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Table of Contents

List of Contributors	vii-ix
Editorial	x-xii
FAMILY INTEGRATION AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT Prof. Stephen Oladele Ayankeye	1-22
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FAMILY LIFE Benson Ohihon Igboin	23-47
IMPLICATION OF GLOBAL SEXUAL RIGHTS REVOLUTION ON THE FAMILY INSTITUTION Sharon Slater	48-60
EFFECTS OF POSTMODERNISM ON CHRISTIAN PARENTING IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY Elijah Adeyinka	61-76
BANDURA'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION FOR FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF OLDER CHILDREN Oluwakemi Olajumoke Amuda	77-90
VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE GENDER IN EKITI STATE: BIBLICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES Ayinde, Abosede Hellen	91-111
THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY FAMILY INSTITUTION AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT John Ayo Oladapo, PhD	112-128

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR DISPELLING CONFLICTS IN MARRIAGE Princess O. Idialu PhD. & Raphael A. Idialu PhD	129-141
PARENTING AND ITS IMPACT ON TEENAGE DELINQUENCY Foluke Omobonike Odesola, PhD	142-154
FAMILY AND EDUCATION, SITUATING THE NIGERIA EXPERIENCE Ogbeni Sylvester	155-168
ETHICO-RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY ON IN VITRO FERTILISATION TO MINIMISE INFERTILITY AMONG INFERTILE CHRISTIAN COUPLES Otun Michael Oluwajuwonlo	169-181
SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG YOUTH AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT Itakorode Olanrewaju Andrew F.	182-193

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Editorial Note

Undoubtedly, the human family is one of the most threatened units of our individual and communal existence. Many have argued that the family's failure or success reflects the order in the development of society. This unvarnished truth and the consequences of ignoring it account for establishing a journal devoted exclusively to family life - *International Journal of Family Life and Societal Development*. This journal, conceived as a means and avenue to express concern and interrogate pressing family issues and proffer solutions, is not a confessional one; it takes discursive and practical approaches to issues on family life from interdisciplinary perspectives.

In this maiden volume, Stephen Ayankeye argues that there is a nexus between family integration and societal development. Inversely, a disintegrated family will lead to the underdevelopment of society. He further argues that there are factors that engender family integration but that those factors are now being challenged. He recommends ways of ensuring that the challenges are tackled. Benson Igboin interrogates the effects of social media on family life. He argues that society is dynamic, and globalisation has ambivalent impacts on family life. While it is now practically impossible to insulate family life from social media, he concludes that reasonable and responsible deployment of social media will enhance family unity and connectedness. Sharon Slater's article examines the integration of family and the family's protection in Nigeria and Africa. Slater argues that the assault on children and families in Nigeria is propelled by the global sexual revolution, to which many parents in Africa have not given sufficient attention. She notes that this revolution should be viewed from a human rights perspective to challenge its causes and effects on African families, particularly young people. She thus recommends that parents and the African government have critical roles to play in safeguarding the sexual health of their children.

On his own, Elijah Adeyinka examines the effects of postmodernism on the African family system. He points out that postmodernism's tilt

towards relativism adversely impacts family life. In order to stem the tide of postmodernism's inroad into the family, he suggests that family life should be guided strictly by enduring biblical principles. Oluwakemi Amuda's article intervenes by highlighting the critical role of effective communication within the family. She argues that when there is adequate and mutual communication in the family, faith is developed, which results in the development of the whole person. For Abosede Ayinde, violence against the female gender in the family and society has remained unabated. Ayinde notes that contemporary society has been unable to arrest violence against the female gender. She also examines the biblical basis of violence against the female gender and recommends ways to ameliorate it. John Oladapo echoes the argument that the challenges of the modern family system directly link with societal development. He argues that the African family system is being critically neglected, and the consequences are dire and visible. He, therefore, recommends the need to pay urgent attention to those values that sustained the family system before modernity unleashed its forces on it. Princess and Raphael Idialu reaffirm the argument that effective communication in the family has a way of dispelling and resolving conflict. They examine effective communication skills to demonstrate that family health will be maintained and sustained when emplaced. Foluke Odesola articulates that parenting is critical to the healthy growth and development of the child. Effective parenting, she argues, leads to arresting juvenile delinquency. As a result, she recommends that effective parenting is a sine qua non for guiding the child through the challenges that the teenage period of development poses.

