

A Moral Analysis of *In Vitro* Fertilization in the Philippine Context

Siddharta B. Chiong, OP*

Faculty of Philosophy, Ecclesiastical Faculties,
University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

Abstract: This paper analyzes the moral issues of *in vitro* fertilization in the context of the Philippines by first unpacking the socio-cultural factors that may influence Filipino couples to avail themselves of IVF. The paper then analyzes the moral merits of the *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination* in the Philippines in the light of the Catholic tradition. This analysis will give an overview of how doctors practice IVF specifically in the Philippines. The paper then presents three moral objections to the practice of IVF. Finally, some Filipino virtues are offered as cultural resources that may help infertile couples in bearing the cross of infertility. This paper hopes to contribute to the scarce resources that tackle this issue from the Filipino perspective since most bioethical papers are limited to the Western perspective.

Keywords: In Vitro Fertilization, Unitive and Procreative Dimensions of the Marital Act, Filipino Studies, Loob and Kapwa

* Siddharta B. Chiong, OP can be contacted at siddharta.chiong.eccle@ust.edu.ph.

The author would like to thank Rev. Fr. Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, OP, under whose class this paper was conceptualized and developed.

Introduction

In Filipino society, newlyweds are usually expected to bring news of a coming child within a year of marriage, so much so that - as Leonardo N. Mercado observes- “In-laws get anxious if the newly-weds do not have a child after one year.”¹ The anxiety comes from the implicit fear that the couple might be *baog* or “infertile.”

Infertility is medically defined as, “A disease characterized by the failure to establish a clinical pregnancy after 12 months of regular, unprotected sexual intercourse or due to an impairment of a person’s capacity to reproduce either as an individual or with his/her partner.”² Not surprisingly the Filipino expectation of a child coincides with the medical time frame.

In 2019, research shows that globally the age-standardized prevalence rate of infertility increased by 0.370% per year for females and 0.291% per year for males from 1990 to 2017. In 2017, there are 1,571.35 in every 100,000 women, aged 15-44, who suffer from infertility throughout the world (95% UI: 1115.30, 2121.94). It was observed that those aged 15–19 had the lowest prevalence rate for infertility, while those aged 35–39 group had the highest prevalence rate.³ Delayed motherhood among professionals is one reason for childlessness. As more Filipino couples prioritize their careers instead of having children early on in their marriage, the rate of childlessness in the Philippines will also increase.

In 2011, Merck Serono Pharmaceutical commissioned Synovate to conduct a survey which involved 100 participating households in key cities in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.⁴ The survey revealed that one out of ten Filipino couples is suffering

¹ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publication, 1975), 194.

² Fernando Zegers-Hochschild *et al.*, “The International Glossary on Infertility and Fertility Care, 2017” *Fertility and Sterility*, vol. 108, Issue 3 (2017): 401. This is the latest revision of the definition with the following remarks: “When developing terms and definitions, special attention was given to possible impacts on ethics and human rights issues as well as recognizing and respecting cultural sensitivities, ethnic minorities, and gender equality. Some of these considerations resulted in a consensus modification of the previous definition of ‘infertility.’ The first modification included broadening the concept of infertility to be an ‘impairment of individuals’ in their capacity to reproduce, irrespective of whether they have a partner. The revised definition also reinforces the concept of infertility as a disease, which can generate an impairment of function.”

³ Hui Sun *et al.*, “Global, Regional, and National Prevalence and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years for Infertility in 195 Countries and Territories, 1990–2017: Results from a Global Burden of Disease Study, 2017,” *Aging* vol. 11, issue 23 (2019): 10952—10991.

⁴ Randolph L. Flores, “Infertility in The Philippines and Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology: A Commentary,” *Scholars Academic Journal of Biosciences*, vol. 4 (2016): 329. See also Tam Noda, “1 in 10 Filipinos Suffer Infertility – Study,” *The Philippines Star*, April 3, 2013. Accessed May 21, 2021. Available from <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/health-and-family/2013/04/03/926523/1->

from infertility. This survey is obviously not conclusive, but it does confirm the problem of infertility in the Philippines. These couples avoided treatment due to the following principal reasons: 1) financial reasons (86%), 2) time constraints (27%), and 3) patient's belief (17%). Dr. Marc Anthony Ancheta, MD, Chief of The Medical City's Reproductive Medicine, Infertility and Gynecologic Endoscopy, says "some 35 to 40% of a couple's inability to conceive a child are due to female factors."⁵ Infertility is a real problem globally and locally, that Republic Act No. 10354 or the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, in Section 4, considers "prevention, treatment and management of infertility and sexual dysfunction" as a basic health care service.

***In Vitro* Fertilization**

Assisted Reproductive Technology

Modern science has developed means of addressing infertility through Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). ART refers to, "All treatments or procedures that include the *in vitro* handling of both human oocytes and sperm or of embryos for the purpose of establishing a pregnancy. This includes, but is not limited to, *in vitro* fertilization and embryo transfer, gamete intrafallopian transfer, zygote intrafallopian transfer, tubal embryo transfer, gamete and embryo cryopreservation, oocyte and embryo donation, and gestational surrogacy."⁶

The Catholic Church is cautious about the use of ART not simply because they are "artificial," but because many of them pose a threat to the dignity of the human person.⁷ To be sure, any medical techniques that facilitate or enable the natural and normal performance of the conjugal act to attain its proper end are morally acceptable.⁸ The Church, in fact, encourages research that reduce sterility because this is at the service of the human person.⁹ Treating the disease of infertility is a fulfillment of a healthcare professional's God-given vocation.¹⁰

10-filipinos-suffer-infertility-study. See also Frances Mangosing, "1 in 10 Filipinos Couples Have Infertility Problems– Survey," *Lifestyle Inquirer*, August 24, 2013. Accessed May 21, 2021. Available from <https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/121705/1-of-10-filipino-couples-have-infertility-problems-survey/>.

⁵ Flores, "Infertility in The Philippines and Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology: A Commentary," 328.

⁶ Zegers-Hochschild *et al.*, "The International Glossary on Infertility and Fertility Care, 2017," 397.

⁷ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae* (February 22, 1987), Introduction, § 3.

⁸ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, Introduction, § 3.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), § 2375.

¹⁰ Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, OP, *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 148.

History of In Vitro Fertilization

One of the most popular ART forms is *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). On July 25, 1978, Louise Joy Brown, the first test-tube baby, was delivered. Louis was conceived through a, then, clandestine experiment that will later be known as IVF.¹¹ The procedure was developed by Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards. Edwards was later awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2010. Since then, IVF has helped countless couples, who may initially be reluctant with the procedure, to experience the joy of having a baby.¹²

The IVF technology was introduced to the Philippines by Dr. Angela Ho, MD and Prof. Maureen Tsakok, MD of the National University of Singapore in 1995. Together with pioneering Filipino doctors like Prof. Greg Pastorfied, MD of the Philippine General Hospital and Prof. Leonardo Almeda, MD of the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center, they founded the Center for Reproductive Medicine at Connecticut, Greenhills in 1996- the first IVF center in the Philippines.¹³ The same year witnessed the first IVF live birth in the country.¹⁴ Currently, there are six IVF centers in the Philippines:¹⁵

- Center for Advanced Reproductive Medicine and Infertility
in **St. Luke's Medical**
Global City, 32nd St. Bonifacio Global City, 5th Ave, Taguig, 1112
Metro Manila
- Kato Reproductive Technologies
Tower 1, The Enterprise Center 6766 Ayala Avenue Makati City 1226
Philippines
- **Victory A.R.T. Laboratory Phil. Inc.**
Medical Plaza Makati, Amorsolo cor. Dela Rosa St., Legaspi Village,
Makati City
- **Philippine Center for Assisted Reproduction, Inc.**
Raffles Corporate Center, F. Ortigas, Jr. Rd., Ortigas Center, Pasig City

¹¹ H. W. Jones, "Moments in the life of Patrick Steptoe," in *Fertility and Sterility*, vol. 66, no. 1 (1996):15–16.

