

## Morality: The matters of artificial insemination

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### Abstract

Infertility is one of the big problems in today's world. This is also one of the causes of division and broken families. As Christians, we are called to live and bear witness to the Gospel in today's life. At the same time, know how to accompany families in this situation so that they can find the best means (approved by the Church) that can bring joy and peace to those families.

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### Introduction

We live in a civilized and progressive world. The development of science and technology seems to be able to solve all the problems of life. One of the problems facing families today is the issue of childlessness. This problem partly affects the happy life of the family. Science has solved many cases for such families when giving birth to children through artificial insemination. However, from the position and point of view of the Catholic Church, is it acceptable to conceive in this way?

Artificial insemination (or insemination) is a technique of creating embryos by combining a man's sperm with a woman's egg, not through intercourse, but through modern technical means<sup>1</sup>. Artificial insemination can be divided into two methods: the first is insemination in the female body by injecting sperm into the uterus. Second, fertilization occurs outside the woman's body and then transfers the embryo into the uterus. Artificial insemination can be homozygous or heterosexual. Homozygous artificial insemination is the use of gametes from a couple. Heterosexual artificial insemination is the use of gametes from a third person other than the couple. In both methods, men's semen is often obtained by masturbation, which is contrary to Christian morality. In order to have enough eggs for the second experiment, the woman must undergo an ovulatory process. She must take fertility drugs to produce a large number of eggs, which often causes many side effects. Then sperm and eggs are combined in a lab dish to create an embryo. Due to high failure rates and to reduce costs, specialists often produce more embryos than are needed for implantation in a woman's uterus. One of them will be implanted in a woman. For the rest, embryos that

<sup>1</sup> Phêrô Trần Quốc Dũng, *Đạo Đức Sinh Học – Tập 2A*, Nxb. Phương Đông, p.56

are not implanted – extra fetuses – are either discarded, frozen, donated to others, or for research.

### From a moral point of view

Perhaps the description above explains why the Catholic Church does not accept these measures. Because in these processes, the child is created outside the act of conjugal life. The baby can therefore be seen as a product of modern technology rather than a gift from a husband and wife union.

Indeed the source of life is God, and He has authority over life. The Bible recounts that Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."*<sup>2</sup> and raised the only son of the dead widow of Nain and Lazarus to life<sup>3</sup>. The Bible also says that man is created in the image of God<sup>4</sup> and is called to participate in the divine life of the Trinity<sup>5</sup>. The image of God is inscribed in each person, and man is called to become *"children of God."*<sup>6</sup> through the Incarnate Word. Man must manifest the image of God in himself and in his life. Precisely because of such great human dignity, the circumstances of birth must also be appropriate, namely marriage and the family: *"The source of human life must be in its true context, marriage. And the family, in which it is born through an act of mutual expression of love between man and woman."*<sup>7</sup>.

From a moral point of view, the beginning of a new life takes place solely through marital intercourse. Therefore, in the act of husband and wife, husband and wife do not *"make"* a baby, but they give love to each other through the act of giving each other's bodies and opening them to the gift of human life. The child born through the conjugal act is a gift of God. *"The birth of a person must be the fruit of the parents' reciprocal giving and is expressed in the conjugal act. In that act, man and woman cooperate with the Creator's work, as servants and not as masters."*<sup>8</sup>. Giving birth and raising children to their full maturity is a heavy responsibility, so *"the child has the right to be conceived, to be conceived in the womb, to be born and to be brought up in marriage: precisely through the relationship guaranteed and acknowledged relationship with his or her parents so that the child can discover his own identity and reach his authentic human development."*<sup>9</sup>. With the foundation of the Bible and the Teachings of the

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<sup>2</sup> John 14,6 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/14>)

<sup>3</sup> Luke 7,11-17, John 11, 1-45 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible>)

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1, 26 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1>)

<sup>5</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Dignitas Personae*, n. 8 ([https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html))

<sup>6</sup> John 1, 12 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/1>)

<sup>7</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Dignitas Personae*, n. 6, ([https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html))

<sup>8</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Donum Vitae*, n. 6, ([https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html))

<sup>9</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Donum Vitae*, n. 6, ([https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html))

Church, children cannot be viewed as “*products*” of their parents, “*made*” or “*produced*” by parents or scientists.

