

The cover photo caught my eye: three women, one man and two babies. A number of years ago, my eyes were drawn to a particular cover photo of a glossy Sunday magazine by one of the nation's largest newspapers.¹ I perused the article entitled "Meet the Twiblings." The article's author wrote of having finally found "Mr. Right" at 41 years of age. But after multiple failed rounds of *in vitro* fertilization, her doctor was blunt: "If you really want a healthy baby, get a surrogate and an egg donor." The couple wanted twins and finalized arrangements for two surrogates, resulting in births just five days apart.

The article highlights the radically different approaches to marriage and family inherent in these procedures. It closes with the author's draft of the fairytale that she would one day read to her two children about their origins. In an eerie play on words, the descriptive tale is all about a Fairy God-donor...this is our brave new world.

Without question, infertility produces a powerful mixture of emotions in would-be parents: pain and sorrow, hope and desire. It is a brutally painful cross to bear. Competing voices offer solutions, extremely costly. More importantly, these solutions destroy life in order to produce it. The Church does not turn her back on struggling couples, but firmly holds to the conviction that we are servants and stewards of life, not its arbiters. The desire to become a parent is a virtuous one; however, it does not bestow upon us an absolute authority over how that life is conceived.

For thirty-five years, the Saint Paul VI Institute in Omaha NE² has been treating couples struggling with infertility in ways that fully embrace the teachings of our faith. We pastors have a duty to make known these ethically responsible fertility services to couples who are struggling.

¹ Melanie Thernstrom, *New York Times Magazine* January 2, 2011. The author defended her decision as "creating a kind of extended family, in which you have chosen to be related to these people through your children, it feels very rich."

² Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction/ www.popepaulvi.com

“Do parents have a right to a child?” How you answer this question in your mind is absolutely crucial. The dignity of human life at its earliest stages is predicated upon the belief that children are first and foremost a **gift** and **never**, under any circumstances, a **right**. If we in the Church neglect to teach this to our teenagers in our Catholic schools, in Religious Education programs, in our homes, we will have failed them as they prepare for marriage. They will easily fall prey to the allusion that to bring a child into this world is a fundamental right, and that technology merely serves to bring that right to fruition.

Our respect for life conceived in the womb and threatened by abortion extends to the moral implications of reproductive technologies that fail to safeguard innocent human life in the womb, something not captured by the latest abortion statistics. Researchers at the Yale School of Medicine reported in 2005 that 85 % of embryos transferred to a womb in IVF are never born alive.³

Clearly, couples struggling in this situation must be sent home with more than theology. They must be sent home with hope and with sound reasoning as to the “why” behind the Church’s convictions. “To those who say that the Church’s teaching on fertility contains too many “No’s,” we must answer that behind every ‘no’ in the difficult task of discerning between good and evil, there shines a great ‘Yes’ to the recognition of the dignity and inalienable value of every single and unique human being called into existence.”⁴

While the number of abortions has clearly decreased, in no small part to a vigorous pro-life effort to change hearts and minds, the numbers remain staggering, with 900,000 abortions annually in the United States, roughly the population of San Francisco, the nation’s 14th largest city. And reproductive technology is on the rise.⁵

³ J. Harper, “85 out of 100 embryos wasted,” *The Washington Times*, Sept. 13, 2005, p. A7.

⁴ *Dignitas Personae*, #37, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), 8 September 2008

⁵ According to the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, “more than 8 million” babies have been born via IVF since Louise Brown was the first in 1978. It has now risen to 500,000 births per year.

The Book of Isaiah contains several passages in which the mysterious figure of the Servant is introduced, including that of today. Christians see in this prophecy a foreshadowing of a Messiah. In the text, the Servant's vocation will be not only the restoration of Israel, but the conversion of the world.⁶ Isaiah 49:1,5 reads, “Now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb...”

The lesson of this weekend before the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* is a sobering one, for many challenges remain. We mustn't tire in the battle for the protection of human life, nor be deterred in the face of criticism. Let us never respond to criticism with invective. Rather, we pray for the grace to reach out in all charity, truth and humility, mindful that many voices are competing to be heard. Please Lord, grant that the voice of reason and truth may stand out.

⁶ New American Bible, footnote to Isaiah 49:6