¹² Chaya Raizel Breger, "In Vitro Fertilization Brings Joy to Infertile Couples," in *Reproductive Technology*, ed. Cindy Mur (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2005), 25-30.

¹³ "Prologue" in Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine, *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination* (Makati: OVT-Graphic Line, Inc., 2016).

¹⁴ P. Dupont, "Life and Death in the Philippines" *Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2013): 277.

¹⁵ "Prologue" in Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine, *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination*.

- **Repro Optima Center for the Reproductive Health, Inc.**
Address: Ground Floor JRDC Building, Osmeña Blvd., Capitol Site, Cebu City
- **In-Vitro Fertilization Davao, Inc.**
Brokenshire Hospital, Madapo Hills, Davao City

As the popularity and market for IVF continues to grow in the Philippines, more IVF centers are expected to open. Lee Women's Hospital of Taiwan has already expressed plans of opening a center in the country.¹⁶

The Medical Procedure of *In Vitro* Fertilization

Introduction

IVF is an emotionally straining and complex procedure that requires a great deal of transparency. Couples need to reveal very personal and even embarrassing matters to clinic staff. Furthermore, they must “allow themselves to be manipulated physically and emotionally as they progress through the procedure.”¹⁷ Many vlogs and blogs have been uploaded in social media platforms that follow couples in their IVF journey, giving insight into their frustrations and genuine joy during and after the procedure.

This section of the article follows Dr. Geoffrey Sher MD and his colleagues' description of the medical procedure. Most IVF cycles follow these steps: 1) preparation; 2) induction of ovulation; 3) egg and sperm retrieval; 4) embryo transfer.

Preparation and Tests

A number of tests are conducted, which may include tests for viral infection for both couples. For the man, sperm quality will be tested, such as sperm chromatin structure assay. There can also be tests for sperm antibody, to check if there are antibodies that affect the ability of the sperm to fertilize an egg.

The woman may undergo immunologic testing to diagnose if large lymphocytes in the uterine lining are activated because these damages the trophoblast

¹⁶ Ching M. Alano, “Taiwan's fertility doctor brings affordable in vitro treatment,” *Philippine Star*, October 30, 2017. Accessed May 21, 2021. Available from <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/health-and-family/2017/10/30/1753971/taiwans-fertility-doctor-brings-affordable-vitro-treatment>.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Sher et al., *In Vitro Fertilization: The A.R.T. of Making Babies* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 43. This is the primary resource for the section “The Medical Procedure of *In Vitro* Fertilization,” of this article.

of an implanting embryo, causing a miscarriage. Tests for thyroid problems that are associated with infertility may also be conducted.

The woman also needs to undergo a pelvic assessment to inspect irregularities among the pelvic organs. Test are done to diagnose the quality of the endometrium, which is the mucosal tissue that surrounds the uterus and onto which the embryo implants itself. There needs to be more than 8mm sagittal thickness and a triple line appearance of the endometrium before egg transplantation can proceed. Finally, the health of the woman is essential, and she will be given nutritional supplements.

Induction of Ovulation

Controlled Ovarian Stimulation (COS) is conducted through the use of fertility drugs that enhance the growth and development of multiple ovarian follicles that will produce multiple healthy eggs for follicular aspiration. Usually, birth control pills are used 10 days or more before COS in order to influence the menstrual cycle and thus manipulate when COS can begin. 10 days after the onset of menstruation, fertility drugs such as gonadotropins are given. These fertility drugs are usually in the form of self-administered intra-muscular injections applied in the abdomen area or in the thighs for around 8-14 days.

Seven days after initial gonadotropin therapy, the patient is monitored in order to determine the best day to administer the trigger shot. Once there are sufficiently large enough follicles and the estrogen level is optimal, the doctor administers hCG (Profasi, Novarel, Pregnyl, Ovidrel), which triggers ovulation and the final maturation of the eggs. Doctors try to induce the maximum number of eggs while avoiding hyper-stimulation syndrome which is characterized by the enlargement of the ovaries resulting in fluid exuding into the abdominal cavity.

Egg and Sperm Retrieval

Egg retrieval is conducted 34-36 hours after the hCG shot, which is right before the eggs ovulate. Ultrasound-guided egg retrieval is performed under analgesic sedation and paracervical anesthetic. While the woman is sedated, the doctor will introduce a long ultrasound probe into the vagina, which provides images of the ovaries on a monitor. The doctor then inserts a needle connected to a suction device through a sleeve into the vagina beside the probe. The needle pierces through the vaginal wall and into the ovaries and into follicles. The doctor then aspirates the follicular fluid and the eggs along with it, and drains it into a receptacle, usually a test tube. An average of 10-20 eggs are usually retrieved, depending on the ovarian

reserve of the woman.¹⁸ The egg retrieval procedure takes 20 to 30 minutes, with about 1 hour of postoperative recovery.

In circumstances where the ovaries may not be accessible via transvaginal ultrasound, laparoscopy may then be used by inserting a telescope placed in the umbilicus through an incision in the abdomen area.

The collected follicular fluid is examined by an embryologist, who checks the number of aspirated eggs and their maturity. Full chromosomal analysis (complete karyotyping) genomic hybridization (CGH) is conducted to accurately assess the eggs. Any discovered abnormalities render an egg incompetent and unusable.

Semen retrieval can be conducted through manual stimulation or through intercourse in which the ejaculate is deposited in a special condom, which is later collected by medical staff.

Insemination

When the egg reaches optimal maturity, it is placed in a petri dish with a nourishing liquid. This liquid medium simulates the acid-alkaline balance in a woman's reproductive tract.

On the other hand, a centrifuge is used to separate the sperm from the seminal fluid. Then the sperm is capacitated by being washed in a special liquid which alters the plasma membrane covering the acrosome on the sperm's head, causing the release of enzymes for penetration.

The embryologist, then, adds drops of the capacitated sperm (numbering about 50,000) in the petri dish with the egg(s). They are then allowed to undergo fertilization on their own, while the dish is incubated at 37° C, the normal body heat. Fertilization normally happens within a few hours after the mixture. The fertilized embryos are then cultured for two to six days.

Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) can be used when healthy sperm is absent in the ejaculate or in similar complications. ICSI involves direct injection of a single sperm into the cytoplasm of the egg with a needle, guided by a sophisticated microscope. Healthy sperm can be obtained through Testicular Sperm Extraction directly from the male organ.

¹⁸ A study found that harvesting 15 eggs in one retrieval provided the best statistical chance of live births through IVF. Sesh Kamal Sunkara *et al.*, "Association between the number of eggs and live birth in IVF treatment: an analysis of 400 135 treatment cycles," *Human Reproduction*, vol. 26, issue 7 (2011): 1768–1774.

Microscopic Embryo Grading and Genetic Embryo Assessment

The selection of competent embryos for transfer to the uterus is the most important predictor of the success of the IVF program because incompetent embryos may result in 1) failure of the embryo to develop, 2) miscarriage after implantation, or 3) chromosomal birth defect like Down syndrome.

Unfortunately, most methods currently used to select the best embryos for transfer are relatively inconsistent- yielding on average less than 20% pregnancy-rate per embryo. Thus multiple embryos as usually transferred into the uterus to increase the prospect of a successful pregnancy. This, however, leads to the risk of high-order multiple pregnancies (three or more fetuses), which puts the mother in grave danger.

Assisted Hatching

Assisted hatching involves creating a hole in the zona pellucida. The zona pellucida is the flexible *shell* that surrounds the embryo, and naturally dissolves to allow the embryo to attach to the endometrium. Assisted hatching skips a step in the implantation process and facilitates embryo implantation.

Embryonic Transfer

The embryonic transfer is the shortest step but the most critical phase. Generally, the embryos are transferred to the uterus 48 to 144 hours after insemination. Doctors will decide whether to transfer a 2-3 days old cleaved embryo or a 5-6 days old blastocyst.