Ogbeni Sylvester examines the role of education in the development of the family. Although education costs are high and hardly affordable, he argues that education is essential to the family and society. He suggests ways through which parents could navigate the challenges the cost of education has posed in contemporary society. Michael Otun introduces the ethical and religious dilemma many Christian couples face in deciding whether or not to resort to IVF in

their quest to procreate. He argues that the decision is not easy because of many interpretations of scriptures and pressures that are brought to bear on couples. He thus concludes that couples should weigh the moral implications of IVF before taking their final decision. Finally, Andrew Itakorode Olanrewaju examines the causes and effects of drug abuse among youth. He argues that despite concerted efforts to discourage the youth from engaging in substance abuse, the reality on the ground shows an increase in the number of those involved. He recommends that parents and government should intensify efforts towards ensuring that the youth are dissuaded from abusing drugs because of their harmful effects on them and society.

Benson Ohihon Igboin
Editor-in-Chief

ETHICO-RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY ON IN VITRO FERTILISATION TO MINIMISE INFERTILITY AMONG INFERTILE CHRISTIAN COUPLES

BY

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Abstract

Scientific research revealed that the desire to have children remains one of human being most primal and deep-seated desires. Over the centuries, since God's injunction, children have been born by natural means; but it appears that more than ever, some couples find their desires to have children thwarted by infertility; which has given room for the society, family, parents and even the Church to mount pressures on the infertile couples to seek an alternative solution through in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Social pressure, especially on women, is at the heart of the drive for natural parenthood. As a result, infertile Christian couples desperately seek alternative methods through in vitro fertilisation because of the natural means that have failed them to procreate. Without the natural means to procreate, God-created species would reach extinction. Thus, men and women grow up emulating their parents and planning to have their families through assisted reproductive technology. However, religion plays a mammoth role in the ethical considerations surrounding in vitro fertilisation among Christians. The assisted reproductive technology to procreate is not without its ethico-religious criticisms among some Christians as the argument from a Christian religious perspective states that in IVF, children are created through a technical process, made to go through quality control, and destroyed if found deficient, which the Church considers being a waste of life created by God. Therefore, this paper adopts critical and analytical methods to evaluate the controversies surrounding ethical and religious arguments on in vitro fertilisation among infertile Christian couples.

Keywords: Ethico-Religious, Controversy, In vitro fertilisation

Introduction

In vitro fertilisation has consistently become a source of ethical and religious controversy among Christians since its development. Looking at it from the Christian religious perspective, the Church has compartmentalised fertility into two categories: First, those that help achieve pregnancy through sex - fertility drugs, ovulation chart, and surgery to remove blockages are moral. Second, those that replace sex with technology, including IVF and artificial insemination, are immoral. Considering the way religion is coming to terms with modern fertility methods, Cha (2018, 9) explains that 40 years ago, the world's first "test tube" baby born at a British hospital in the industrial city of Oldham, heralded a radical change in the creation of human life. Afterwards, one of the doctors involved in developing the test tube child opined that science – not God – was in charge of the 'test tube' baby.

The procedures of assisted reproductive technology have amplified profound and ethical questions for the world's theologians: When does life begin? Is it a sin to destroy a fertilised egg if life starts at conception? What defines a parent? Is it biblical to use the sperm or eggs of a third party in assisted reproductive technology? Can we say the woman who donates the egg is the mother or the woman who gives birth to the child? What defines a marriage? Can we say it is adultery if the sperm used to fertilise an egg is from a man who is not the husband? Some religionists discuss these controversial issues, whether it is ethical or not to involve a third party in assisted reproductive technology. Some Christians argue that it is unethical to use the sperm of another man or use the womb or eggs of another woman who is not directly involved in marriage for IVF. To some, this is ethical, and to others, it is not. This has, however, become an issue of debate among religious groups, especially in Christendom.

