

Catholic Article - The Fertilization of a Human Life



The modern world today is a battlefield for human life. The forces of the civilization of life and the culture of death are on a collision course; caught in the middle are the unborn who are under siege. John Paul II, in his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, writes: “The demographic question is used to justify threats and attacks against life...Face to face with overpopulation in the poorer countries,

instead of family and social policies and fair distribution of resources — anti-birth policies are enacted... Contraception, sterilization and abortion are part of the reason why there is a sharp decline in birthrate.”¹

This phenomenon of the culture of death has never been observed at any other time in the world’s history and has become prevalent after World War II (1939-1945). By culture of death is meant the breakdown of modern political, cultural and moral life mainly caused by a repudiation of God as the Creator and Lord of the universe. Man enacts his own laws independent of the Divine Law; man decides who shall live and who shall die. Twenty-seven years of legalized abortion has meant death for millions of the unborn, victims of the culture of death. On a personal level, we abet this culture with our selfishness, egotism and immorality. “This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents.”² The fields of the natural sciences and medicine are not immune to its intrusion, either.

Scientific research is developing products to suppress human life . . . The scientific way of thinking rejects the idea that there is a truth of creation which must be accepted, or a plan of God for life to be respected. A unique responsibility belongs to health-care personnel—the guardians and servants of human life. Doctors of medicine are losing sight of their ethical dimension and tempted to be agents of death and manipulators of life . . . The Hippocratic Oath requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for the sacredness of life. Nor can it be denied that the mass media are implicated in the conspiracy against life, by endorsing and promoting contraception, sterilization, abortion and euthanasia as milestones of progress and a victory for freedom, while those who are pro-life are labeled as the enemies of progress and freedom.³

Personal Reflections

As a member of the medical profession, I am cognizant of the fact that we can support life or be instruments of death, guard or destroy human life. To remain loyal to God, to our profession, and to ourselves, we must choose life! The Roman Catholic physician must integrate into his own practice lofty moral and ethical standards. He must keep in mind always that he has no authority to decide who shall live and who shall die. Human life is a gift from God; it is He alone who can give or take away life!

During my medical internship, I had delivered scores of babies. Each time I released a newborn from its mother’s womb and heard its shrill first cry with its first breath, there was that awe at the deep and sweet mystery of life, and the wonder of how this baby’s body which started with one cell, the

fertilized egg (1.5 mm. long), that will, in due time, comprise 60 trillion cells, 60,000 miles of tubing (arteries and veins), 600 muscles, 206 bones and much more!⁴

I have fond recollections of an absolutely pro-life Professor of Obstetrics who warned us, repeatedly, of the evil of abortion. I learned this lesson too well. Soon after I was licensed to practice medicine in my homeland, my first patient, a married woman in her thirties, requested an abortion. My response? “Not even for a million bucks!” Why? Because I believe in two fundamental life issues: human life is sacred and human life begins at conception and ends at the point of natural death. In my subsequent practice in internal medicine and psychiatry, I had the privilege to observe and treat the integral human person: (1) the human body, complex and flexible but basically fragile; (2) our brain with its 100 billion nerve cells — the body’s control center and the material substrate for our actions, thoughts and feelings; and (3) above all the human spirit— resilient, indomitable and the source of our intellect and choices.

The Abortion Debate

The Roe v Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court on January 22, 1973 was iniquitous, as far as human life and the future of humanity are concerned. Since then, millions of the unborn have been slaughtered in the womb in what is apparently the most unsafe place for innocent babies; their own mothers are the accomplices of the abortionists to crimes, called “a woman’s right”—a label that is euphemistic, erroneous and totally devoid of truth. This is a perversion and a distortion of reality. And because a woman has the “right to choose” to murder her unborn child, thousands of potential presidents, jurists, scientists, physicians, educators, astronauts, religious and political leaders, and millions more sent by God as the solution to humanity’s needs, will never have a chance to be of service to the world!

Human Life Begins at Conception

This article takes part in the abortion debate with this premise that human life begins at conception. Italian biologist, Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-1799) rejected the theory of the spontaneous generation of life and discovered that life resulted from impregnation; DNA was still unexplored then.⁵ For almost a century now, it has been a known fact that the life of the individual human starts with the fusion of the two human germ cells or gametes. It was Hertwig who proved that a human being begins at a precise point by the union of ovum and sperm.⁶ With the recent headway in molecular genetics, data on fertilization are not inferential but are demonstrable scientifically. This is the gist of this treatise. I also wish to pay tribute to Professor Jerome Lejeune, M.D., Ph.D. (1927-1994), a member of the Pontifical Academy of Science for twenty years, first president of the Pontifical Academy for Life and above all, a defender of human life. We honor him as a world-class geneticist and a model Roman Catholic physician. I had the great privilege to attend his lectures held at Vatican City. He once said: “Science cannot tell the difference between good and evil.”

Fertilization and Conception – Definitions

Here is one dictionary definition of conception: it means fertilization; it is the inception of pregnancy. Thus, the words, conception, fertilization, convey the same meaning; they are interchangeable when they refer to an act of being pregnant or a state of being conceived. In our discussion we will use conception, fertilization interchangeably. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary states that fertilization is the process of fusion of two gametes whereby the somatic chromosome number is restored to 46, and the development of the new individual is initiated. The Random House Dictionary explains it as the union of the male and female nuclei, the fecundation of plants and animals. Merriam-Webster’s has

another apt term for conception: it is a beginning!!!

