

Ova Donation

A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The supreme gift of marriage is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged “right to a child” would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents, and the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2378*)

Church teaching

- ★ Respect for the unity of marriage and for conjugal fidelity demands that the child be conceived in marriage; the bond existing between husband and wife accords the spouses, in an objective and inalienable manner, the exclusive right to become father and mother solely through each other.(37) Recourse to the gametes of a third person, in order to have sperm or ovum available, constitutes a violation of the reciprocal commitment of the spouses and a grave lack in regard to that essential property of marriage which is its unity. (*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, The Gift of Life*)
- ★ Spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord’s Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2379*)
- ★ Respect of the dignity of the human being excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo. (*Pontifical Council for the Family, Charter of the Rights of the Family*)
- ★ Science and technology by their very nature require unconditional respect for fundamental moral criteria. They must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integral good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 2294*)
- ★ Surrogate motherhood represents an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood; it offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his own parents; it sets up, to the detriment of families, a division between the physical, psychological and moral elements which constitute those families. (*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, The Gift of Life*)

Resources

- ★ **Texas Catholic Conference** Stem Cell Research page (www.TXcatholic.org/ESCR.asp)
- ★ **US Conference of Catholic Bishops** Stem Cell page (www.USCCB.org/prolife/issues/bioethic)
- ★ **National Catholic Bioethics Center** The NCBC conducts research, consultation, publishing and education to promote human dignity in health care and the life sciences, and derives its message directly from the teachings of the Catholic Church (www.NCBCenter.org)
- ★ **Pontifical Academy for Life** The Pontifical Academy for Life was established to study and to provide information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion and protection of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church's Magisterium (www.AcademiaVita.org)

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Ova Donation

Ovum donation refers to the practice of purchasing ova from a woman in exchange for money. The practice is referred to as a donation because the money is paid for a woman's time, not for the obtaining of her eggs. Purchased eggs are fertilized via in-vitro fertilization and used in assisted reproduction and can also be used to produce new embryonic stem cell lines for research.ⁱ The Texas Catholic Conference is opposed to ova donation, which has eugenic leanings, proves a risk to women's health, and can also take advantage of women in financial need.

Risk to Womenⁱⁱ

George J. Annas, a medical ethicist who strongly favors reproductive technologies, has expressed concern about the medical risks to the women who donate their eggs for use in IVF. Ovum donation, he states, is "a medical procedure with major risks. There's a sharp limit of the number of ovum women can donate, and there can be ... significant problems to this."

Donating eggs clearly poses a health risk for women. Interestingly, it is illegal to sell any human body parts ... except eggs. These go to the highest bidder, often over the Internet. Some report as high as \$50,000 for the right pedigree of looks, personal qualities, and SAT scores. In 1999, according to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, approximately 8,000 donor eggs were transferred. The money may sound enticing to a young college woman, however, after enduring the debilitating cycles of questionably safe medications in a poorly regulated industry, only to give up all claim on her genetic child, she may literally be making the biggest mistake of her life. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has developed guidelines that place a \$5,000 limit on donor compensation, and calls for independent medical and psychological evaluations of the donors.

Targeting Women with Financial Needⁱ

In addition to the risk to the health of women, others are concerned that women with financial need, including young university females, and women of the third world and Eastern Europe, may not truly be giving free informed consent to donate their eggs because their consent is clouded by their financial need.

"There is a global shortage of human ova for in vitro fertilization and stem cell technologies. Health care providers and administrators who are associated with assisted reproduction enterprises are aggressively recruiting egg donors through the electronic and print media. Young female university students without the financial resources to fund their education lack the autonomy to give informed consent for donation of their ova as a means of paying their tuition because of the constraining influence of their situation. We must remain vigilant in monitoring the ethical and moral approaches of the "industrial" aspect of assisted reproduction, not only toward young university females, but also toward women of the third world and Eastern Europe."

Threat of Eugenics

Ova donation also can create an ethical concern regarding eugenics, the practice of trying to improve the human race through influencing genetic reproduction. This threat is apparent especially in advertisements that specify criteria for IQ, height, athleticism, hair color, eye color, and personality type. Eugenics promotes one race or types of features over another and in doing so contradicts the values of the person integrally considered in all his dimensions, material and spiritual. This is ill-hidden racism and is morally unacceptable.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Papadimos, Thomas J., and Alexa T. Papadimos. "The Student and the Ovum: the Lack of Autonomy and Informed Consent in Trading Genes for Tuition." 12 July 2004. Reproductive Biology and Endocrinology. <<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?tool=pubmed&pubmedid=15248892>>. Copyright © 2004 Papadimos and Papadimos; licensee BioMed Central Ltd. This is an Open Access article: verbatim copying and redistribution of this article are permitted in all media for any purpose, provided this notice is preserved along with the article's original URL.

ⁱⁱ Anderson, M.D., Marie, FACOG, and John Bruchalski, M.D. "Assisted Reproductive Technologies are Anti-Woman." Pro-Life Activities. 2004. USCCB. <<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/04anderson.shtml>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The International Community and Values." Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html>.