Jenkins (1999, 58) asserts that the advances in molecular biology, transgenics, genetic engineering, reproductive technologies and human cloning raise various ethical issues. Ethical responses sometimes reflect the difficulty of keeping abreast of moral problems in this field. Jenkins argues further that medical technology has the

power to improve the human condition. However, this will not happen if medicine, science and technology lie only in the hands of scientists. Ethicists are equally vital in the controversies arising from in vitro fertilisation. Fifty-five years ago, many people condemned the first heart transplant as “unnatural”. Today, transplants are performed routinely, and scientists are discussing the possibility of transplanting animal organs to humans. According to ethicists, Jenkins (1999, 59) submits that medical and technological progress can have positive effects, making people's lives safer and more comfortable, but inventions at times can raise religious questionable issues and injustice. How do the Christians decide what is right and wrong in using science, medicine and technology? In light of this, this paper focuses on the ethico–religious controversial issues arising from assisted reproductive technology called in vitro fertilisation to minimise infertility among infertile Christian couples. Since God commands them to procreate, this paper argues that infertile Christian couples must be guided through assisted reproductive technology to have children.

Clarification of Concepts

In vitro fertilisation: There are now various ways to have a baby other than through sexual intercourse. In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is now widely used to produce 'test-tube babies'. In vitro means the fertilisation takes place 'in glass', i.e. in a testtube or culture dish or elsewhere outside the human body. In vitro fertilisation is a technique for helping infertile couples to conceive. It is a technique to induce a woman to produce eggs (ovulate) by hormone treatment; the eggs are then removed and fertilised in the laboratory by her partner's sperm. The tiny embryos are checked for abnormalities before being placed in the woman's uterus, where they continue their development in the usual way until birth (Jenkins, 1999, 70).

Christine (1987, 67) opines that in vitro fertilisation is fertilising an egg by sperm outside a woman's womb. It is a form of assisted reproductive technology used to treat infertility among couples. During IVF, the egg is fertilised outside the body and then transferred into the mother's uterus for growth and development. IVF

is used to treat women with blocked fallopian tubes, ovulation disorders, endometriosis or other infertility-related issues. Goldsworth's (1999, 94) argument states that in vitro fertilisation requires the intervention of the medical team. This intervention begins by taking a history of the couple, followed by physical and laboratory examinations that include a test for the sperm count of the male partner and a pelvic exam, cervical culturing, and staining of cervical secretions for the presence of Chlamydia for the female partner. Once these tests are completed, fertility drugs are administered to the woman to stimulate her ovarian follicles to produce as many healthy eggs as possible.

This is necessary because a single fertilised egg or pre-embryo has only a tiny chance of survival. Eggs are retrieved within 27 to 36 hours by a specific stimulation technique such as ultrasonographically guided aspiration or laparoscopy, and as many eggs as possible are obtained per single retrieval attempt. Goldsworth proves that the harvested eggs are inseminated by a sample of semen that contains sperm of good quality and is prepared by washing to induce capacitation. Each harvested egg has a 60 percent to 70 percent chance of being fertilised. Once cleavage occurs, the pre-embryos are transferred to the woman's uterus.

Ethics: To understand ethico-religious concept of in vitro fertilisation, it is apposite at this junction to explain the term 'ethics'. The word 'ethics' has intrigued scholars down the ages and continues to do so today. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that aims to understand the meaning of life and the nature of knowledge, beauty and goodness. Ethics helps us to make moral judgement about ourselves and others around us. It will be impossible to live a relatively ordered life if human principles do not agree with other people's ideas about right and wrong. At times, human beings do or say things we feel are all right, but our reflections later make us feel that what we are doing or saying is wrong. According to Ayantayo (2009, 4), ethics is a systematic study of human actions and

interventions in order to determine their goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, correctness and incorrectness and with attention given to how such course of action and intention being evaluated affects the person who performed the act or showed intent in question, at which it is directed, and the society or the environment where the action is performed or the intention is melted. Infertility is a painful reality among many couples today. However, in vitro fertilisation promises to give infertile couples hope of having children but many people still see the moral cost of it as severe and unethical because of its procedures that destroy innumerable embryos, which are discarded as extra and unwanted. In response to this, some Christians have diverse interpretations and have reached varying conclusions that IVF and other assisted reproduction are not suitable and unworthy methods.