“It is important to understand the meaning of fertilization as the beginning of a new human being,” stated Dr. Lejeune in his 1989 court testimony in Tennessee. The Court agreed with him and came to this conclusion: human life begins at conception.⁷ To this devout, humble scientist, conception means a new human being coming into life.⁸ The following words he had used, such as human and life are the very ones that pro-abortion forces use in their rhetoric to thrust upon those easily taken in, that the new emerging human life is just a blob, defined as a small drop or lump of something viscid or thick or something ill-defined or amorphous. A blob never grows, develops or directs its own development from within; it does not differentiate in order to mature and grow; it doesn’t kick or move; it is inert and lifeless. A blob stays a blob. Dr. Lejeune, in his book, *The Concentration Can: When Does Human Life Begin?* (1992), declared with authoritative competence: the human embryo is definitely not a blob. We will refer to his scientific skills, particularly evidence from DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), in proving that the embryo or fetus is not a blob.

Some Legal Positions

The United States Supreme Court adjudicated in *Roe v Wade* (1973) that the unborn child is not entitled to the right to life and therefore it does not merit the equal protection of the law guaranteed by the United States Constitution; it contends that they are not sure if the unborn is a human being or a person.⁹ This 1973 decision goes against the Declaration of Independence by the U.S. Congress on July 4, 1776. The second paragraph of the Declaration affirms thus:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Meanwhile, the Constitution of the United States, (September 17, 1787) in Article XIV, Section 1, attests that:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to its jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the States in which they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

The weighty terminology under review here are human person and human life. The legal decision of *Roe v. Wade* denied the person, humanity and life of the unborn baby in its various stages while in its mother’s womb; thereby it cleared the way for its killing at the discretion of State legislatures. At the political level, the fetus is a “thing,” an object that can be negotiated and bargained for.¹⁰

The Church Safeguards the Mystery of Life and Impedes Societal Disintegration

If the State allows the murder of its youngest citizens, whose life then is safe and who can speak for human life? The Roman Catholic Church, from its very foundation by Jesus Christ Himself 2000 years ago, has always felt the necessity to (1) defend human life as sacred from its conception to its natural end; (2) respect the dignity of the human person; and (3) reveal the truth about Man—an anthropology inspired by Faith, Revelation and Truth Himself— Jesus, the Son of God.

However, the doctrines and teaching of the Church had been rejected by The Age of Reason—a philosophical and intellectual movement of 18th Century Europe, notable for its dissent from traditional religious, political and social concepts. Its emphasis on rationalism in all types of

intellectual inquiry still dominates modern thinking. Thus the U.S. Supreme Court's decision based on modernistic ideas utilize a functional notion of the person, i.e., one is a person only to the extent that one can perform and serve utilitarian purposes.¹¹ These criteria are not objective, but subjective, capricious, unreasonable and cater to political goals.

Human Life

What or who is a human being? One dictionary definition of human is (ca 1533) — “a bipedal primate mammal, Homo sapiens: MAN broadly.” Dr. Lejeune, agrees that a human being is someone who belongs to the specie Homo sapiens regardless of his age, weight, maturity or stage of his development or tissue differentiation.¹² Thus, the earliest stages of human life, the zygote and embryo begotten of human parents, are included in the specie, Homo sapiens; aborting them is just as sinful, evil and wrong as the killing of an adult human person. Father Joseph de Torre, in his book, “Bioethical Questions,” provides us with another perspective. He says: “Human beings are truly unique as a specie in that they can think abstractly and choose freely — abilities which no other earthly creature has. Each human being is an individual and is irreplaceable.”¹³

What is life? It is an organismic state characterized by capacity for metabolism, growth, reproduction, and movement. These are characteristics also shared by plant and lower animal life. A human being, however possesses a greater degree of immanence because of his consciousness and interior life. Animals are limited to whatever can be perceived by the senses. Man transcends these limitations and can prevail over pain and suffering. With his intellect, he can discern between good and evil; with his will, he can choose between right and wrong.

How about non-life, e.g., a blob? There is an impassable barrier between non-life and life. The activities of non-living things, such as minerals, are necessary, blind and can be fully explained by physics and chemistry.¹⁴ Example: a rock falling down the slope; it is a passive recipient. Its activities are transmitted to it and the effects remain outside of the stone.¹⁵ For the philosopher, the greatest difference between life and non-life is this: life possesses immanent activities, while non-life actions are only transient. An immanent activity is one whose effects remain within the subject which acts, while in a transient one, the effects pass into another being. All living beings possess a number of immanent activities, such as growing, seeing, thinking, willing. The number of these activities and their degree of immanence increase as we ascend in the scale of being. Life's most usual criterion is movement, especially self-movement. This adds to its other mysterious qualities.¹⁶ The following attributes are characteristic of life from the scientific viewpoint:

- 1) Organization: growth and other activities are not random processes but are so controlled that they form integrated and coordinated systems.
- 2) Cellular composition: made up of cells; a cell is the basic unit of life.
- 3) Metabolism: chemical changes in a living cell by which energy is provided for vital biochemical reactions, and new material is assimilated. It is the sum of the processes in the buildup and destruction of protoplasm.
- 4) Unstable equilibrium: typical of a living organism which becomes stable chemically only after it dies.
- 5) Death: this is its eventual end.¹⁷