The physician first inserts a speculum to expose the cervix. An abdominal ultrasound transducer is placed on the lower abdomen to give an image of the uterus. The doctor then gently introduces a flexible catheter loaded with embryos through the cervix into the uterine cavity. When in place, the embryologist injects the embryos into the uterus. The insertion depth is just short of the top of the uterus to avoid injuring the endometrium. If there are residual embryos in the catheter, they are incubated, and the process of transfer is repeated.

In cases where a catheter through the cervix will be highly traumatic, the doctor can perform a transmyometrial embryo transfer, where the doctor, using a vaginal ultrasound probe, inserts a needle transvaginally through the wall of the uterus into the uterine cavity, while the patient is under general anesthesia.

In the Philippines, the number of embryos transferred is usually no more than three cleavage-stage or two blastocyst-stage embryos. More can be transferred

depending on the circumstances.¹⁹ In CARMI, St. Luke's, doctors ideally transfer a single embryo for a young patient who has a higher chance of pregnancy. On the other hand, for women aged between 35-40, around three or even four embryos are transferred.²⁰ After the embryonic transfer, progesterone or vaginal suppositories are given to the woman until the pregnancy diagnosis eight days later. The mother will be regularly monitored by her physician throughout the pregnancy.

Social and Cultural Factors that Influence Couples to Pursue IVF

The Filipino Community

The Filipino notion of the person is different from the autonomous and self-determining “self” or “individual” of the modern West. The Filipino notion of self-identity, self-worth, and self-determination is always embedded within a *loob-kapwa* relationship.

Loob, which is translated as “subject,”²¹ “will”²² or “relational-will,”²³ is the closest Filipino notion to the concept of the “self.” *Loob* literally means “inside” and is a rich metaphor for the inmost aspect of the human person. However, the Filipino *self* or *loob* is never conceived of or experienced in isolation, but it is always in relation to *kapwa*. As Dionisio Miranda puts it, “Indeed *loob* needs *kapwa* even to be *loob*: its continued responding to *kapwa* is the condition for its own existence and authenticity as *loob*.”²⁴ *Loob* fully realizes itself only in relation to *kapwa*.

The *kapwa* refers to another *loob*, another person, who is understood and perceived as a “shared Self.”²⁵ This notion of a shared-self is captured by the saying,

¹⁹ PSRM, *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination*, Sec. 17. However, more embryos may be ethically transferred in the Philippines with the following conditions:

- a. When delivery of all conceived children is assured to be in a hospital with facilities for neonatal intensive care;
- b. The patient has undergone at least 2 failed ART cycles;
- c. The woman is above 37 years old;
- d. The couple does not wish to cryopreserve any of their excess embryos.

²⁰ Rachel Perez, “What You Need to Know About IVF Today in the Philippines,” *Smart Parenting*, September 15, 2016. Accessed May 22, 2021. Available from <https://www.smartparenting.com.ph/pregnancy/getting-pregnant/what-you-need-to-know-about-ivf-in-the-philippines-a00041-20160915-lfrm>.

²¹ Dionisio M. Miranda, SVD, *Butihin Pinoy: Probe Essays on Value as Filipino* (Manila: Logos Publication, 1992), 83.

²² Leonardo De Castro, “Debts of Good Will and Interpersonal Justice,” *Paideia*. Accessed May 18, 2021. Available from <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaDeCa.htm>.

²³ Jeremiah Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” *Asian Philosophy* vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 154.

²⁴ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 84.

²⁵ Katrin De Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2005), 28.

“Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa (I am no different from others).”²⁶ Jeremiah Reyes translates *kapwa* as “together with the person,” because the starting point of our understanding of ourselves should be *togetherness*.²⁷

A *loob*'s lived-experience is to move and operate within a community of *loobs*.²⁸ Being an ethical *loob* means to embody the value of *pakikipagkapwa*: a communication with a *kapwa* involving an opening of *loob* and a sharing of significant parts of one's *loob*.²⁹ This process of mutual reciprocity leading to convergence and collaboration is called *pakikipagkalooban*, which leads to the state of *magka-loob*, or a likeness of each other's *loob*.

These dynamics explain why Filipinos are overly concerned and inquisitive about each other's lives. Filipinos feel a spontaneous desire to be involved with a *kapwa*'s situation and share with that *kapwa* their own lives. There is less concern for privacy as there is for solidarity, that sometimes, it borders to plain nosiness or being *pakialamero*. This specific in-group nature of the Filipino society/community gives force and weight to the cultural factors that follow below.

Traditional Notion of Family

The former president Corazon C. Aquino says that the meaning of being a Filipino, the “collective character that we take pride in...” “much of our national traits—both good and bad—springs from our sense of family.”³⁰ The family begins with the union of a husband and a wife in a loving, life-long marriage.

Landa Jocano notes that, in the Filipino worldview, an offspring is an integral part of married life and is traditionally viewed as what legitimizes marriage.³¹ Tamerlane Lana, OP, in describing Filipino-Catholic marriage, says, “love is fecund, for it is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue, raising up new life.”³² In the Filipino psyche, a child is the natural and

²⁶ Virgilio Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1992), 54.

²⁷ Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” 156.

²⁸ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 83.

²⁹ Miranda, *Butihin Pinoy*, 83.

³⁰ Corazon C. Aquino, “Family, Spirituality and the Filipino Sense of Nationhood,” in *Filipino Spiritual Cultural Social Transformation and Globalization* (Marikina: Monastery of St. Therese and Kalayaan College, 2003), 15-16.

³¹ F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization: Traditional Kinship and Family Organization*, Anthropology of the Filipino People (Manila: PUNLAD Research House, Inc., 1998), 84.

³² Tamerlane Lana, OP, *et al.*, *Marriage and Family: A Life of Love and Commitment* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2004), 97.

logical result of marriage. Furthermore, Belen Medina explains that being a parent is a “natural outcome of marriage.”³³

It appears to have been deeply ingrained in the Filipino cultural psyche to want, desire, and enjoy children.³⁴ For a married couple, a child is an “empirical evidence of love.”³⁵ Many Filipinos even consider it morally questionable for married couples not to desire a child.³⁶ The oriental and Christian character of the Filipino family shapes it to be “child-centered” and “God-centered.”³⁷ Children are seen as blessings from God, and the absence of this gift is perceived painfully as a punishment.³⁸ Indeed *Gaudium et Spes* characterizes the procreation and education of children as the ultimate crown of marriage.³⁹

Moreover, Filipinos believe that children bring good luck to their families.⁴⁰ This is because children are considered as the hope and future of the family—existentially, economically, and biologically (contributing to the survival of the clan).

Jocano goes on to say that the absence of offspring renders the union meaningless and could even lead couples to engage in extramarital affairs, especially among men for whom offsprings are still a hallmark of virility or *pagka-lalake*.⁴¹ Among Filipino ethnic groups, infertility is considered as a ground for divorce.⁴² Unlike Western societies where childlessness is a lifestyle choice that is easily understood, traditional Filipino society simply does not have the cultural categories to understand why a married couple remains childless.⁴³

The Social Prestige of *Baog*

Jocano tersely puts it, “The social prestige of *baog* is low.”⁴⁴ Because the Filipino is embedded within a *loob-kapwa* relation, a person’s being *baog* is not a

³³ Belen Medina, *The Filipino Family* (Quezon City, Philippines: The University of the Philippines Press, 2001), 193.

³⁴ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 77.

³⁵ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 79.

³⁶ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 77-78.

³⁷ Lana, et al., *Marriage and Family*, 80. Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education, *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Manila: ECCCE, 2017), 37.

³⁸ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 82.

³⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), §50.

⁴⁰ M. Concepcion & E. de Guzman, *To Have or Not to Have: Perspective of Three Generations on the Value of Children* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Institute, 1981).

⁴¹ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 80. Cf. Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Ethics* (Tacloban: Divine Word Publications, 1979), 83. Cf. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 194.

