

'Toxic' Technology

Bioethicist addresses the morality of infertility treatments

By Nicole Myshak

Aware of her near impossible mandate to speak about a host of bioethical issues during a single workshop, Dr. Moira McQueen opted to limit the scope of her presentation to reproductive technologies.

The director of the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute made her presentation to a capacity crowd of almost exclusively young adults during the annual Catholic Christian Outreach Rise Up conference.

McQueen decided to concentrate on this topic based on the demographics of the group she was addressing and in light of "*Dignitas Personae*," a recently published document by the Vatican on the subject.

This document "more or less reaffirmed" the Church's 1987 instruction on reproductive biotechnologies entitled "*Donum Vitae*," says McQueen.

Making the most of the time, McQueen began her workshop,

entitled "Faith in the Fields — Bioethics, What is a Catholic to do?," with a discussion of the "principles of conscience" which comprise the framework for making moral decisions.

First she emphasized that "having knowledge of the facts" is crucial to making good decisions. "Good ethics depend on good facts," states McQueen.

Knowledge Is Power

Next the academic bioethicist outlined the importance of "knowledge of norms" concerning "Catholic teaching." "We need to know what it says in specific situations," she insists.

Referencing the theological contributions of St. Thomas Aquinas and his emphasis on the virtue of prudence — right reason — McQueen notes that reasoning is the most important thing that we can do.

"Thinking is hard work," she acknowledges. "But that's what's demanded of us. We're asked to think about things." McQueen adds that the norms set down by the Church are the "product" and result of thinking.

Finally, when believers are making decisions they also need to "bring in prayer and discernment."

Referring to section 16 of the Vatican II document "*Gaudium et Spes*," McQueen conveys the role of conscience in decision-making and how it is the "inner core and sanctuary of our being" wherein the human person is in closest relationship with God.

Concerning matters related to technology, McQueen emphasizes that moral issues pertain to "how" such advancements are used and not the technology itself. We are not "Luddites" or "anti-progress," she says, adding that it is the nature of humans "to help other people be healers."



IN OUTLINING the Catholic response to reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization, Dr. Moira McQueen cautions that any action that violates the inseparable unity of the procreative and unitive dimensions of sexuality, is "intrinsically wrong." (Submitted photo)

Made in God's Image

Transitioning to the specific topic of reproductive technologies McQueen says that central to discussions about these issues is the "concept of personhood" which is a "fundamental area."

Articulating the Catholic position, McQueen explains that each person, from the tiniest zygote to the oldest centenarian, is equal before God.

"Every single one of us is radically equal because every one of us is made in God's image," affirms McQueen. "So we believe each of us, from the moment of conception until natural death, is inherently worthy, inherently dignified and worthy of respect."

Even so, she acknowledges that in the secular world the question of personhood is not agreed upon and differs throughout various regions and jurisdictions. "There is no clear answer to that in secular terms," McQueen says.

In Canada, she notes, someone is not "a person" until they've been delivered from the birth canal of their mother.

McQueen urges that this matter

of personhood is "not a trivial question" for "if you are not a person you have no rights."

Turning her attention to reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), cloning and stem cell research, McQueen asserts the increasing relevance of these topics for "infertility is on the rise" in most Western countries and affects roughly one in every four or five couples.

Regarding IVF, she notes that many problematic aspects of this technology are often glossed over including its "low success rate" which is approximately 30 percent.

She speaks of IVF being "incredibly expensive" and requiring a "surgical procedure" for "ovum extraction" during which the woman is at risk to have her ovary or fallopian tubes perforated.

Once the eggs are extracted, "the woman's egg and the man's sperm" are fused together "in a Petri dish." "You have to actually fuse them," explains McQueen. Then "sometimes" the embryo is "inserted into the woman's womb."

McQueen stresses that the standard procedure in IVF is to **(Please turn to Page 11)**



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