

National/International Report

Pope asks scientists, doctors to obey procreation guidelines

3 Catholic hospitals plan to keep in-vitro programs

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has asked Catholic doctors and scientists to avoid employing procreation procedures declared immoral by the Church. But he offered no specific means of enforcing adherence to the Church's moral guidelines. Instead, he asked local bishops to handle problems of individual and institutional violators through dialogue.

The pope made the appeal in a speech March 20 to 13 French bishops. The speech followed announcements by authorities at French, Belgian and Dutch Catholic hospitals that they would continue to offer in-vitro fertilization techniques to sterile married couples despite the Vatican's declaration that the procedure is immoral.

Speaking of scientists, the pope said: "That which is technically possible could appear to them as something which should be done, as if a purely technical possibility could take the place of moral criteria."

The pope referred to the Vatican procreation document, released March 10, which called in-vitro fertilization immoral. The document "offers to all men of good will and particularly to believers the criteria which should absolutely orient the activities of researchers and doctors," he said.

"In the name of human sciences, some people could be tempted to reduce humanity and its history to its social situation or its psychological makeup," the pope said.

"A good number of scientists honor themselves by admitting the need to respect moral criteria," he said, adding that new initiatives are needed in pastoral plans governing relations between the Church and universities and scientific institutes, in order

to avoid unnecessary clashes between religion and intellectual life.

"I do not have any particular methods to propose to you to resolve these problems, the pope acknowledged. "It is your duty to search for them at the regional level or in the episcopal conference.

A week after the Vatican published its procreation document, authorities at the Catholic University of Lille, France, said that the university hospital would continue offering the fertilization technique, which involves uniting human sperm and egg in a laboratory dish then implanting the egg in a woman's uterus. But they also called for a dialogue between concerned Catholic universities and the Vatican on the issue.

Last Sept. 18, the hospital, Saint-Philibert, announced the birth of a baby girl named Emilie, who had been conceived through the medical facility's in-vitro fertilization program. Four other babies have been conceived and born through the program.

University authorities said that by declaring in-vitro fertilization immoral, the Vatican caused moral problems for doctors who seek to provide "an infinitely precious human service."

The Vatican's "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation," released March 10, calls the in vitro procedure "illicit and in opposition to the dignity of procreation and of the conjugal union." Coupled with that stand is Vatican concern that the procedure as regularly practiced involves the destruction of some embryos, which the Church regards as persons with full rights.

University of Lille rector Michel Falise said March 11 that the world's Catholic faculties of medicine "had not been consulted" when the document was being written. He urged the Vatican to "open a



Dwight Cendrowski/NC News

'SUPREME GIFT' — The Vatican document on procreation states that in-vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood and human-embryo experimentation that is "not directly therapeutic" are morally illicit. The document, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, specifies that a child "is not an object to which one has a right," but is, rather, "the supreme gift" of marriage.

dialogue with us and with other concerned Catholic universities on this question."

Falise also said the university would continue the in-vitro fertilization program under strict moral guidelines. He noted that it would accept for the program only stable married couples using their own sperm and eggs. No embryos would be destroyed in the process, according to the guidelines.

The Catholic University of Louvain,

Belgium, also intends to continue offering in-vitro fertilization to sterile couples "as we have been doing for the past three years," said Karol Thomas, head of the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics.

In the Netherlands, the Catholic University of Nijmegen has "no plans to stop providing IVF to those who can benefit from it," a spokesman said. The university hospital has provided the treatment to 100 couples, with 10 pregnancies resulting.

Pope's actions in South America to be closely analyzed

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II is preparing 52 speeches for his March 31-April 12 South American trip to Uruguay, Chile and Argentina.

But his actions and the symbolic meaning given to them are more likely to be remembered than his formal words in the countries he visits.

The pope may strongly denounce human rights abuses, but Chileans are more likely to remember whether he greeted the country's military president, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, with a bear hug — a typical gesture that signifies close friendship among Latin men.

The meanings read into the pope's actions will probably be highly subjective and often contradictory, depending on the special interests of those interpreting the symbol.

Latin societies have a strong tradition of using symbols to convey meaning, and Catholic symbols are especially important to political, civic and partisan groups. Being tied to a Catholic symbol implies Church support and the moral and social acceptance that this brings in societies where almost the entire population professes Catholicism.

The pope's trip will severely test his ability to communicate beyond the spoken word, especially in the politically turbulent societies of Argentina and Chile, where he will spend most of the trip.

Both countries have a developed tradition of using Catholic symbols for partisan purposes.

"Where there is a little tension in the air, the objective reception of the pope's message is more difficult, because every word, every gesture can be interpreted differently and even in an opposing fashion," said Argentine Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and an organizer of youth events for the papal trip.

In Argentina, people will be attuned to whether the pope uses the Spanish term "punto final" in discussing human rights.

In ordinary usage, "punto final" means the period that concludes a letter, essay or other piece of writing. Idiomatically, the phrase means the definitive end to a situation. But now in Argentina, it is also the shorthand term for a controversial law that established a March deadline for leveling criminal charges against military personnel who are accused of human rights violations.

Human rights groups have criticized the law, saying it did not leave them enough time to gather sufficient evidence in many cases. Already Argentines are arguing the symbolic

meaning of the absence on the papal schedule of a meeting with human rights groups.

Argentines also are likely to read pro-government or anti-government meanings into a papal talk to the country's monolithic labor movement. The event is being organized by the General Workers Confederation. The confederation is part of the opposition Peronist political movement and is a strong critic of the government's economic policies.

Political tension is even higher in Chile, because of widespread opposition to the 13-year-old rule of Pinochet, who came to power in a bloody coup.

The pope officially is scheduled to meet Pinochet three times during the six-day visit: at the airport arrival ceremony, at the presidential palace and at the airport farewell ceremony.

But what would be the symbolic meaning if Pinochet, a Catholic, also decides to show up at a papal Mass and receive Communion from the pope?

The pope is scheduled to meet all the Chilean bishops. But what would be the symbolic value if he shuns or pays special friendly attention to Bishop Carlos Camus of Linares?

Bishop Camus stirred major church-state tensions less than a month before the papal trip by saying that members of a group that tried to kill Pinochet last September might some day be considered heroes.

Chileans will also be sensitive to what the pope does during a meeting with youths at Santiago's National Stadium, which was a detention and interrogation center in the aftermath of the coup. Human rights groups also have said the stadium was a site for the torture and killing of political prisoners.

Papal awareness of the pitfalls does not mean he will sidestep the issues, real or symbolic.

"There is no conflictive situation which can make him keep quiet or tone down what he has to say, strongly and clearly, as a universal pastor," said Cardinal Pironio.



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