It is perfectly legitimate for infertile couples to seek treatment in order to have children. Because the desire to have children is natural, and children are the fruit of marriage. However, it is not correct to assume that the couple has a right over the issue of children. But instead, they are called to participate in the work of creating new life and to assume the responsibility of developing it.<sup>10</sup> as a precious gift.

Faced with this problem, the Church understands and sympathizes with the pain of infertile families. The Church's disapproval of artificial inseminations is not that the Church does not care enough about people with their earthly needs for love and happiness, but that the Church loves and cherishes people and tries her best. Upholds the dignity of the human person and wishes him or her true happiness from an eschatological perspective.

However, the Church is not entirely opposed to any of these measures because they are man-made. Indeed, the Church approves of artificial means to assist couples in achieving conception directly from the conjugal act. It is morally appropriate to use artificial methods to restore fertility. Sometimes a husband or wife has a physical disability that can be corrected. For example, many surgeries or treatments can help men produce more sperm or correct their defects. Women may have surgery or medication to clear the lining of the uterus or ovarian cysts. Women can take fertility drugs that are similar to the hormones that help them get pregnant. In restoring health, such methods can help couples conceive through conjugal behavior. This is an artificial aid, not a natural substitute.

If couples are infertile after having successfully treated infertility by legitimate means, then accept the human condition with insurmountable limits. At that time, husband and wife are called to accept the cross with Jesus to offer sacrifices to the Father. Husband and wife try to overcome their own pain, open their hearts to orphaned and homeless children and welcome them into the loving home of their family. Husband and wife can also participate in activities, and volunteer work in the community, in the parish to find joy through serving others. In the parish I serve, there is a very young couple who have no children. Every day, they work together to make a living. They also schedule a time to participate in parish activities together. In their spare time, they go out together and visit friends. It is when working together that they feel supported and overcome difficulties and challenges in life. Encana admonished his wife, Anna, as she wept and refused to eat or drink because she couldn't have children: "*Anna, why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Aren't you more than ten sons to me?*"<sup>11</sup>. With real love, suffering will make two people stick together and need each other more.

In parish ministry, the first task rests with the parish priest. During the Matrimonial Catechism course or on an opportune occasion, the parish priest should address this

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1, 28 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1>)

<sup>11</sup> 1 Sm 1, 8 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1samuel/1>)

issue to the young people and the laity. Provide them not only with knowledge about artificial insemination but also let them know the position of the Church on the issue. From there, it helps them prepare mentally so that if the incident happens, they will not be too "shocked". However, this is a very difficult problem because human nature is weak. Although there are pieces of advice, encouragement, and explanations, it is only the insiders that we feel the pain. Theoretically, it is easy and ideal, but when faced with personal experience, we understand the pain of infertile couples. If not, it is the cross that God sent to them. We can only pray and beg for God's mercy on those people. Let God's love change their thoughts, helping them to relieve the pain of having to face the problem of children every day.

## Conclusion

Infertility is one of the big problems in today's world. This is also one of the causes of division and broken families. As Christians, we are called to live and bear witness to the Gospel in today's life. At the same time, know how to accompany families in this situation so that they can find the best means (approved by the Church) that can bring joy and peace to those families.

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## **Biodata**

Fr. Peter Pham Dong Hoa is a priest of Xuan Loc Diocese and an assistant priest at Hoa Binh Parish. He was ordained in 2019 and studying the Master of Theology Program at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam, majoring in Dogma. His priestly motto is “meek and humble” (Mt 11, 29) following the example of Jesus.