The above features are never found in non-living things, such as a blob.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (# 2258) states: “Human life is sacred from its beginning because it involves the creative action of God, and remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, Who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of Life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”

A decade ago, Life magazine published a vivid photographic essay, titled, “The First Pictures Ever of How Life Begins” and subtitled “The First Days of Creation.” It was about the work of Swedish photographer Lennart Nilsson who, with his high-tech tools, scanning electron microscopes and endoscopes, was able to photograph the development of a human life from its first second through its earliest hours and days. There is the mind-boggling pictorial evidence of “two small bubbles, filled with chromosomes floating around, one from the woman and one from the man. These nuclei, drawn inexorably toward each other, soon meet and begin to combine. The result is a single nucleus that contains for a new individual an entire biological blueprint — genetic information regulating all: nose length, skin color, body build, inheritable diseases, etc. Within 10 -12 hours, the two cells will split again and again, and so on.”¹⁸

Francis Crick and J.D. Watson shared the 1962 Nobel Prize in medicine for the double-helix theory of DNA, the molecular basis of our heredity. It was in the 1990s that the science of molecular genetics began to take shape. Dr. Lejeune, Professor of Fundamental Genetics at the Rene Descartes University of Paris received the Kennedy Award for his discovery of the chromosomal basis of Down's Syndrome or Trisomy 21. It is science that can delineate the beginning of human life or determine when death occurs and it is philosophy that can say: there is a human being and a human person there. Science and philosophy must have an ongoing mutual relationship; they need each other's data and insights.¹⁹

A Schema of the Unborn's First Two Months of Life

After fertilization, the following sequence takes place:

- First cell, the zygote or the fertilized egg or the first cell.
- 2-cell embryo; each cell is called a blastomere.
- 3-cell embryo.
- 4-cell embryo.
- 8-cell embryo.
- 16-cell, 32-cell embryos, and so on; 16 or more blastomeres form a morula, a solid ball of cells.
- blastocyst — formed after the morula reaches the uterus and changes to a fluid-filled cavity.
- embryo proper — formed from the inner cell mass of the blastocyst. The embryonic period extends until the end of the 7th week when all the rudimentary organs and structures are already present.
- Fetus – term for the developing conceptus after the embryonic period.²⁰

Fertilization

The fertilization of the human ovum by a spermatozoon occurs in the woman's Fallopian tube within minutes, or at the most, in a few hours after ovulation.²¹ George W. Corner described fertilization best, as follows:

The fertilization of an egg by a sperm is one of the wonders of nature, an event in which magnificent fragments of human life are driven by cosmic forces toward their appointed end—the growth of a living being. As a spectacle it can only be compared with the eclipse of the sun or the eruption of a

volcano It is, in fact, the most common and the nearest to us of nature's cataclysm; and yet it is very seldom observed because it occurs in a realm most people never see — the region of microscopic things.¹⁰

The Fertilized Egg (The Zygote)

After the process of fertilization, the ovum becomes the fertilized egg. It is also called the first cell. This is the beginning of a new and unique individual person! This uniqueness of this particular new individual person means that each individual is different from the next individual, and there is no one like him in the whole world. This is not a hunch or a mere opinion; this is a demonstrable scientific fact.²³

Dr. Lejeune calls the zygote the most specialized egg under the sun. It contains the genetic message or information which is read like an algebraic formula, by all the other subsequent cells during the process of its development.²⁴ The zygote is the earliest stage of a new human life and comes into existence during the process of fertilization.²⁵ The zygote is also the most "knowledgeable" cell in the world, since it contains all the paternal and maternal secrets of cell differentiation; i.e. its DNA contains all the instructions on how the fast-proliferating cells will diversify into various organs and structures of the still-evolving human person.²⁶ In this first cell, mental traits and the entire physical makeup, such as limbs, organs, circulatory system, etc., of this particular individual are all unambiguously laid out. This is not an unverified supposition; it is a scientifically verifiable, albeit hidden, phenomenon, perceptible to the DNA specialist, via the scientific technique of DNA manipulation of chromosomal molecules. Through this technology, one can reliably detect the features, peculiarities, and life codes of the beginning human being, and which appear immediately after conception and start to animate the new person.²⁷

The 3-Cell Embryo—the Stage of Differentiation

Shortly after fertilization, the fertilized egg undergoes immediate mitotic division;²⁸ this results in a 2-cell embryo, with each of the two daughter cells of roughly equal dimensions. One of these two daughter cells again splits into two, but the other member of this pair does not subdivide. There is an unequal division of blastomeres, according to the instructions written in the fertilized egg. This is the 3-cell embryo. That this stage occurs has been well known in the field of embryology for the past fifty or sixty years; but its significance remained a mystery. Soon after, the 4-cell embryo ensues and thereafter, the embryo continues to split into multiples of two. Most probably, it is during this period of the 3-cell embryo that a two-way message travels from the one cell on one side to the other two cells on the other side. Suddenly, there is the realization that these cells are not just an ordinary mass or a mere population of cells, or a tissue culture but a trio of cells bound for specialization and individualization, building itself according to its own inherent rules. It has been proven by geneticists, in experiments with 3-cell, 4-cell and 5-cell animal embryos that only the 3-cell embryo can differentiate into an individual organism.²⁹