In response, Ayantayo submits that there are important issues based on the exposition above that ethicists note as matters arising from the description, particularly as they relate to what ethics is concerned with. The first has to do with what we mean by actions and intention, which ethics studies. The second focuses on what constitutes a good or bad action and who determines what constitutes a right or wrong action. Who or what sets the standard that determines an action's rightness or otherwise? And what comes out of the such study of human conduct? James (n.y) argues that ethics is a branch of philosophy that aims to explain the meaning of life, the nature of knowledge, beauty and goodness. It is a discipline that specifically refers to an area of morality that explores human conduct and values. Ethics also explains what constitutes moral and immoral concerning human actions and decisions.

Religion: It is not easy to get a consensus on the definition of religion. According to Oshitelu (2010, p1), each definer learns to define religion from a personal perspective and intellectual and psychological dispositions from their religious persuasions. Oshitelu (2010, 7) quotes Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804), who asserts that religion is a recognition of all human duties as divine commands. Among the multifarious definitions of religion, Oshitelu argues that religion, according to James (n.d), is man's compelling desire to be in

good relations with a religious transcendental order controlling human destinies and natural events in life, which finds expressions in a prescribed system of ritual and belief.

Ethical Controversies and the Position of Christian Religion on In vitro fertilisation

The ethical argument on in vitro fertilisation started when the result of the first animal IVF experiment was published in the mid- 1930s (the consequence was later contested). While some scholars saw it as a promising development to help infertile couples, some Christians were critical, pronouncing that assisted reproduction is against the intention of God about procreation. The Christians could lend their voices because Ojo (n.y, 10) submits that religion firmly holds people's beliefs, feelings, conduct, and attitudes. The religion of a man answers his questions about the Ultimate Being, man's place and roles in life. Obasola (2009, 143) argues that religion plays a significant role in the ethical considerations surrounding reproductive technology. Some religionists argue that reproductive technology should be banned because its unnatural procedure gives room for multiple pregnancies and threatens the mother's physical and mental health seeking a child through IVF Conception. Christine postulates that because non-secular communities have solid opinions and spiritual legislation related to marriage, sex and reproduction, thus, modern fertility technology has forced religion to respond to reproductive technology.

Jenkins explains that reproduction can bring the pleasure and joy of parenthood to childless couples and single women, whether they are infertile, post-menopausal or lesbians, or women wanting a dead partner's child. One effect of IVF is that children put up for adoption might lose out if an infertile couple has a child by IVF, while the child of a post-menopausal mother may find that its mother is too old to care for it or even dies before the child reaches adulthood. Roman Catholic Church has this to say about in vitro fertilisation:

It is because of the concern of the Church to protect the embryo that caution has been expressed about some developments in

in vitro fertilisation. So that scientists can be sure of fertilising an egg which will grow successfully when placed in the uterus, usually several eggs are fertilised, creating spare embryos which are either thrown away or used for experimentation. This is in effect killing of human life. While the Church does have sympathy with couples who are not able to have children, it does not consider it legitimate to treat the human embryo as experimental or disposable material. Life is God's gift and we do not have a right to children. Means to aid birth between husband and wife are considered morally good. However, if this involves a third person for example, artificial insemination by donor or a surrogate mother) this is not considered ethically acceptable (Jenkins, 1999, 71)

Obasola (2009, 144), while alluding to assisted reproductive technology, argues that theologians view all forms of cloning as a thorny issue, which is an example of the ongoing tension between faith and science. Some people believe the scientific advances that enable reproductive technology. Also, they believe these advancements are a God-given blessing. Others argue that science should not presume to “play God” by manipulating genetic makeup. Some claim that assisted reproductive technology must be banned because it involves and encourages the destruction of human embryos.

In the Christian understanding of in vitro fertilisation, Richie (2012, 7) submits that IVF can wreak havoc on a woman's body and reproductive organs. The body was not made to endure hyperovulation, multiple pregnancies simultaneously, and hormonal drugs. In the case of twins or higher-order multiple pregnancies, the mother will more likely develop a high level of blood pressure, preeclampsia (protein in the uterus), or gestational diabetes during pregnancy. In assisted reproductive technology, fertility drugs are an essential part of IVF, but they increase the chances of multiple pregnancies from 1- 2 per cent to 25 per cent. Multiple births place the mother and her babies at risk. One way around this problem is selective reduction, where one or more of the foetuses are aborted to give the remaining ones a better chance; but has the aborted foetus equal rights with the foetus or foetuses which were allowed to go to term?