⁴² Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 84.

⁴³ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 83-84.

⁴⁴ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 90-91.

private affair but the whole clan's business. Being *baog* influences how others evaluate a couple, and this affects how *baog* couples see themselves.

A recent study by Randy Ale Tudy and Ida G. Tudy reveals the struggles of Filipino couples who are childless. Their study shows that infertile couples experience a deep sense of embarrassment and shame because their infertility is a constant source of ridicule.⁴⁵ It is not uncommon to hear men dropping jokes like “*Mahina! Hindi makabuo!*”⁴⁶ It is also not uncommon for women to base their self-worth in their capacity to be mothers.

Furthermore, there is a sense of incompleteness in their lives because the Filipino idea of a family always includes children, with the idyllic picture of a child excitedly greeting his parents as they come home from work.⁴⁷ This sense of existential incompleteness also renders their career futile and meaningless.⁴⁸

Lastly, there is the constant pressure from family, friends, and colleagues because the constant opening refrain is, “When are you going to have a baby?”⁴⁹ The pressure comes from relatives and friends asking questions, giving bits of advice, and from complaining would-be *lolos* and *lolas*. The pressure could also come subtly from the very presence of someone else's child.

The experience of *baog* couples is painful as it is complex, so much so that in a candid blog post, a married Filipina describes the aforementioned social phenomenon as, “the persecution of childless couples.”⁵⁰ The desire to have children springs from the very nature of being human, thus a reasonable and commendable desire. However, good intentions are not enough to render IVF morally licit.

The Church Losing Influence

The Philippines is the fifth largest Christian country in the world, with about 80% of its population composed of Roman Catholics. However, as the *Catechism for the Filipino Catholic* admits, “Some have asserted that Filipino Catholics are

⁴⁵ Randy Ale Tudy and Ida G. Tudy, “Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Approach,” *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 25, no. 5 (2020): 1,265. Available from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3372&context=tqr>.

⁴⁶ Ikalwewe, “The Persecution of Childless Couples,” *When the Nail Sticks Out* (blog) January 28, 2014. Accessed May 18, 2021. Available from <https://whentheailsticksout.wordpress.com/2014/01/28/the-persecution-of-childless-couples/>.

⁴⁷ Tudy and Tudy, “Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines,” 1226.

⁴⁸ This is also affirmed by Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 83.

⁴⁹ Tudy and Tudy, “Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines,” 1267.

⁵⁰ Ikalwewe, *The Persecution of Childless Couples*.

‘sacramentalized’ but ‘not yet evangelized.’”⁵¹ The *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* notes that some even describe Christianity in the country as “a social fact more than personal conviction.”⁵² While the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines has released pastoral letters regarding contraception, there is, to date, no pastoral statement regarding IVF. Neither has the researcher found any articles in major newspapers that tackle the morality of IVF from a Catholic perspective. This shows a vacuum in the moral catechesis, leaving a large number of the faithful with only an inkling or a mirage of the Church’s sexual ethics.

Furthermore, despite the Church’s audible voice on national affairs, the Church seems to be slowly losing her influence in the minds and hearts of the Filipino people because of political and moral scandals.⁵³ The proceeding of the RH Bill debate, until its passing into law, is a source of insight into the changing views of the Filipinos regarding the Church’s teachings. Esperanza Cabral argues that surveys reveal a “widespread rejection rather than acceptance of Catholic teaching on contraception and sterilization” among Filipinos.⁵⁴ There needs to be a caveat to the survey results of the Social Weather Stations because they obviously have their limitations. Nevertheless, these indicate a widening gap between the teachings of the Church and the family planning choices of the faithful.

A study using discourse analysis by Gabrielle Marie Liamzon and her colleagues on the attitudes of 10 Filipino Catholics struggling with infertility and the issue of surrogacy gives a glimpse of how Filipino Catholics generally respond to and negotiate with the Church’s teachings.⁵⁵ Some separate and dissociate the Church’s teachings from their personal faith in God and emphasize God’s desire for their *happiness*. Some separate the role of religion from their personal reproductive decisions, and even characterize complete obedience to the Church as “blind.”⁵⁶ Some participants choose to be selective in the Church’s teachings and emphasize the Church’s pro-life stance to support their own desire to bring forth new life. Unlike abortion or contraception which hinders the coming of new life, it is sometimes difficult for Filipinos to understand why a procedure that results in new life is morally illicit. It is worth mentioning that many of the respondents of the study claim to be active in their Catholic faith.

⁵¹ *Catechism for the Filipino Catholic* (Manila: ECCCE, 1997) §1590.

⁵² ECCCE, *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*, §265.

⁵³ Oscar P. Lagman, “Church Lost Its Influence During Arroyo Presidency,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 23, 2017. Accessed May 17, 2021. Available from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/101048/church-lost-influence-arroyo-presidency>.

⁵⁴ See Esperanza Cabral, “Reproductive Health Law in the Philippines,” *Journal of the ASEAN Federation of Endocrine Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019): 28.

⁵⁵ Gabrielle Marie A. Liamzon, “Surrogacy Among Filipinos Who Have Struggled with Infertility: A Discourse Analysis,” *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, vol. 15 (2021). Accessed May 28, 2021. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1834490921997933>.

⁵⁶ Liamzon, “Surrogacy Among Filipinos Who Have Struggled with Infertility,” 8.

There are no similar studies on the issue of IVF. However, the above findings can reasonably be applied to how infertile couples negotiate their pursuit of IVF with the Church's teachings. There is a tendency to rationalize or put aside parts of the Church's teachings in order to justify their pursuit of IVF. This is not surprising since the pain of infertility and the desire for a child becomes an overwhelming factor in their decision-making process.

Holding views contradictory to orthodox Catholic teachings is not uncommon among Filipinos. This is even typical of the inclusive and syncretic worldview of Asian cultures. Filipino psychologist Jaime Bulatao terms this "split-level Christianity," and describes it as, "The coexistence within the same person of two or more thought-and-behavior systems which are inconsistent with each other."⁵⁷ It is also observable that there is little deliberate reflection to reconcile these contradictions because these Filipinos do not experience any practical problems as a result of split-level Christianity.

Nevertheless, many faithful still attest to the beauty of the Church's teachings on human sexuality and life. In 2019, television host, Oh Sang-Mi, or "Sam Oh" as she is known in the Philippines, recently announced that she will no longer continue her egg freezing in view of future IVF.⁵⁸ She was the first to publicly endorse egg freezing in the country but she had a change of heart after discovering the Catholic Church. She says,

I was saddened when I found out, and it wasn't easy for me to accept because I had been banking on my eggs. But I couldn't deny that the Church's teaching on sex, which is where its teaching on IVF stems from, is absolutely beautiful.

Sam Oh describes the Church's teachings as "beautiful." Perhaps it is through beauty that the Church can best catechize her faithful. The paper now turns to discuss the morality of IVF.

Moral Analysis of the *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination in the Philippines*

Introduction

This section is a moral analysis of relevant provisions in The Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine's *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted*

⁵⁷ Jaime C. Bulatao, SJ, *Phenomena and their Interpretation: Landmark Essays 1957-1989* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1992), 22.

⁵⁸ Anne A. Jambora, "...A Woman Who Changed Her Mind," *Lifestyle Inquirer*, August 27, 2019. Accessed May 17, 2021. Available from <https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/343996/and-one-woman-who-changed-her-mind/#ixzz6wPI2Oqm8>.

Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination, 2016. This analysis unpacks the specific practice of IVF in the Philippines. All IVF centers in the country are expected to follow these guidelines in the practice of ART. This analysis of the document also prevents the researcher from attacking a strawman, which is what happened to Agustin Fernando B. Pablo in his editorial article, where he accused IVF centers of being unconstitutional for discarding residual embryos.⁵⁹ Pablo was eventually refuted in another article by Santiago Del Rosario, MD.⁶⁰

The researcher has identified a number of relevant provisions that reflect Catholic values in an imperfect way. These provisions are placed under the headings “pro-life” and “pro-marriage,” with quotation marks to convey that they might reflect Catholic values, but only imperfectly and incompletely.