There are instances wherein individuation does not occur, in cases which I have seen myself in pathological gynecologic specimens. A dermoid cyst can grow to a huge size in a woman's abdomen; it will never develop into a baby though it contains the bodily "spare parts" such as hair or teeth. It results from the division of an ovum that is not fertilized. On the other hand, in hydatidiform moles, fertilization occurs. But somehow, the fertilized egg does not subdivide correctly because the maternal genes have disappeared and only two sets of paternal chromosomes remain. The "pregnant" uterus contain only small, shiny, grape-like balls, called moles, with no fetal parts.³⁰

In summary, it is an experimentally proven fact that the 3-cell embryo is already a unique individual, different from any other person. Thus, as soon as he is conceived, a man is a man.³¹ From three cells

to four cells, the embryo grows on to eight cells, sixteen cells, thirty-two cells, sixty-four cells, and so on in quick succession until the ninth month when a fully-developed baby emerges from its mother's womb.

The Transmission of Life

There is a vitalizing principle inside the zygote that tells it to build itself into a new individual, or a particular new person. Dr. Lejeune calls this the information which is contained in a vehicle or a material substrate, DNA—the line between parent and child. It transmits the information from generation to generation. The DNA molecule in the living cell is a complicated chemical composition made up of two pieces of thread, each thread approximately 3.3 feet long, with 23 pieces of programming contained in 23 chromosomes, bringing to a total of 46 chromosomes in each DNA molecule. Each strand is identical to the other. In each chromosome are many different combinations of coded instructions which we call genes.³² Each gene determines a characteristic of a part of the body, such as the color of the eyes, etc. Genes are the units of heredity and are portions of DNA that direct the production of specific proteins. The genetic information is coded in the sequence of subunits (nucleotides) arranged like a ladder, making up the DNA molecule. Thus, they are the blueprints for cell construction. To obtain a perspective, we may visualize this inexact analogy with a personal computer which stands for the nucleus of the cell. One software is the DNA which contains a folder of chromosomes. Inside the folder are files of genes. In each gene are the nucleotide sequences of chemicals which correspond to the text or words in each file. The chromosomes can be called the Tables of the Law of Life since on them are written the programs and attributes of each individual person.³³

Information Written on the Fertilized Egg

Dr. Lejeune speaks of the information as the animating principle and the transmitter of instructions to proceed with the building of a new individual person. The information also signifies “the attribute inherent in and communicated by one of two or more alternative sequences or arrangements of something, as nucleotides in DNA.”³⁴ This information is inside the zygote and we cannot see it as it is infinitesimally small. It has been estimated that the matter of all the DNAs of the five billion human beings that will replace us in the future can fit into two aspirin tablets. Man has been reduced to his simplest expression; this is nature's provision to provide order against the random movements of particles of molecules. The information is written in the smallest language possible so that it can dictate how to manipulate, particle by particle, atom by atom, molecule by molecule. But this “formula” can expand, if the zygote is given shelter, is nourished, allowed to grow and is protected and nurtured within its mother's womb, and is not aborted, spontaneously or deliberately.³⁵

The amount of information inside the fertilized egg in 3.3 feet of DNA from each parent, is about 10^{10} to 10^{11} power, basically. If we add to that other protoplasmic processes, then no computer in the world has enough storage to carry all that staggering data involved in the making of a human person.³⁶

Modern DNA Technology DNA Manipulation

Alec Jeffreys, a geneticist from England, discovered DNA manipulation in 1987. He was able to select an ultra-microscopic piece of DNA and replicate it several times. This technique proves that a specific message, e.g., to express or not express a certain trait, is repeated many times in the chromosomes. Under the special probe invented by Jeffreys, the chromosomes appear like an electronic bar code. What does the human “bar code” of Jeffrey's method reveal? It tells us that every individual is unique, distinctive and special. The probability of persons with identical chromosomal bar codes is less than one in a billion.³⁷

PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction)

This technique was also first used in 1987. It utilizes Jeffreys's analysis but it goes further than just the DNA of one individual; it takes samples from a particular cell and targets the cell nucleus. It can recognize a characteristic sequence of a Y chromosome and can probably determine the sex of an embryo only several days old.³⁸

Methylation

To methylate means to introduce a methyl group (CH₃) onto a molecule or a chemical formula. This chemical reaction of methylation of some of the bases of DNA,³⁹ seems to be only a tiny change in the DNA molecule, but it increases the amount of information up to the power of 10¹⁵. With methylation, some traits are not expressed; and if a DNA base is not methylated, the gene is expressed. "It is a kind of language that tells the chromosome—you have to give up this trait, or express it . . . So it is necessary that some genes be expressed, and for some, to be silent."

More than thirty years ago, it was known that some bases of the DNA were methylated, but the nature of the changes made were not known then. A little more than ten years ago, Surani discovered that the methyl group was placed on the DNA cytosine base, converting it to methylcytosine — enabling it to do extraordinary things.⁴⁰

An Overdue Eulogy To A Devout Catholic Scientist: Jerome Lejeune, M.D., Ph.D.

