

Declaration regarding "Embryonic Reduction"

12 Luglio 2000

The Pontificate Council for the Family has been invited to express its position regarding "embryonic reduction", and after having consulted with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issues the following Declaration.

Presently, cases of multiple pregnancies (whereby the maternal womb is shared by many embryos) have become less rare. These cases usually occur because of ovarian stimulation in the cases of infertility, or because of the recourse to artificial fecundation, about which the Magisterium has already pronounced itself (Cong. of the Doctrine of the Faith, Istr. Donum vitae, II). Above all, it is rightful to be aware of the difficult and even dramatic situations that such techniques can produce. We cannot therefore fail to bring to the attention, the responsibility of these doctors who, while practicing the hyper stimulation without the due ability and precaution, or applying the techniques of artificial fecundation, provoke situations to the point of endangering the life of the mother and the conceived children.

As regards to the multiple pregnancies, some affirm that they cannot arrive together at term, either because of the spontaneous death of the embryos in the uterus, or because of the premature birth of the foetuses without hope of life. In addition, moreover, it is said that if the unborn children arrive to term, the obstetrical difficulty (and the consequent danger for the mother) is increased. On this basis, they arrive to the conclusion that the selection and the elimination of a few embryos would be justified in order to save the others or at least one of them. It was for this reason that the technique called "embryonic reduction" was introduced.

In this regard, one must note what follows: since every embryo must be considered and treated as a human person in respect to his eminent dignity (Cong. for the Doct. of the Faith, Inst. Donum vitae, I, 1), from the first moment of conception, the fundamental human rights and foremost that of the right to life, must be given recognition to the unborn child, and this right must not be violated in any way.

Beyond all confusion and ambiguity, it must therefore be affirmed that "embryonic reduction" constitutes a selective abortion: it consists in fact in the voluntary and direct elimination of an innocent human being (John Paul II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 57). Whether it be sought as an end or used as a means, "embryonic reduction" always constitutes a grave moral disorder (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Evangelium vitae, 62). Because it refers to a truth always accessible to simple reason, the unlawfulness of such behaviour imposes itself as a valid norm for all, even for unbelievers (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Evangelium vitae, 101). The moral prohibition remains even in the case where the continuation of the pregnancy involves a risk to the life or to the health of the mother and of the other twin. It is forbidden in fact to do evil even as a means to a good end (John Paul II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 57).

The life of a person comes from God, is always His gift, and the participation of His vital breath (John Paul II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 39). The embryonic selection which consists in the voluntary elimination of a human life, cannot be justified neither on the basis of the so-called principle of the lesser evil, nor in basis of that of double effect: neither one nor the other, in fact, finds application in this case. Also, one cannot under-estimate the possibility that the adoption of the technique of embryonic reduction may lead to a eugenic intention, and thus through prenatal diagnostic techniques, there could be a point where the value of a human life would be measured only in terms of normality and of "physical well-being" (John Paul II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 63), according to a reductive concept of "quality of life".

May the Lord of life accompany parents in the realization of their most high task and sustain them in the obligation to respect the right to existence of the child to be born. May He guide at the same time those who are at the service of life, to make all what is possible to save the mother and the children. Fortunately, thanks to the important scientific progresses accomplished in these last years, cases in

which multiple pregnancies that could be conducted to a happy ending are not few. It is certain however that if the fact of having to assist helplessly at the premature death of innocent creatures is part of the human limit, never will it be morally lawful to provoke death voluntarily.

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