“Pro-Life” Features of the Guidelines

The Philippines is pro-life in its constitution. **Article II, Section 12** of the Constitution states, “The State recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution. It shall protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception.”

IVF in the Philippines is so guided by the respect for the life of the unborn that precautions are made to avoid the inadvertent destruction of human embryos. The destruction of excess embryos during the IVF process is unconstitutional, as Pablo rightly stated.⁶¹ In an editorial article, former president of the Philippine Medical Association, Del Rosario, MD has assured the public that strict ethical guidelines are enforced on both Filipino and foreign medical practitioners that prohibit the destruction of residual embryos in any laboratory in the country.⁶²

Section 9 of the Guidelines states, “Human life begins at fertilization when a sperm and a mature oocyte unite to form the zygote [...] the zygote, preembryo, or embryo, are already considered unique human beings and are therefore entitled to full moral support as that of an adult.” The recognition of humanity in the zygote, preembryo, and embryo is reflective of Catholic values that are still generally prevalent among Filipinos. The Church upholds that, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.”⁶³ The section also

⁵⁹ Agustin Fernando B. Pablo, “Discarding ‘Excess’ Human Embryos Violate Constitution,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 01, 2019. Accessed May 21, 2021. Available from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/119845/discarding-excess-human-embryos-violate-constitution>.

⁶⁰ Santiago A. Del Rosario, MD, “No Laboratory in PH is Allowed to Destroy Excess Embryos,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 15, 2019. Accessed May 23, 2021. Available from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/120124/no-laboratory-in-ph-is-allowed-to-destroy-excess-embryos#ixzz6vrPfQ0M0>.

⁶¹ Pablo, “Discarding ‘Excess’ Human Embryos Violate Constitution.”

⁶² Del Rosario, MD, “No Laboratory in PH is Allowed to Destroy Excess Embryos.”

⁶³ Holy See, *Charter of Rights of the Family* (October 22, 1983), Art. 4.

accords to the unborn full moral support that is properly accorded to persons, which is analogous to the Church's understanding that, "Human embryos obtained *in vitro* are human beings and subjects with rights: their dignity and right to life must be respected from the first moment of their existence."⁶⁴

Consequently, Section 17 states, "Fetal reduction in cases of high order pregnancies is not permissible." Fetal reduction or selective pregnancy reduction is the termination of fetuses while leaving others unharmed during a multiple pregnancy. *Dignitas Personae* makes clear that fetal reduction is an intentional selective abortion, and falls under a contradiction of seeking new life by the destruction thereof.⁶⁵ In this regard, ART in the Philippines shows its consistency to its pro-life stance.

As an alternative to the destruction of embryos and fetal reduction, the Guidelines offers cryopreservation as an option. Cryopreservation is a method of freezing embryos and preserving them for later IVF cycles. Section 11 states, "Cryopreservation is an accepted and effective ancillary technique in various infertility procedures." Furthermore, Section 9 states, "Patients should be counseled that the disposal of cryopreserved embryos is not allowed in the Philippines." Couples with cryopreserved embryos will have to continually pay for the storage fees of these embryos.

Despite the justification that cryopreservation is a lesser evil, *Dignitas Personae* asserts, "Cryopreservation is *incompatible with the respect owed to human embryos*."⁶⁶ Section 9's respect for embryos, "entitled to full moral support as that of an adult," is contradicted by Section 11. It is interesting that in Section 11, there is a note attached to the term "cryopreservation" that states, "*An embryo has the potential for human life and thus must be respected & protected." The shift of terminology from embryos being "unique human beings" to merely having "potential for human life" shows the logical and moral inconsistency of the document.

The Supporting Statements of Section 11 states, "ART facilities must also be reminded that embryos whether abandoned or allowed by the couples may not be donated for research experimental purposes." This coincides with *Dignitas Personae's* statement that the "use of these embryos for research or for the treatment of disease are obviously unacceptable because they treat the embryos as mere 'biological material' and result in their destruction."⁶⁷ It is commendable that the embryos are not further objectified as research materials in the country.

⁶⁴ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I. Respect For Human Embryos, §5.

⁶⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae* (December 8 2008), §12.

⁶⁶ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §18.

⁶⁷ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §19.

Section 6 states, “Techniques that utilize preconception sex pre-selection are not permissible because they result in gender discrimination.” Couples are not allowed to choose the sex of the embryos to be transferred into the uterus due to preference alone. This reflects a higher consciousness among Filipinos regarding the equality of the sexes. This sexual equality is reflected in a general preference among Filipino couples to have an evenly distributed ratio of sexes among their children. Jocano notes that some even resort to adoption to achieve this balanced ratio.⁶⁸ This Filipino consciousness of equality is also reflected in mythic form in the single and simultaneous origin of both *malakas* at *maganda* from a single bamboo; unlike other origin myths where one sex is drawn from another.⁶⁹

“Pro-Family” Features of the Guidelines

The Guidelines stipulates in Section 21 that IVF, “should only be provided to married couples with executed informed consent by both husband and wife.” Furthermore, Section 2 of the Practice Guidelines states, “Infertility services may be offered to married couples,” and it recognizes that “the sanctity of marriage is very much a sacred space.”⁷⁰ This is a recognition that the institution of marriage is the only proper context for bringing about new life.

In line with Article 1 of the Family Code of the Philippines (E.O. 209), which defines marriage as a special contract of permanent union “*between a man and a woman*,” Section 21 of the Guidelines states, “IVF treatment for LGBT is not permissible in the Philippines.” In restricting LGBTQ+ and unmarried individuals from IVF, the Guidelines strives to preserves the natural and traditional structure of the family. This provision goes contrary to other countries that offer IVF to single persons or members of the LGBTQ+.

Section 15 states, “The use of donated oocytes, spermatozoa or embryos is ethically unacceptable for any infertility procedure. Surrogate motherhood as a means to achieve pregnancy for infertile couples is not an acceptable procedure in the Philippines.” In other words, *heterologous* IVF, the use of at least one gamete from a donor, is prohibited by the Guidelines. *Donum Vitae* clarifies that heterologous artificial insemination violates an essential property of the unity of marriage by the inclusion of gametes from a third party. Furthermore, heterologous IVF further violates the dignity of the child by depriving him “of his filial relationship with his

⁶⁸ Landa Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 84-85. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 83.

⁶⁹ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 81.

⁷⁰ See Sec. 2, “Practice Guidelines,” *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination*. This section further clarifies, “Special consideration must also be given to infertile couples that belong to other religions (Eg. Muslim couples) where a husband may be permitted to have multiple wives. In such special cases, proper documentation must be provided.”

parental origins...”⁷¹ It is commendable that only *homologous* IVF, i.e., only using the gametes of the spouses, is endorsed by the Guidelines, making the process less reprehensible.⁷² Sadly, there are still some medical centers in the country that offer surrogacy through IVF or Artificial Insemination. The Family Code in Article 164 has a provision for the legal status of a child born from artificial insemination.⁷³ However, there are still not enough laws to cover this issue of surrogacy, especially gestational surrogacy.

Eugenic Mentality of the Guidelines

Section 18 states, “The utilization of preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) and preimplantation genetic screening (PGS) are ethically acceptable only in cases of genetically transmitted conditions which are serious, and no safe and effective interventions are available. PGD utilized for embryonic gender identification is allowable only in cases where a strong family history of sex-linked genetically transmissible disease exists.” PGD and PGS are methods for examining the oocyte, zygote, or embryo for any abnormalities or defects. Embryos that have been pre-diagnosed with diseases or aneuploidy are judged undesirable and are, by principle, condemned to be cryopreserved forever, never to enjoy the comfort of a womb.