In in vitro fertilisation, embryos transferred to the woman's uterus are determined by the chances of fertilisation, which varies with the woman's age. A sufficient number of fertilised eggs are needed to increase the likelihood of pregnancy. Those that are not needed usually are frozen. Embryos not transferred to a woman's uterus may be used for research or destroyed. Some Christians argue that in these instances, the physicians have halted further embryonic development with the consent of the couple. Ethically speaking, considering the human fertilised egg or embryo to be protoplasm overlooks the fact that it differs from every cell in a woman's body and can be identified as human by its DNA. However, some scholars support the view that the life of a human being starts at conception but disagree that the life that begins at conception is not human. Thus, Christians prove and conclude from this that the live pre-embryo is a developing human being right from the moment of conception.

The question is, "At what stage during pregnancy can a foetus be regarded as an individual?" This question has perplexed theologians, philosophers and medical ethicists down the ages. Indeed, the way scholars answer this question will influence our views on the issues concerned with medical ethics. The key questions are: is the foetus a person or a potential person? Does a foetus have rights, and if so, how can these rights be balanced against the rights of the mother? Is the foetus a person at sixteen weeks when it begins to move or is it a person only at 34 weeks when it is developed enough to live outside its mother's womb?

According to Raeper and Edwards (1997, 98), Aristotle proves that ensoulment (personhood) occurs 40 days after conception for the male fetus and 80 days after conception for the female fetus. Muslims, according to Goldsworth, argue that personhood occurs 14 days after conception. The question is: is a pre-embryo a person from the moment the ovum is fertilised? Shannon (1997, 65) reacts that the answer is no. However, Shannon argues that not until totipotency gives way to specialised cellular development, which occurs approximately three weeks after the formation of the zygote, can it be correctly said that the pre-embryo is an individual. Goldsworth

submits that Catholic Church is the proponent of the assertion that the life of a foetus starts when the ovum is fertilised.

Jenkins (1999, 90), while reacting to the submission of Shannon, proves that the Roman Catholic teaching disagrees with the argument of Shannon, which states that the pre-embryo cannot be referred to as an individual or a person. The Catholic Church submits that the Bible, according to Psalm 139, says, "thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee when I was being made in secret' (KJV). The psalmist considers that God's interest in the individual is evident from the earliest moment of life, a theme echoed in Jeremiah 1:5, which says: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you'. One can argue that if life in its most total sense is imbued with meaning, even from its first form, then to interfere or destroy it is wrong.

Is a foetus a person or a potential person? St. Augustine maintained that the soul was implanted by God at 46 days, whereas Thomas Aquinas maintained that the soul of a girl was implanted at 90 days and the soul of a boy at 40 days. Thus, the destruction of fertilised eggs throughout the technique of in vitro fertilisation may not be morally wrong or unethical, provided it is carried out before the soul is implanted (Jenkins, 1999, 90). In the 17th century, however, the Roman Catholic Church taught that God implanted the soul at the moment of conception, which led to the Catholic view that the destruction of unwanted embryos during the IVF process is immoral because embryos are potential human beings that have souls right from the beginning of conception. Therefore, the Catholic Church concludes that destroying embryos is murderous and embryo research is unacceptable. However, to establish the ethical controversy concerning IVF practices, Asplund (2019, 1) submits that the ethical controversy over IVF started when the results of the first animal IVF experiment were published in the mid-1930s. While some people saw it as a promising development to help infertile couples, others were critical, saying that the scientists were playing God because human life has immeasurable values in all its forms, including the earliest stages that start with fertilisation. Ethically, embryos should not be dealt with carelessly or destroyed, but unfortunately, some IVF practices create several embryos that are likely to die or freeze for an indefinite period.