It is appropriate now to interject a paean to Jerome Lejeune, the DNA expert and pediatrician who saw Christ in the crippled and mentally-disabled children. "Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said — Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. — And He laid His hands on them and went away"(Matthew 19: 13-15). Although I had not known him personally, I had heard him at international conferences sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, headed by Fiorenzo Cardinal Angelini. Dr. Lejeune's lectures were on: "The Ethical Aspects of the New Biomedical Technologies"(1990), "Human Genetics And The Gifts of The Holy Spirit" (1991), "The Mentally Retarded: A New Approach", (1992), and "Borders of Genetics" (1993). It gave me great pleasure to hear him and see him in person, since I had always respected him for his discovery of trisomy 21 in the human chromosome which contains the gene for Down's Syndrome, a relatively common congenital disorder (1 in 600 births); it causes delayed growth and mental retardation. What I did not know until recently was that he was also a very devout Catholic, a personal friend of Pope John Paul II, a member of the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences for twenty years. It was on his initiative that the present Holy Father established the Pontifical Academy for Life on the 11th of February, 1994; he was its first president. Two months later, in April, 1994, he died. The details here have been obtained from articles written by two of his friends, one of them being Wanda Poltawska, M.D. a collaborator of our Holy Father for forty years at the Institute of the Theology of the Family in Cracow, Poland; she and I met at the meetings for health care workers in Rome and we have become friends since. She described Dr. Lejeune as a dedicated physician who had under his care several thousand sick children with genetic disorders; he suffered at the hands of his fellow-physicians who did not have any qualms about aborting or killing defective infants. At the same time he was supportive of other doctors who were discriminated against because of their anti-abortion stance.⁴¹

A French geneticist, Dr. Marie Odile-Rhetore, an associate of his since 1952, characterized him as "happy in a simple fashion and knew how to make people happy; there was no envy, bitterness or jealousy in him. He knew his days were numbered but he never complained, only to say that his

illness was stupid only because there were still tasks to do. He was critical of scientists who no longer know what a human being is or when life begins. Dr. Lejeune had a very simple definition of a human being: he is a member of our specie, *Homo sapiens*.”⁴² A fitting epitaph for him should read: Here lies a humble scientist, and a fearless Roman Catholic — truly, a saintly physician, and a role model for many. Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord. May he rest in peace!

Rebuttal of Some Pro-abortion Opinions

Pro-choice people who choose to slay the innocent in their mothers’ wombs share four unfounded beliefs related to (1) the uncertainty as to life’s beginning; (2) abortion as a therapeutic medical procedure; (3) doubts about the humanness of the unborn; and (4) the unborn as a non-person. These are crucial issues that we shall rebut.

Human life has a fuzzy beginning

But we argue that conception is the unquestionable beginning of a human life since what is conceived is a member of the species, *Homo sapiens*—Dr. Lejeune’s definition of a human being. From its very beginning, the zygote, is a human being. The Pontifical Academy For Life, in a symposium in Cracow, Poland, held on November 30 to December 1, 1998, unanimously affirmed that:

In the development of a human being, from the time of conception, there is no point at which any qualitative change takes place; there is only a non-discrete continuum of life impulses, transmitted by one cell to another, and the continuum is interrupted only at the moment of death.⁴³

The fertilized egg is the beginning of the human being, the human individual, the human person, all one and inseparable. Why is this true? Because from the moment that the human sperm makes contact with the human ovum, under normal conditions, all subsequent development to the birth of a live newborn is a *fait accompli*. There is nothing else that can hinder its relentless and unstoppable progression to grow to full maturity as another human being.⁴⁴

Abortion is a therapeutic medical procedure

Legalized abortion is not performed as a medical necessity. As a former intern in Obstetrics-Gynecology, I know very well that benign medical terminology is used by abortionists to cover up a malignant state. What comes to my mind is the memory of a young woman brought to our hospital on a stretcher, in a state of shock, her abdomen rigid as a wooden board. Her abortionist had perforated her uterus and a portion of her colon.

“Abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes; life, once conceived, must be protected with the utmost care,” says Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁴⁵ Father Joseph de Torre, a personal friend of Cardinal Ratzinger, and an Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Asia and the Pacific near Manila, states: “Abortion is the worst type of murder that exists, because it operates under all three aggravating circumstances. First, the embryo is absolutely innocent. There is no justification, whatsoever, to kill that person. Secondly, this developing, miniature person is totally defenseless. What can this little baby do inside its mother’s womb to defend itself? Thirdly, the embryo is killed by its own mother. How do you explain an infanticide committed by its own mother, since it is a widely acknowledged fact that the greatest human love is that between mother and child.”⁴⁶

The encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) of Pope John Paul II, is unequivocal about

abortion as the killing of a human being. Here are selected excerpts which, even if repetitious, only serve to underscore a major message.

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always a moral evil, whether it is an embryo, fetus, child or adult (#37). The killing of a human being, choices once unanimously considered criminal, are now more socially acceptable . . . One end result is the tragic loss of the right to life of the unborn (# 4). Abortion is no longer deemed a crime, but a “right” to the extent that states legalize it and many provide free abortion services. Embryos and fetuses are attacked when they are most weak and defenseless, with the complicity of the family, which by its very nature should be the sanctuary of life. These crimes are also disguised by using innocuous medical terms (#11). Liberal ideology tries to justify and disguise these atrocious crimes against human life (#8). They directly violate the divine commandment, Thou shalt not kill (#13). God cannot leave these crimes unpunished. The blood of the murdered one demands that God should render justice(#9). How can one speak of the dignity of the human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted ?(#20)