Dignitas Personae states, “Preimplantation diagnosis is therefore the expression of a *eugenic mentality*...”⁷⁴ This is because, as Pope John Paul II explains, “It presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of ‘normality’ and physical well-being, thus opening the way to legitimizing infanticide and euthanasia as well.”⁷⁵ We can observe the Guidelines’ lack of openness to the gift of persons and a concurrence to place conditions on parental love. Furthermore, a eugenic mentality presupposes the inadequacy and inferiority of disabled persons. A eugenic culture implies a negative evaluation of the quality of life and inherent value of disabled persons as lives not worth living.⁷⁶ However, contrary to opinion, persons with disabilities attest to experiencing good and fulfilling lives.⁷⁷

⁷¹ CDF, *Donum Vitae* I, §2.

⁷² CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I §5.

⁷³ Family Code, Art. 164 “Children conceived as a result of artificial insemination of the wife with the sperm of the husband or that of a donor or both are likewise legitimate children of the husband and his wife, provided, the both of them authorize or ratify such insemination in a written instrument executed and signed by the before the birth of the child.”

⁷⁴ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §22.

⁷⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995), §63.

⁷⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of Higher Commission, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” no. 23. Saxton, Marsh, “Why Members of the Disability Community Oppose Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion.”

⁷⁷ See Tom Shakespeare, “Nasty, brutish, and short? On the predicament of disability and

As a conclusion to this section: Despite the honest attempts of Filipino doctors to provide ethical guidelines, IVF still fails to satisfy moral criteria that are essential to the respect owed to a human person. Nevertheless, the Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine's efforts to make IVF less reprehensible is something worth commending. The paper now proceeds to identify the moral issues in the practice of IVF.

Catholic Moral Evaluation of IVF

Introduction

Donum Vitae is firm in asserting that even if we distance ART from the destruction of embryos, the very nature of IVF renders it morally evil: "Such fertilization is in itself illicit and in opposition to the dignity of procreation and the conjugal union, even when everything is done to avoid the death of the human embryo."⁷⁸ The conjugal union is the only dignified manner by which human life should be conceived.

In this section, the paper highlights three of the many Catholic moral objections against IVF: 1) the separation of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act, 2) the objectification of embryos, 3) the evils of cryopreservation.

Separation of the Unitive and Procreative Dimensions

IVF deprives human procreation of the due dignity connatural to it because conception is abstracted from the marital act.⁷⁹ The Church's assertion about the inextricable link between the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act is the result of a Christian understanding of the theological and anthropological meanings of the conjugal act.⁸⁰ The paper shall focus on the anthropological reasons because it offers more opportunities for dialogue with Filipino cultural values.

Christian anthropology understands the human person as a "unified totality."⁸¹ Anything that reduces the person to either mere body or mere spirit is embodiment" in *Disability and the Good Human Life*, Jerome Bickenbach, Franziska Felder and Barbara Schmitz, eds. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷⁸ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, §5.

⁷⁹ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, §5.

⁸⁰ See Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude*, 101-102. Theologically, the conjugal act is a sacrament which makes visible in the world the unity of the Trinity, which is both one and life-giving. Only conjugal acts that are ordered to express the unitive and procreative dimensions can properly express and participate in God's love.

⁸¹ Paul Lauritzen, "Whose Bodies? Which Selves? Appeals to Embodiment in Assessments of Reproductive Technology," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, ed. Lysaught, M.T., Kotva Jr. J., Lammers, S., Verhey, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 850-858.

morally problematic. Pope John Paul II explains that the body is a means of expressing and revealing the entire person. Therefore, there exists a “language of the body” by which persons enter into communication and communion with each other. The language expressed by the conjugal act is a mutual, reciprocal, and total self-giving of the person to the beloved. This mutual and total self-giving makes up the unitive dimension of the conjugal act.

Furthermore, the total self-giving of each person necessarily involves the mutual exchange of the gift of their fecundity, because a person’s fecundity is an integral aspect of their embodied-personhood. In simpler terms, for the conjugal act to be genuinely unitive, it must also be open to procreation. As *Donum Vitae* puts it, “It is in their bodies and through their bodies that the spouses consummate their marriage and are able to become father and mother.”⁸² In the conjugal act, there is “a genital encounter of a man and woman who express their love by their intention to procreate and unite in and through the bodily manifestation of their masculinity and femininity.”⁸³ For the language of the body to be true, the conjugal act must be unitive and must be open to procreation.

Furthermore, Tamerlane Lana, OP explains that the artificial separation of the two meanings of the conjugal act, “violates the integral humanity, referring specifically to the dignity of the spouses, because it violates the integral signification of the act, which is a personal act.”⁸⁴ The separation of the two dimensions of the conjugal act distorts the language of the body by making the body “lie” to the other because the conjugal act says, “I totally give myself to you,” and yet something is actually withheld. For conjugal love to be authentic, it has to be a complete, mutual, and total self-giving of persons.⁸⁵

Any intervention that fails to conform to this inseparable unity is a departure from the natural law implanted in the body. Therefore, an openness to the procreative dimension should always be within the context of the reciprocal giving of each other in love: the procreative dimension is activated together with and by means of the unitive meaning.⁸⁶

Jocano notes that traditionally, Filipinos understand sexual intercourse and procreation not in physical terms alone. Jocano explains, “The act has a symbolic

⁸² CDF, *Donum Vitae*, Introduction, II.

⁸³ Donald P. Ascì, *The Conjugal Act as Personal Act: A Study of the Catholic Concept of the Conjugal Act in the Light of Christian Anthropology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 282.

⁸⁴ Tamerlane Lana, OP, *Ethos et Eros: The Ethical Link of Lovemaking and Lifemaking in Christian Marriage* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1997), 179.

⁸⁵ Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude*, 125.

⁸⁶ Lana, *Ethos et Eros*, 178.

component which makes the entire process comprehensible to the actors. This ‘inner world’ of meanings provides the actors with culturally accepted notions of sexual gratification and ground rules for achieving it.”⁸⁷ The sexual act is governed by cultural and ethical norms that make it fitting and respectful to the married couple.⁸⁸ In other words, in the Filipino psyche, it is implicit that sex and procreation are not subject to personal preferences but must follow certain rules that preserve their sanctity and propriety.

Unlike Western secular societies where sex has been dissociated from an intimate personal encounter, Filipino society still believes in an “inner world of meanings” operative within the sexual act. We can say that there exists a language of what is proper and fitting that a Filipino couple needs to observe if they are to respect themselves.

Although this language is mostly defined by cultural norms rather than ontological reflection, there nonetheless exists for the Filipino values and “meanings” in the sexual act that can be an opportunity for inculturating the Catholic sexual ethics.

The Catholic Church upholds the inseparable link between the unitive and procreative dimensions because it is only in its fullness is true mutual love and its ordination toward the human person’s vocation to parenthood preserved.⁸⁹ *Donum Vitae* affirms that this connection is “willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative.”⁹⁰ In the Filipino culture, pregnancy is not only a biological reality but also the concern of the community and most importantly, “also a supernatural phenomenon. God and other spiritual beings have a hand in the process.”⁹¹

Pope Pius XII says further, “It is never permitted to separate these different aspects to such a degree as positively exclude either the procreative intention or the conjugal relation.”⁹² This means, then, that human procreation should always be the fruit of a specific conjugal act. In *Dignitas Personae*, the Church reaffirms, “It is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act: human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution.”⁹³ IVF abstracts the procreation of life from the conjugal act and is thus morally unacceptable.

⁸⁷ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 93.

⁸⁸ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 92.

⁸⁹ Pope Paul Pius XII, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), §12.

⁹⁰ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, §5.

⁹¹ Landa Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 90.

⁹² Pope Pius XII, “Discourse to Those Taking Part in the Second Naples World Congress on Fertility and Human Sterility” (May 19, 1956).

⁹³ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §16.

The conjugal act is the only context worthy of human procreation. IVF deprives procreation of the dignity which is proper and connatural to it. The sacred moment of procreation in the context of a conjugal act, wherein the spouses can become co-operators with God, should not be replaced by a conception in a cold, sterilized petri dish.

