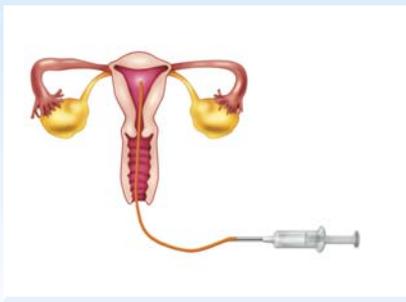




Is Artificial Insemination Wrong Even Among Married Couples?

"The pregnancy itself would be brought about by a new and different set of causes, whereby the mechanical actions of a technician would substitute for, and thus violate, the intimate and exclusive bond of the marital act."



Artificial insemination introduces sperm into a woman's body by use of a thin tube (cannula) or other instrument to bring about a pregnancy. Artificial insemination can be either *homologous* (using sperm from a woman's husband) or *heterologous* (using sperm from a man she is not married to). Both forms of artificial insemination raise significant moral concerns.

Bringing about a pregnancy by introducing a cannula through the reproductive tract of a woman and injecting sperm into her body raises concerns about reducing her to a kind of conduit for the purposes of obtaining a child. These actions fail to respect the most personal and intimate aspects of a woman's relational femininity and her sexuality. She ends up being treated or treating herself as an "object" for the pursuit of ulterior ends. A man also violates his sexuality, as his involvement becomes reduced to "producing a sample," usually by masturbation, which technicians then use in order to impregnate his wife or another woman. Similarly, any child conceived in this manner is potentially treated as an object or a "project to be realized," rather than as a gift arising from their shared bodily intimacy and one-flesh union.

Back in 1949, a prescient Pope Pius XII already recognized some of these moral concerns when he wrote:

"To reduce the common life of a husband and wife and the conjugal act to a mere organic function for the transmission of seed would be but to convert the domestic hearth, the family sanctuary, into a biological laboratory. Therefore... we expressly excluded artificial insemination in marriage."

The Catholic Church addressed this matter again in greater detail in 1987 in an important document called *Donum Vitae* (On the Gift of Life), noting that whenever a technical means "facilitates the conjugal act or helps it to reach its natural objectives, it can be morally acceptable. If, on the other hand, the procedure were to replace the conjugal act, it is morally illicit [unacceptable]. Artificial insemination as a substitute for the conjugal act is prohibited."

Some Catholics have nevertheless suggested that artificial insemination might occasionally be permitted in light of another passage from the same document

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which they interpret as allowing for an exception: “Homologous artificial insemination within marriage cannot be admitted except for those cases in which the technical means is not a substitute for the conjugal act but serves to facilitate and to help so that the act attains its natural purpose.”

Interestingly, at the present time, there do not seem to be any real-world examples of insemination technologies that facilitate the conjugal act. Hence, while the statement above is true in a theoretical way, in practice there do not appear to be any specific technical methods to which the statement would in fact apply, so the claim of some Catholics that an exception exists for homologous artificial insemination does not appear to be correct. The core problem remains that even if sperm were collected without masturbation, the subsequent steps of introducing a sample into a woman’s reproductive tract, through a cannula or other means, would invariably involve a substitution or replacement of the conjugal act, which would not be morally acceptable.

To procure sperm without masturbation, a couple could use a so-called “silastic sheath” during marital relations (a perforated con-

dom without spermicide). This would allow some of the sample to pass through, and some to be retained and collected, and would assure that each marital act remained ordered and open to the possibility of transmitting the gift of life.

Yet even when using a morally-permissible sperm procurement technique, the subsequent mechanical injection or insemination step itself would raise serious moral concerns. Clearly, a marital act would not cause the pregnancy, but at best would cause gamete (sperm) collection. The pregnancy itself would be brought about by a new and different set of causes, whereby the mechanical actions of a technician would substitute for, and thus violate, the intimate and exclusive bond of the marital act.

Homologous artificial insemination, in the final analysis, does not facilitate the natural act, but replaces it with another kind of act altogether, an act that violates the unity of the spouses in marriage, and the right of the child to be conceived in the unique and sacred setting of the marital embrace.

The beauty of the marital embrace and the noble desire for the gift of children can make it challenging for us to accept the cross of infertility

and childlessness when it arises in marriage, even as it offers us an opportunity to embrace a deeper and unexpected plan of spiritual fruitfulness that the Lord and Creator of Life may be opening before us.

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