

The Guild of St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian Hong Kong

Response to Consultation on the 2011 Review of the Code of Practice on Reproductive Technology & Embryo Research

The Guild of St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian Hong Kong is an association of Catholic doctors formed in 1953, aimed at facilitating the intercourse between Catholic members of the medical profession of Hong Kong with a view to the study and discussion of bioethical issues, and of upholding the principles of Catholic morality.

The Guild re-emphasizes the sanctity of the human life from conception right through to its natural end. As we have already noted in our response¹ to the last consultation exercise in 2006, most of what is proposed disregards this sanctity and we unreservedly oppose it. This response is an update to the previous response and should be considered alongside it. In this update we have incorporated the teaching contained in the doctrinal instruction *Dignitas Personae* published in September 2008,² some time after the last consultation exercise was concluded.

Artificial Human Reproductive Technology

Techniques which assist procreation “are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life”.³ The principles which must be respected for infertility treatment to be acceptable to the Catholic Church are clearly listed in that document – respect for a) the right to life and to physical integrity of every human being from conception to natural death; b) the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse; c) the specifically human values of sexuality which require “that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses”.⁴

¹ <http://www.doctor.catholic.org.hk/publications/GuildResponse.doc>

² Instruction *Dignitas Personae* on Certain Bioethical Questions, AAS 100 (2008) 858-887
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

³ *Dignitas Personae*, no.12

⁴ *Ibid.*

It can thus be seen that “all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization, as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization which substitute for the conjugal act, are to be excluded. On the other hand, techniques which act as an aid to the conjugal act and its fertility are permitted.”⁵ Further details on the case against in vitro fertilization,⁶ intracytoplasmic sperm injection,⁷ the freezing of embryos⁸ and oocytes⁹, and embryo reduction¹⁰ are to be found in the ensuing paragraphs of the same document.

We re-iterate our opposition to pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, which is “the expression of a eugenic mentality that ... is shameful and utterly reprehensible, since it presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of ‘normality’ and physical well-being ... By treating the human embryo as mere “laboratory material”, the concept itself of human dignity is also subjected to alteration and discrimination. ... [this] serious and unjust form of discrimination which leads to the non-recognition of the ethical and legal status of human beings suffering from serious diseases or disabilities ... is immoral and must therefore be considered legally unacceptable.”¹¹

Embryo and Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Embryo research is “unacceptable because they treat the embryos as mere “biological material” and result in their destruction. The proposal to thaw such embryos without reactivating them and use them for research, as if they were normal cadavers, is also unacceptable.”¹² Specific cases against human cloning¹³ and animal-human hybridization¹⁴ have also been presented in *Dignitas Personae*.

We repeat our condemnation of embryonic stem cell research. As *Dignitas Personae* points out: “Methods which do not cause serious harm to the subject from whom the stem cells are taken are to be considered licit. This is generally the case when tissues are taken from: a) an adult organism; b) the blood of the umbilical cord at the time of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., no.14-16

⁷ Ibid., no.17

⁸ Ibid, no.18-19

⁹ Ibid, no 20-

¹⁰ Ibid, no.21

¹¹ Ibid, no.22

¹² Ibid, no.19

¹³ Ibid, no.28-30

¹⁴ Ibid, no.33

birth; c) fetuses who have died of natural causes. The obtaining of stem cells from a living human embryo, on the other hand, invariably causes the death of the embryo and is consequently gravely illicit"¹⁵

Conclusion

To the extent that the proposed Code of Practice disregards the sanctity of the human life right from conception, the Guild of St Luke, St Cosmas and St Damian re-iterates its opposition to human reproductive technology and embryo experimentation. With the publication of the Doctrinal Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, we have updated our position to take account of the Church's assessment of recent advances in the relevant medical technology.

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Hong Kong

¹⁵ *Dignitas Personae*, no.31