Objectification of Persons

As the procreation of new life is moved further and further away from the natural reality of male and female sexual union, the child becomes more and more a product, a project, and a property.⁹⁴ IVF changes and distorts our understanding of persons and children.

Every person possesses intrinsic dignity and inviolable rights because he is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). A person's dignity is grounded in his Divine origin and destiny:

Created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a "child in the Son" and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for eternal life of blessed communion with God.⁹⁵

The human person is the only organism that God willed, or rather, loved into existence for its own sake. Thus, the proper response to a person is love. *Donum Vitae* states, "In his unique and unrepeatable origin, the child must be respected and recognized as equal in personal dignity to those who give him life."⁹⁶ The only dignified means of a child's coming into life is through the conjugal act. He must be conceived as the fruit of his parents' love. According to Jocano, "*Ang mga anak ay katibayan ng pagmamahal* (a child is an evidence of love)."⁹⁷ If so, then the child should be a product of the love between husband and wife and not the product of a medical manipulation of their sexual faculties. However, IVF places the coming about of a child outside the marital bed and into the doctor's laboratory.

If a child becomes a product of medical or biological techniques, he is reduced to an object of scientific technology. To bring about a child through "technical efficiency which are to be evaluated according to standards of control and dominion"

⁹⁴ Jennifer Lahl & Christopher White, "Biotech Babies: On the Moral Significance of Reproductive Technology," *First Things*, April 2014. Accessed on May 20, 2021. Available from <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/04/biotech-babies>.

⁹⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, (December 30, 1988), §6D.

⁹⁶ CDF, *Donum Vitae* Introduction, II.

⁹⁷ Jocano, *Filipino Social Organization*, 84.

is to render a child *made* not *begotten*.⁹⁸ The person in his concrete reality is touched upon, whenever in and through the body the person is manipulated. The Sacred Congregation for The Doctrine of the Faith states, “From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth.”⁹⁹ A child is not a right that parents can demand by their prerogatives.

Furthermore, the Catechism states, “A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The ‘supreme gift of marriage’ is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged ‘right to a child’ would lead.”¹⁰⁰ A child is a gift that cannot be demanded. The idea that the child is a gift from God is a strong cultural understanding that has the Christian heritage as one of its substrata. The recognition that no one has an absolute right to a child is an acknowledgement of our human creatureliness and dependence on the Creator.

Benedict Ashley, OP further explains, “In all such questions, the rights of the child are more fundamental than the desire of the couple, as noble as it is, to procreate, because the proper goal of the parents’ desire is the good of the child, not their own generativity.”¹⁰¹ *Donum Vitae* goes on to explain that it is in fact a genuine right of a child to be born from the conjugal and loving act of his parents, as the only means of being conceived that is worthy of his dignity.¹⁰²

The Evils of Cryopreservation

In the Philippines, embryo cryopreservation is considered as an alternative to embryonic destruction. Cryopreservation is a process where embryos are stored in sub-zero temperatures in order to preserve them for later use. *Donum Vitae* is firm in saying that even if the intention is “pro-life,” cryopreservation “constitutes an offence against the respect due to human beings by exposing them to grave risks of death or harm to their physical integrity and depriving them, at least temporarily, of maternal shelter and gestation, thus placing them in a situation in which further offences and manipulation are possible.”¹⁰³ Cryopreservation objectifies human embryos.

Furthermore, the process of cryopreservation still unduly exposes embryos to danger “since a high percentage does not survive the process of freezing and

⁹⁸ CDF, *Donum Vitae* Introduction, § 2.

⁹⁹ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (November 18, 1974), § 12.

¹⁰⁰ *Donum Vitae*, II, § 8. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2378.

¹⁰¹ Benedict M. Ashley, OP, Jean DeBlois, and Kevin D. O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics: A Catholic Theological Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 87.

¹⁰² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2378.

¹⁰³ CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, §6.

thawing.”¹⁰⁴ Most unhealthy embryos do not survive even the freezing process. A 2011 study showed that the survival rate of thawing was 69% for zygotes (of 1,991 sample zygotes), 85% for 3 day-old embryos (of 2,880 sample embryos), and 88% for blastocysts (of 503 sample blastocysts).¹⁰⁵

The very fact that embryos are exposed to the danger of dying is already more than enough reason to render cryopreservation morally illicit. The possibility of killing an embryo should be enough to deter any Catholic from cryopreservation because, “it is objectively a grave sin to dare to risk murder.”¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, cryopreservation arrests the natural, biological dynamism of embryos, where they are relegated to an existence that can barely be considered “living.” Their dignity as human persons is further violated because of the inhumane state in which they are manipulated for *later use*. Cryopreservation deprived embryos of the fundamental moral rights to be gestated and nurtured by their parents.¹⁰⁷

If their parents do not wish to transfer them into the uterus, they are preserved for an indefinite time, for the most part, forgotten. A survey of over one thousand individuals in the United States, Europe, and Australia who have cryopreserved embryos found that “only 67% of patients were likely [...] to use embryos for reproduction” and 21% responded to be “very likely to donate their embryos for research.”¹⁰⁸ We do not have a similar study in the Philippines, but it is reasonable to say that some cryopreserved embryos will never make it into a womb. These cryopreserved embryos are left “orphans” unable to develop beyond their current state.¹⁰⁹ It is no different from abandoning one’s own baby.

Catholic moral theologians propose different approaches to the problem of abandoned cryopreserved embryos. *Dignitas Personae* has considered pre-natal adoption or surrogacy as morally problematic, “as this practice would also lead to other problems of a medical, psychological and legal nature.”¹¹⁰ *Dignitas Personae*

¹⁰⁴ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §18.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Ellen Pavone and Joy Innes, et al., “Comparing Thaw Survival, Implantation and Live Birth Rates from Cryopreserved Zygotes, Embryos and Blastocysts,” *Journal of Human Reproductive Science*, vol. 4, issue 1 (2011): 25

¹⁰⁶ CDF, *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, § 13.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick A. Tully, “Cryopreserved Embryos and *Dignitas Personae*: Another Option?” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 22/4 (2012): 372.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Lyerly et al., “Fertility Patients’ Views about Frozen Embryo Disposition: Results of a Multi-Institutional U.S. Survey,” *Fertility and Sterility* no. 93 (2010): 502.

¹⁰⁹ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §18.

¹¹⁰ CDF, *Dignitas Personae*, §19. Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, “On the Catholic Vision of Conjugal Love and the Morality of Embryo Transfer,” in *Human Embryo Adoption: Biotechnology, Marriage, and the Right to Life*, ed. Thomas Berg and Edward Furton (Philadelphia: National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2009), 115-134.

has removed embryo adoption through gestational surrogacy as a possible solution. Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, OP suggests continuing cryopreservation until artificial wombs are invented, by which the abandoned embryos can undergo ectogenesis.¹¹¹ Patrick Tully proposes that it is better for embryos who will spend an indefinite period of time frozen to be allowed to thaw and die naturally, as a treatment more in keeping with their dignity.¹¹² He compares this approach to removing a permanently attached life support from a patient. Tadeusz Pacholczyk suggests continuing to cryopreserve them as part of our moral duty to care for our own offspring until a morally acceptable option presents itself or they eventually die.¹¹³ Perhaps the safest approach for now is to continue to preserve these frozen embryos until a Magisterial solution appears.

Role of Filipino “Virtues” in the Cross of Infertility

The Church encourages infertile couples who have exhausted all possible and licit medical procedures to unite themselves to the Cross of the Lord, the source of all spiritual fecundity. In dealing with the painful reality of infertility and childlessness, we can look into the resources of the Filipino culture because, as Jose M. de Mesa explains, every cultural expression is “an honest attempt to cope with human problems...”¹¹⁴ They function to lift “men’s hearts to deal with particular situations in moments of crisis, danger or depression.”¹¹⁵ Reyes argues that we can understand Filipino values from a virtue-ethics framework, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹¹⁶ Understanding these cultural values as virtues gives more specificity to them and takes into account the Hispanic-Catholic influence of the Filipino culture.

