heard," Mich said. "What I think is missing from this discussion is the experience of people who've faced these issues."

Another facet theologians have pointed to as missing from the document is the economics of biomedical technology.

"The Vatican tends to be act-oriented in its moral analysis," Sister Schoelles said. "People in Third World countries, as well as a lot of Americans, have no health care, and here we've evolved these great technologies

to handle the problems of the few who can afford it."

While economic and experiential elements may be missing from the Vatican document, they have swiftly been drawn into the public discussion that has followed its release.

Drafters of the document stressed the importance of such a dialogue between Catholic scientists, theologians and physicians, and their secular counterparts.

But because the initial reports on the bioethics instruction were so negative, Sister Schoelles believes that the document, like *Humanae Vitae*, runs the risk of being dismissed as mere denial, particularly in secular circles.

"When we speak of *Humanae Vitae*, one paragraph on artificial contraception is usually all we mean," she pointed out. "But if you come at *Humanae Vitae* with another set of questions, it's a great document."

Some theologians and "church-watchers" have predicted that the bioethics document would meet with the same kind of widespread rejection that was reported in the wake of *Humanae Vitae*.

Mich believes the more recent document will simply reinforce people's present orientation on moral issues.

"For some people, it may be harder to look to the Church for leadership, after something like this comes out. Others find it very reassuring," he said.

"It's more than a matter of reading Church documents. Interpretation is very important," he added. "And an individual's informed conscience is still the final arbiter."

Contributing to this report was NC correspondent Jerry Filteau.

Vatican instructions on origins, dignity of life

Vatican City (NC) — The major points of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" are as follows:

• Two "fundamental criteria" for judging the morality of new biomedical techniques affecting the origins of life are "the inviolability of the innocent human being's right to life" from the moment of conception, and the "special nature of the transmission of human life in marriage."

• A human being must be respected "as a person" from the moment of creation.

• Prenatal diagnosis when intended to safeguard unborn life is legitimate, but is "gravely illicit" if likely to result in an abortion should defects be found.

• Therapeutic procedures intended to preserve or improve the health of the embryo are permitted.

At a glance

- Experiments on embryos which there is no thought of implanting in the womb are wrong if they involve the creation of embryos.
- Human embryos created in vitro are human embryos from the moment of their artificial creation, and must be treated as such.
- A child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage.

...the creation of a human embryo in vitro is not a simple matter. It involves the union of two human gametes, the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, and the subsequent development of a new human being.

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Adoption agency schedules meeting at library in Pittsford

Love the Children, a licensed non-profit adoption agency, will hold a general information meeting at the Pittsford Community Library, 24 State St., Pittsford at 7:30 on Wednesday, March 25.

Love the Children places children from Korea between the ages of six months and 14 years. Applicants must be couples married for three years. One parent must be willing to be

at home with the child until he or she is at least 24 months old.

The process takes approximately six months from application to the arrival of the child. The children are in good health and are cared for in foster homes in Korea. Fees to cover agency expense, airfare, foster care and medical care total \$5,120.

Call (716) 223-1868 for information.

Retreat weekend planned by Rochester Sisters of Mercy

Women who are interested in deepening their knowledge of the vocation to religious life are invited to a retreat weekend at High Acres, the Mercy retreat house in Geneva from April 3 through April 5. Sister Margaret Mary Mattie, RSM, a staff member of the Mercy Prayer Center in Rochester, will conduct the weekend on Lenten themes.

This retreat is part of the year-long Faith Sharing Program, sponsored by the congregation's Vocation Team.

To register for the retreat, arrange for a car pool or obtain information, women can contact Sister Sheila Stevenson in the Rochester

area at (716) 244-2175; Sister Marie Catherine Cain in the Corning, Elmira and Ithaca area at (607) 732-6295; And Sister Patricia Prinzing in the Hornell area at (607) 324-0833.

Breakfast for widows, widowers set

Widows and widowers are invited to the monthly informal breakfast get-together at the Chanticleer Motor Lodge Restaurant, 473 Hamilton Street, in Geneva.

For information and reservations for the breakfast, call Margaret, (315) 789-4837; Vail, (315) 789-7035; Doris, (716) 526-5062; Dorothy, (315) 781-0455, or Carl at (315) 789-2686.

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If your school, church or organization is having a Spaghetti Supper, Chicken Barbeque, Garage Sale, Retreat, Reunion, whatever. . . Let us know about it at the Courier-Journal and we'll do our best to get it in our weekly calendar. All listings must be submitted in writing and received by noon Wednesday, eight days prior to publication date.

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