The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind is a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis in the moral sense. No word has the power to change the reality of things; procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing of a human being in the initial phase of its existence — from its conception to its birth into the world. The moral evil of abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. It is never justifiable to kill deliberately an innocent human being (#58). The Catholic Church makes clear that abortion is a serious and dangerous crime. Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, in communion with the Bishops — I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or a means, is always a grave moral disorder (#62). The killing of innocent human creatures is always an absolutely unacceptable act (#63). Radical views even maintain that in a modern, pluralistic society, there should be complete freedom to dispose of lives, their own or others, including that of the unborn (#68). When a social majority or the legislature decrees the legality of abortion, is this not a tyrannical act against the weakest and the most defenseless? Our consciences demand that we reject these crimes against humanity(#70). Abortion and euthanasia — completely opposed to the inviolable right to life — are crimes that human laws should not legitimize(# 72-73). The freedom to choose immoral acts incompatible with the love of God and human dignity is not true freedom. The beginning of genuine freedom are the negative moral precepts, such as Thou shalt not kill, etc. St. Augustine writes: The beginning of true freedom is to be free from crimes - like murder, adultery, theft, sacrilege, etc.” (#75-76)

There were interdicts against abortion in the early centuries of Christianity. “You shall not kill an unborn child or murder a newborn infant” — from Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, in the Second Century. Tertullian (160-225) was born in Carthage and converted to Christianity. He was a Latin writer who denounced paganism. This is from his Apology: “For us, murder is once for all forbidden; so even the child in the womb, while yet the mother’s blood is still being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful for us to destroy. To forbid birth is only quicker murder. It makes no difference whether one takes away the life once born or destroy it as it comes to birth. He is a man, who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed.” St. Basil the Great (330-370) was the Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and a Father of the Church, along with Sts. Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzen. They were three philosophers whose Christian orthodoxy and influence led to the defeat of Arianism. In his Letters, Basil wrote: “A woman who deliberately destroys a fetus is answerable for murder. And any fine distinction as to its being completely formed or unformed is not admissible among us.” One of the popes of the 20th Century, Pope Pius XI, in his Encyclical, Casti

Connubii (December 31, 1930), wrote: “However we may pity the mother whose health and even life is imperiled by the performance of her natural duty, there remains no sufficient reason for condoning the direct murder of the innocent.” 47

Is the unborn already a human being and does it deserve respect?

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once wrote that “there has been a destructive and very tragic departure from the American ideals of freedom and human dignity — the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* to exclude the unborn child from the human family. No one can deny that the unborn child is a distinct human being, that it is human, and that it is alive. It is unjust therefore, to deprive the unborn child of its right to life on the basis of its age, size or state of dependency . . . Instead, the child — the greatest of gifts — is portrayed as a competitor, an intrusion, and an inconvenience.” 48

The words, human, person, have been cited in this article, recurrently, often as equivalents or descriptive of each other — but both terms undeniably allude to man. This paper, from the very outset, had painstakingly presented proven scientific data based on DNA from a world-renowned molecular geneticist. Dr. Lejeune stated that DNA manipulation opens a tiny window to view the intimate and intricate details of man from his very beginning. As soon as he has been conceived, science states, a man is a man.⁴⁹ Man begins his life as a zygote begotten from human parents who belong to the specie, *Homo sapiens*. Archbishop Elio Sgrechia, Professor of Bioethics at Sacred Heart University in Rome, and Vice President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, validates the prior postulates:

From the moment of fertilization, we are in the presence of a new, independent being who develops in a continuous fashion. There is no moment which is less necessary than another; each stage is strictly dependent upon the stage which precedes it and which determines it . . . When the embryo is finally implanted in the uterus, it does not lose its individuality or the continuity of its development. Human life is discontinued or ceases only at the moment of death. 50

The unborn child is not a person

An excellent definition of person is given by Boethius (480- 525), a Roman philosopher, statesman and Christian theologian: “a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.” In contrast, a human being denotes an individual, a fragment of society. The human person is neither body nor soul, but a rational being arising out of the substantial union of both body and soul. The person is man considered in the totality of his being, and whose end is ordered to God. In virtue of a person being ordered to God, he must not be used as a means or an instrument. His dignity and integrity must be upheld and respected. The person is superior to the order of society.⁵¹

Monsignor Romano Guardini, a prolific religious writer, was the dean of German Catholic thinkers and educators for over half a century and author of over sixty books. He states:

Man is not inviolable by the single fact that he is alive; an animal also would have the same right since it, too, is alive. Human life is inviolable because man is a person. Being a person is not a datum of a psychological nature, but an existential one. The fact of being a person does not depend on one’s age, psychological condition, or the natural gifts which one possesses. The person still exists even in states of lack of full consciousness, as for example, in sleep. The personality can be undeveloped as in babies, yet the baby still requires respect. The personality may not emerge in certain psychological conditions, as in mental illness or physical defects, or may be hidden, as in the human embryo. The person exists from the very beginning of human life, and it is the person that gives dignity to man.

