

ACADEMY OF FELLOWS CONSULTATION

“RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ETHICS AND THEOLOGY OF SYNTHETIC GAMETES”

The following recommendations were developed by the Fellows and guest speakers who participated in the Center’s November 2012 Consultation. This statement does not necessarily reflect the views of individual members of the Center’s Academy of Fellows or that of CBHD, but is offered as helpful guidance to initiate further discussion on this emerging topic. We invite you to respond to their recommendations.

Preamble

The members of the CBHD Academy of Fellows Consultation on synthetic gametes and embryos,

Conscious of the accelerating developments in the synthesis of artificial gametes and embryos;

Convinced of the need to recognise the importance of protecting the inherent dignity of human persons;

Affirming that progress in biology and medicine should always serve human good and not violate the inherent dignity of human persons;

Recognising the importance of promoting a public debate on the questions posed by the synthesis of gametes and embryos as well as the responses to be given thereto;

Reminding all members of society of their rights and responsibilities;

Noting that most couples seek to have children of their own;

Recognising the intense suffering and distress that may arise when a couple cannot have children of their own;

Aware of the traditional¹ Christian belief that procreation should only take place in the context of the exclusive embodied relationship of love between a man and a woman bound to each other by marriage;

Conscious that procreation is not a virtual process but takes place in the context of embodied whole persons.

Noting that a child should represent the unconditional, exclusive and embodied love of his or her parents made flesh;

Mindful that sperm and eggs are parts of the human bodies from which they originated.

Aware that human sperm cells and eggs have no inherent moral value on their own.

Recognising that, in procreation, the entirety of each human sperm cell represents and reveals the whole man from whom it was produced and the entirety of each human egg represents and reveals the whole woman from whom it was produced;

Bearing in mind the traditional Christian prohibition on the use of donor sperm or eggs in procreation and their inability to represent either of the persons in the embodied and exclusive marital love of a couple.

Noting that (1) synthetic eggs obtained from maternal spindle transfer, (2) synthetic sperm cells obtained from women and (3) synthetic eggs obtained from men, no longer represent the whole

individuals from whom they were produced;

Mindful of the psychological and social risks that may arise in a child who is uncertain of his or her identity through assisted reproduction;

Recognising that every child should always be unconditionally welcomed into existence;

Conscious that eugenic practices, defined as strategies or decisions aimed at affecting, in a manner which is considered to be positive, the genetic heritage of a child, a community or humanity in general, undermine the equal, inalienable and inherent dignity of human persons.

Recognizing that maternal spindle transfer, pronuclear transfer, cytoplasmic transfer, and blastomere nuclear transfer can all be characterised as eugenic procedures.

Aware of the substantial biological risks that exist from the use of synthetic gametes and embryos;

Conscious of the traditional Christian prohibition on the bringing into existence of human embryos for research and any intentional destruction of human embryos.

Have agreed as follows:

Eugenic interventions seeking to introduce any modification in the genome of any descendants, in particular genetic modifications of sperm and egg cells for fertilisation, should not be used in reproduction.

The use of gametes in reproduction in which modifications have been undertaken undermining their representation of the prospective parents should not take place.

Maternal Spindle Transfer should not be used in reproduction.

Pronuclear Transfer should not be used in reproduction.

Cytoplasmic Transfer should not be used in reproduction.

Blastomere Nuclear Transfer should not be used in reproduction.

Research on alternative ethical procedures that address mitochondrial disorders and infertility should continue to be supported.

¹ Reference to ‘traditional’ in these recommendations reflects the historic theological position of the Christian church.