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## Baby

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According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, which compiles statistics from fertility clinics, more than 70,000 babies were born in 1994 through such techniques as in-vitro fertilization and gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT). GIFT involves removal of eggs, collection of sperm, then reintroduction of unfertilized eggs and sperm into the Fallopian tubes, allowing conception to take place inside the woman, rather than in a lab.

The society, based in Birmingham, Ala., also estimated that in 1994 some 60,000 babies were born through donor insemination — with semen from a donor other than the husband.

Further, experts estimate that by the mid-1990s, medications to stimulate ovulation, such as Clomid, were resulting in more than 300,000 pregnancies each year.

Producing a child through ART methods does not come cheaply. In-vitro procedures, for example, cost an average of \$10,000 per try; several tries usually are needed.

## Added costs

Beyond massive bills, ART has also begun to leave a trail of legal and ethical problems.

The New York Court of Appeals, for example, ruled May 7 on the case of a couple who, as part of their divorce, battled for control of their five frozen embryos. Maureen Kass wanted to use them for implantation. Steven Kass did not want to have a child with his former wife, and wanted to donate the embryos to research.

Per an agreement they previously signed that any unused embryos be donated for research, the appeals court upheld a lower court ruling awarding the embryos to Steven Kass.

A report of the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law, released April 29, concluded that not enough laws exist to cover all the implications of ART.

Sally True, an Ithaca lawyer who was on the task force, observed that technology is advancing so fast that laws can't keep up.

"It makes for difficult law," observed True, a member of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ithaca, and chairperson of the diocese's Stewardship Council. "What you

have are cases that leap over certain issues."

She cited by way of example the women who bear children with donor eggs. This creates a situation in which there are two mothers: a gestational mother — the woman who carried the child — and a biological mother.

"There's no disposition ruling on who is the mother in certain areas," True said.

Although the task force's 474-page report contains a number of recommendations, critics have pointed to some weaknesses. Among the critics are task force members who submitted two minority reports that were appended to the report.

The minority reports raise concerns about who controls frozen embryos, and about a lack of limits on the number of embryo implants during in-vitro procedures. A limit, they say, would reduce the chances that some babies might have to be "selectively reduced" or aborted.

Meanwhile, Father Bonnici, in a written response to the ART report on behalf of the New York State Catholic Conference, criticized the report for not making recommendations concerning the destruction of embryos and the disruption of family relationships — situations wherein a person can become a parent without his or her consent, even after death.

"Children are not commercial products that can be manufactured or discarded at will," Father Bonnici wrote. "They are precious gifts of a loving God, to which no one has an absolute entitlement."

## The church's view

Although Jack's conscience is clear about using ART to produce a child, it is equally clear that he and Jill opted for some reproductive technologies the church opposes.

Clear as well is that the entire area of ART — and the emotional issues attached — needs more attention from the church, according to Marvin Mich, a professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

"It's a pastoral issue, and I don't think it's being addressed for a variety of reasons," asserted Mich, who teaches a course on biomedical ethics and is on ethics committees at Rochester's St. Mary's and Hornell's St. James Mercy hospitals.

Part of the difficulty, Mich explained, is that Catholics are not talking about reproductive technologies with their pastoral

leaders.

"People go off and deal with it as a medical problem, not as an ethical problem," Mich said. "There's probably some embarrassment about it. They don't want to talk about it."

At the same time, he said the church gives a double message: Be procreative, but don't take advantage of some of the new techniques to be procreative.

Moreover, Father Bonnici told the *Courier*, assuming that with reproductive technologies "ignorance is bliss" opens one to a whole series of potential problems.

"Oftentimes I find myself with a couple who sought to conceive a child with technology, and they found themselves in a quagmire," he said. "In that case, ignorance is not bliss."

Farther Bonnici cited such problems as what to do with unused embryos produced by procedures; what to do when one becomes pregnant with several babies, how to pay bills that can amount to tens of thousands of dollars, and how to deal with emotional stresses generated by dealing with all these other dilemmas.

"It can create an incredible burden for the couple," Father Bonnici said.

The church believes, Mich noted, that "the procreative and the unitive have to be experienced simultaneously in the act of intercourse. The coming together of the egg and sperm should not be extra-corporeal, outside the body."

The church welcomes technologies that assist the human act, but do not replace it, he noted. Thus, for example, taking fertility drugs is allowed.

The church also allows pregnant women who have life-threatening medical conditions to take advantage of operations, treatments and medications for those conditions, even if the treatments will indirectly result in the death of the child. Thus, for example, a pregnant woman with cancer could undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatments, even though they could result in the loss of the child.

Ectopic pregnancy is another life-threatening condition, in which an unborn child has begun to develop in a Fallopian tube rather than a woman's uterus. The standard treatment is removal of the affected tube, which results in the death of the unborn child. But since the treatment was of the condition, and not directly intended to

kill the child, church teachings permit it.

In addition, because of its strong stand on the exclusivity of the marital act, the church does not accept the introduction of individuals other than the couple in the creation of a child. Consequently donated sperm and eggs are not allowed, nor is surrogate parenthood.

Another concern of the church is that beyond separating the unitive and procreative aspects of the conjugal act, some of the new technologies also result in the loss of life through "selective reduction" and discarding of unused embryos.

In the eyes of the church, both involve killing a human being. The church does allow prenatal diagnostic procedures — amniocentesis, for example — when the procedures do not threaten the life of the unborn child or the mother, and are intended to provide information for pre- or postnatal care of the child. But it prohibits such procedures when they are intended to identify — and then abort — a child with a serious birth defect.

## No quick answers

The church's teachings concerning reproductive technology are summarized in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1995 document, "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services." They are also outlined in Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1987 "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" (often referred to simply as *Donum vitae*) and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Father Bonnici said that the church can't give quick answers on specific techniques because the technology is advancing so rapidly. But, he added, the teachings it does provide are clear and provide a basis for making decisions. At the same time, he acknowledged, some people may not like the conclusions reached through careful reflection on church teachings.

"I think one of the things that needs to be conveyed to couples in that situation is no one has a right to a child — which can be a hard message to convey," Father Bonnici said. "A child must be embraced as a gift: a gift from God."

"Not receiving that gift is in no way a sign of failure or a rejection by God," he added.

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