From the Biblical arguments, Jenkins (1999, 97) states four basic principles that summarise the Roman Catholic theological position on the destruction of embryos during IVF:

1. God is the Lord of life and death - a person's ultimate value stems from God, and no individual can take it upon themselves to place themselves in total mastery over the life of another.
2. Human beings do not have the right to terminate the lives of other human beings. "thou shall not kill" (fifth commandment).
3. Destruction of the foetus at whatever stage of development is the taking of human life.
4. Human life begins at the moment of conception. However, an argument exists on Church agreeing with the termination of pregnancy or embryos in complex cases when the pregnancy wants to kill the mother. The publication in 1140 of Gratian's *Decretum* was the first fully systematic attempt to compile ecclesiastical legislation on the termination of pregnancy or destruction of the embryo during IVF. Gratian, according to Jenkins, maintained the distinction between formed and unformed foetus and argued that it is not murder to abort a foetus before the soul is in the body.

Until the sixteenth century, the Church followed a tradition which did not treat as murder the killing of the embryo less than 40 days; even if it was destroyed after 40 days, it was not regarded as murder because it was rarely killed in hatred. However, in 1588, Pope Sixtus V. abolished the traditional distinction between formed/animate and unformed/ inanimate foetuses and called all acts of abortion "murder" in his Papal Bull *Effraenatum*. Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the inviolability of human life from conception, arguing that denying the newly conceived the right to life undermines the entire fabric of Christian ethics. According to Jenkins (1999, 91), the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognised as having the right of a person, which is the inviolable right of every innocent life."

There is a need to focus on the controversy from totipotency results in the assertion that human individuality and personhood do not begin until 40 or 90 days after fertilising the ovum. Raeper and Edwards further opine that if one emphasises that the fertilised ovum normally will develop into a person, then the argument from potentiality may lead one to conclude, along with the Catholic Church, that an embryo is a person from the moment of conception. Ethically and religiously, because personhood bars us from abusing or killing a person, the logical conclusion is that pregnancy reduction and embryo research are immoral. Therefore, the Christians' ethico-religious perspective would like people to believe that personhood occurs at conception. Shannon (1997, 107) disagrees with this assertion and postulates that people cannot see the human countenance of the pre-embryo and cuddling it like a babe is a proof that the fetus is not yet a human being. Therefore, an embryo does not have a personality like a baby and cannot be treated like a human. The embryo's destruction during the earlier conception stage cannot be seen as murderous.

Conclusion

Religion plays a significant role in the ethical considerations surrounding in vitro fertilisation. Some Christians argue that it should be banned entirely and forever because of the controversial issues involved. However, research testifies that the desire to have children by infertile couples remains one of their most primal and deep-seated desires. Without the biological urge to produce, God-created species would reach extinction. This meaningfully suggests that if women do not produce on time, the chances of giving birth are thin.

Wayney (1998, 65) observes that infertility is a growing problem worldwide, and there has been a significant development in the reproductive technology industry to solve the problem of infertility among couples worldwide. Therefore, it is entirely legitimate and indeed praiseworthy to overcome the problem of infertility among couples that causes great pain and anguish. In some cultures, children are seen as a precious gift of marriage; thus, scientists must look for possible solutions that prevent children from

being conceived by infertile couples. In in vitro fertilisation, children are created through a technical process, made to go through quality control, and destroyed if found deficient, which the Church considers a waste of life created by God. Murphy (1990, 6) observes that in IVF, embryos may be damaged through handling and exposure. Murphy explains further that because the zygote is a potential human being, there are moral implications if the fertilised eggs are destroyed. Often, couples determine to harvest more eggs than they intend to use, which means that some of the embryos are eliminated or frozen for later use. However, if the couple conceives immediately, the frozen embryos will be destroyed because they may never need to use them again. From the Biblical point of view, it can be argued that God does not permit Christians to destroy human life because this would be considered a murderous act against the word of God.

Looking at the controversies surrounding the ethico-religious considerations of IVF, this paper submits that many of the techniques now used to overcome infertility also have profound moral implications, and infertile Christian couples should be aware of this before deciding on their use. Each technique should be critically considered to see if it is genuinely ethical to avoid the murderous act. This paper recommends that the practice of IVF should be allowed since it is the commandment of God to be fruitful and multiply. Thus, in this era of technological advancement, the practice of all assisted reproductive techniques, when the oocyte and spermatozoon originate from the wife and husband, respectively, should not be discouraged. Murphy also agrees with this recommendation that IVF with the husband's sperm and wife's egg is allowed, and the resulting child is the legal offspring of the couple, while the in vitro fertilisation of semen from the third party is considered adultery, according to the views of Christians.

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