Being a person distinguishes us from things and makes us subjects. 52

Indeed, the growing awareness of the basic rights of human beings is related to the cognizance of human beings as persons.⁵³

According to Dr. John Crosby, Professor and Chair of Philosophy at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, the essence of personal selfhood is being: “a substance in virtue of standing in itself, of existing neither as a part nor as a property of another.” Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) too, states that the person must be studied in terms of his substance, potentiality, rationality and subjectivity. Dr. Crosby also makes a distinction between being and consciousness which are partly dissociated in the human person. For example, during sleep, there is no consciousness and we are all being; in periods of thinking, there is more consciousness, yet there is that mindfulness of the mystery of our being as persons. Thus, being outweighs always consciousness in the human person. Being, the ontological value of the human person, does not wax and wane.⁵⁴ The foes of the life of the unborn wrongly argue that personhood is equated only with full consciousness and total functioning. *Roe v Wade* ruled that the unborn child does not deserve the legal protection of the State because it has no consciousness and is not able to perform – thus, it is a non-person. However, Karol Wojtyla rejects a too simplistic demotion and downgrading of man to pure consciousness. The Holy Father, as a philosopher, stresses man’s metaphysical beingness.⁵⁵

Abortionists can have no qualms about killing a fetus which they can regard as a human being but deny that it is a person. Similarly, those who believe in euthanasia will also say that the comatose only exist on a merely sub-personal or biological level, and are dead as persons. As stated previously, the zygote is the first stage of bodily human life, but eventually it develops to its full-grown human body at its birth. From this miniscule body, the zygote, emerges the physically-mature baby as the same organism. So, Dr. Crosby asks:

Is it not natural to assume that I, who now live and act as an adult begin to exist as an embodied person from my very beginning as a fertilized egg since the human embryo and the adult human being are the same living being, with each one at different stages of the same human life? There is no evidence to suggest that because the unborn is much weaker physically that it cannot be the same body of the adult human person. So we can only come to the conclusion that the person is already present in the early stages of human life.⁵⁶

The Functions of Science and Philosophy

For many, science is the sole criterion of truth; to the faithful followers of science, it is precise, based on facts, and infallible. Science can be used in its wide sense — as any systematized body of knowledge on a certain subject; in its narrow sense, it refers to the sciences of biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, genetics, etc., and it is this latter view to which we refer. The Catholic Church does not view science in a negative light; the Church is very positive about it, since it sees it as a gift from God and a perfection of our intelligence. Pius XI founded the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on October 28, 1936 to respect the autonomy of science and to encourage scientific research.

Medical science has made tremendous advances to save human lives, especially in the recent decades. But what can it say about the life of the unborn child? It can say how life functions and can define with precision the beginning of life as molecular genetics has done. Unfortunately, science is also implicated in abortion and much fetal research does not respect the dignity of the human person.

Scientists are deeply divided on the “humanness” of the fetus. In Poland the Association for the Support and Popularizing of Sciences declared that natural science does not pronounce judgments on

the humanity of the zygote; the Polish Academy of Science agreed. It meant that the child is human at birth but not before its birth. Whose views can we accept as valid? Who has the right to declare that the newly conceived child belongs to the human race? Apparently, these scientists were not answering the concrete scientific questions but were responding to their own subjective personal value systems. It is only objective scientific empirical data and research which can say that the unborn fetus has the DNA and the physical makeup and program of the species, *Homo sapiens*, and it is, therefore, a human being. The Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council (1989), in concurrence, said: "The human embryo, though displaying successive phases in its development which are designated by different terms (zygote, morula, blastocyst, embryo, fetus) also displays a progressive differentiation as an organism and maintains a continuous and genetic identity." In a nutshell, the necessary and sufficient condition of using human for the unborn is that it came from human parents. As J.W. von Goethe (1749-1831), one of the giants of world literature, said, "A small man is also a man!" 57

The term person is a philosophical, and not a scientific concept. As remarked upon earlier, science and philosophy must have a mutual relationship to be able to offer a unified view of man and reality. It is philosophy that can fathom more deeply into reality and answer the question, What is life? Its view of the universe is far-reaching. It can attest that the embryo is a person because in the fullness of time, its potentiality is certainly transformed into an actuality, i.e., the embryo is a person in potency with the same intellect and free will, but cannot exercise them yet because of its very early stage of development. It is a person in potency but a person with the same dignity that we respect in human beings that are already born and those that have developed their capacities to the fullest. We can speak of a potential person or human being in the fertilized egg — and what we mean by this potentiality is this: the person's essential human nature is there already and that the process of development of a human being has begun. It does not mean that there is only a possibility that a human being will develop from a zygote. The actual human being is there, the program to start a living human being is there; but time is needed so his capacities can be fully developed, so he can be in a position to act, so he can find his place under the sun. So how can we say that a human being is not in the fetus or in its earlier stages? Science can explain the biological functions and the molecular interactions in a human life. Philosophy can say that to be a person does not mean to function as a person all the time. Person is a metaphysical concept and it says that the human being as a person is unique, not repeatable, and non-transferable. For philosophy, reality is more than what is observable and perceptible to the senses. However it needs the help of science, with its DNA evidence, to say that life has already begun; the science of genetics confirms this by saying that the genes in the chromosomes of an individual makes him also unique and unrepeatable. Philosophy can also tell us that to be a person does not mean one always acts as a person. It is enough that one has the natural potentiality to become a rational being. Science and philosophy, with different methodologies, both ultimately express the full truth about man — as a human being and as a human person.58

The integral view of man is beyond what is visible and tangible. Man must not be reduced to mere genetic inheritance for he is also spirit, immanent and transcendent. Integral knowledge requires both scientific discipline and the wisdom of philosophy. There must be an integration of scientific research with ethics and morality to fully serve the human individual and the human person. The Church explains the mystery of man not only by his material DNA but also by his spiritual soul.

The Spiritual Soul

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual (CCC # 362). Dr. Lejeune presents genetic evidence for this fact by equating the information in DNA with the spirit or soul of man, albeit not to a very precise

degree. We can only surmise that the information is the material substrate for the soul, our mysterious and spiritual essence. The human being is both matter and spirit. Dr. Lejeune writes that matter is inert and lifeless. “Matter is matter. There is no living matter. What exists in man is animated matter. Matter cannot reproduce itself for it is not living. Matter is just a support for the information which makes life possible. Information animates matter to force matter to take the form of a human being.”

Dr. Lejeune asserts that the life codes for each special, unique individual are all present at conception and animate the new person very soon after fertilization occurs.⁵⁹ The genetic code is an internal plan that penetrates matter to its depth, to the subatomic level, and determines the way in which matter organizes itself.⁶⁰ Dr. Lejeune postulates that the object of genetics is to (1) ascertain what is it that animates non-living matter so it is changed to living matter and (2) describe the information that controls the millions of molecules that are organized to serve the individual’s needs. The animated matter in the new individual enlightens the body so the spirit becomes incarnate.⁶¹

The Church teaches that the unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the “form” of the body: it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living human body. Spirit and matter in man are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature (CCC# 365). What better confirmation of this Church doctrine from the science of genetics than this statement by Dr. Lejeune: “The genetic information and the molecular structure of the fertilized egg, the spirit and the matter, the soul and the body — compactly fused in the process of the conception of a human person — the beginning of a new human life.”⁶²

End Notes

1 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 25, March 1995, #16.

2 *Ibid.* #12.

3 *Ibid.* # 13, 22, 87, 17.

4 Alan B. Nourse, et al, *The Body* (New York: Time, Inc. 1964), 10, 77, 56.

5 Jerome Lejeune, *The Concentration Can* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 61, 160.

6 Juan de Dios Vial Correa, “The Human Embryo As An Organism . . . And One of Us” *Medicine & Law: For Or Against Life?* (Citta del Vaticano, Libreria. Editrice Vaticana, 1999), 57-58.

7 Lejeune, *op. cit.* 104, 160.

8 *Ibid.* 70.

9 *Ibid.* 202.

10 *Loc. Cit.*

11 Lejeune, *op. cit.* 203.

12 Lejeune, *op. cit.* 70.

13 Joseph de Torre, ed. *Bioethical Questions* (Metro Manila: University of Asia and Pacific Foundation, 1999), 356.

14 J.F. Donceel, *Philosophical Psychology* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 29.

15 De Torre, *op. cit.* 31.

16 Donceel, *op. cit.* 19-20.

17 Donceel, *loc. cit.*

18 Lennart Nilsson and editors *Life “The First Days of Creation,”* *Life*, Aug, 1990.

19 De Torre, *op. cit.* 58 .

20 F. Gary Cunningham, et al, *William’s Obstetrics*, 20th edition (Appleton & Lange, 1997), 105-107; The term, *conceptus* refers to all tissues that develop from the zygote, including the embryo, fetus and placenta.

21 *Ibid.* 19.

22 *Ibid.* 96.

23 Lejeune, op. cit. 41.

24 Ibid. 44-45.

25 Ibid. 68, 70.

26 Ibid. 126.

27 Ibid. 158.

28 Mitosis — a process that takes place in the nucleus of a dividing cell, resulting in the formation of two new nuclei, each having the same number of chromosomes as the parent nuclei.

29 Lejeune, op. cit. 38-39, 51.

30 Ibid. 46.

31 Ibid. 150-158.

32 Genes are the specific sequence of nucleotides in DNA or RNA. They are the functional unit of inheritance by (a) specifying the structure of a particular polypeptide and (b) controlling the function of the genetic materials.

33 Lejeune, op. cit. 31.

34 Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition (1994), 599.

35 Lejeune, op. cit. 32, 37.

36 Ibid. 55.

37 Ibid. 41-42.

38 Ibid. 42, 121.

39 We have more than 100,000 genes. They contain the same four bases, namely: adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine. Any two of these bases make up a rung of the ladder (each helix of the DNA). The specific sequence of their bases in pairs spell out the function of each gene.

40 Lejeune, op. cit. 55, 43.

41 Wanda Poltawska, "Current Objectives Of the Pontifical Academy For Life," *Medicine & Law*, op. cit.: 313-319.

42 Marie Odile-Rhetore, "Jerome Lejeune: A Scientific and Christian Profile," *Dolentium Hominum*, vol. 31 #1 (1996): 143-145.

43 Poltawska, loc. cit. 319.

44 De Torre, op. cit. 433-434.

45 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation," *Origins*, 19, March 1987: Article I, # 1.

46 De Torre, op. cit. 68.

47 Quotes taken from *The Book of Catholic Quotations*, John Chapin, ed. (Fort Collins, CO, 1984), 1.

48 Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "Recalling America: To the U.S. Supreme Court," *First Things*, May, 1994: 9-10.

49 Lejeune, op. cit. 157, 48.

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58 de Torre, op. cit. 3, 22, 57, 61, 447, 461.

59 Lejeune, op. cit. 34, 158.

60 Gula, op. cit. 147.

61 Jerome Lejeune, "Human Genetics and the Gifts of the Spirit," *Dolentium Hominum*, No. 16, 1991: 72.

62 Lejeune, *The Concentration Can*, op. cit. 47.

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