One relevant Filipino cultural virtue is “*Bahala na*.” *Bahala na* has an encompassing meaning to characterize the so-called Filipino fatalistic attitude or resigned acceptance of his lot in life.¹¹⁷ The concept contains a negative meaning of fatalism and irresponsibility, which is “often supported by appeal to an unorthodox conception of the role of divine providence in human affairs.”¹¹⁸ In this negative sense, laziness and irresponsibility are justified on the pretext of leaving things to God.

¹¹¹ Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude*, 141-143.

¹¹² Tully, “Cryopreserved Embryos and *Dignitas Personae*: Another Option?”

¹¹³ Tadeusz Pacholczyk, “Frozen Embryo Adoption Are Morally Objectionable,” *The Catholic Citizen: Proceedings from the 26th Annual Conference of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*, ed. Kenneth Whitehead (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2010), 84-101.

¹¹⁴ Jose M. de Mesa, *And God said, “Bahala Na!”* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology Press, 1979), 94 & 109.

¹¹⁵ De Mesa, *And God said, “Bahala Na!”* 94.

¹¹⁶ See Jeremiah Reyes, “*Loob at Kapwa: Mga Unang Hakbang Patungo sa Isang Pilipinong Birtud-Etika Gamit si Sto. Tomas de Aquino*,” *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities* vol. 3 (2013).

¹¹⁷ F. Landa Jocano, “New Directions for the New Filipino,” *Solidarity* vol. VIII, no. 8 (1974): 5.

¹¹⁸ Douglas Elywood, “A Theological Approach to Some Traditional Filipino Beliefs About Man,” *The South East Asian Journal of Theology*, vol. XI, Spring (1970): 40.

However, as De Mesa explains, “It is more accurate to designate it as a realistic acceptance of their present limitations, an acceptance which does not give up the hope that a “break” in life will come and which does not neglect what can be done.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, *bahala na* has a positive meaning which is the courage to move forward and be resilient. Jocano explains that *bahala na* is a principle of forbearance for the Filipino people. Jocano adds, “Without it, it is doubtful whether one can withstand the impact of stress under given conditions.”¹²⁰

Bahala na is typically portrayed by a farmer, who, after he has plowed and planted, finally says “*bahala na*.” What the farmer means is, “I have done my part; the rest belongs to God.”¹²¹ De Mesa identifies this particular nuance of *bahala na* as a rich resource for inculturating the Christian notion of Divine Providence. *Bahala na* means trusting in God’s providence in the sense of leaving everything into His hands when nothing more can be humanly done. As De Mesa puts it, “*Bahala na* theologically means *bahala na ang Diyos*.”¹²² Furthermore, Pura Santillan Castrance says that *bahala na* can be the Filipino counterpart to the fundamental principle of acceptance in Oriental philosophies and even Christian theology.¹²³

Infertile couples are encouraged to exhaust all possible and morally acceptable medical procedures to cure the disease of infertility. However, when everything humanly and morally possible has been done, relentless search must give way to acceptance and surrender. Infertile couples, through prayer and a life of virtue are called to say, *bahala na*, in surrender to God’s providence.

It takes great courage and faith to surrender to God, that is why infertile couples need to develop the virtue of *lakas ng loob*. *Bahala na* needs to be coupled with the Filipino virtue of *Lakas ng loob*, which is translated as “strength-of-the-will” or “inner strength.” The meaning of *lakas ng loob* has evolved from the courage of tribal heroes to the *lakas ng loob* manifested by Christ in the *Pasyon*, particularly the *Pasyon Pilapil*.¹²⁴ Reynaldo Ileta argues that the Filipinos’ *pakikiramay*, “sympathy” for the suffering Christ portrayed in the *pasyon* became a source of *lakas ng loob* for the revolution of the illiterate *masa* during the 1840-1910 period.¹²⁵ The Church encourages infertile couple to unite themselves to the Cross of the Lord because it is the source of Christian courage and fortitude. In the *pasyon*, Filipinos can understand

¹¹⁹ De Mesa, *And God said, “Bahala Na!”* 116.

¹²⁰ F. Landa Jocano, “New Directions for the New Filipino,” *Solidarity* vol. 8 no.8 (1974): 5-6.

¹²¹ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 72-73.

¹²² De Mesa, *And God said, “Bahala Na!”* 118.

¹²³ Pura Santillan Castrance, “The Filipino and His ‘Masks,’” *Solidarity*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1970): 3.

¹²⁴ Reyes, “Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” 166-167.

¹²⁵ See Reynaldo C. Ileta, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

their suffering as a participation in Christ's passion; and to triumph as Christ did requires a transformation of their *loob* into one that has *lakas ng loob* to withstand trials.¹²⁶ The passion of Christ is the source of spiritual fecundity that gives Filipinos the *lakas ng loob* to weather the storms and calamities that have plagued the country. The cross of infertility is eventually a means of internal transformation and spiritual growth that leads the couple to a life of holiness and Christian fortitude.

Bahala na and *lakas-ng-loob* are premised on *malasakit*, particularly, God's *malasakit*. *Malasakit* means "concern" or "compassion." *Malasakit* is the term used in the Tagalog New Testament to describe the shepherd who cares (*may malasakit*) for the sheep (Cf. Jn. 10:11). *Malasakit* describes God's providence. The assurance of God's *malasakit* is the driving force for *bahala na*. *Bahala na* is motivated by the belief that "God's will is a helpful, healing, liberating, saving will. God wills life, joy, freedom, peace, salvation, the final, great happiness of man..."¹²⁷ *Bahala na* together with *malasakit* becomes a powerful value for a theological re-rooting in the Filipino context. It is the vocation of every Christian to grow in holiness by learning to trust and surrender to God more and more each day.

An attitude of *bahala na ang malasakit ng Diyos* leads to another important Filipino virtue: *katahimikan*. Dionisio Miranda explains that *katahimikan* may mean, "stillness, quiet, and rest (*palagayang loob, tahimik ang isip, etc.*)," as a contrast to the psychological state of *panghihinayang*, "regret."¹²⁸ *Katahimikan* is related to the cultural value *hinahon* which aside from the meanings of being "dispassionate" or "discreet," may also mean "resignation, submission, acceptance."¹²⁹ In this context, *katahimikan* can mean harmony in one's life because things are accepted as being in their proper place and time according to God's providence. With prayer and a life of virtue, an infertile couple can eventually experience acceptance and *katahimikan*. In *katahimikan*, there is contentment and peace in the pain of infertility. *Katahimikan* means ceasing to struggle against reality. It means letting go of the tormenting anguish of refusing to accept reality. Just as Christ emptied himself in his *kenosis*, so Christians are called upon to empty themselves of their desires in surrender to God's will.

Furthermore, *katahimikan* characterizes the state where persons relate appropriately with each other and accept the situations of each member of the community.¹³⁰ Relatives and friends are also called upon to accept the reality of

¹²⁶ Monica Jalandoni-Nalupta, "Suspicious of the Filipino Social Virtue of Fortitude," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* vol. 6, no. 1 (2016): 52.

¹²⁷ Hans Kung, *On Being A Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), 250.

¹²⁸ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 145-146.

¹²⁹ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 150.

¹³⁰ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 148.

an infertile couple's condition and be prudent in their speech. *Katahimikan* in the community can be achieved if each *loob* is prudent and compassionate with their *kapwa*, who is suffering from infertility.

Miranda explains that when *katahimikan* is understood in its positive sense of happiness (*maligaya*) because of reasonable well-being, it can be related with the Western concept of *Eudaimonia*.¹³¹ *Katahimikan* is an openness to the hope that even infertile couples can live a fulfilling and meaningful life together. *Katahimikan* is an openness to the unexpected and unscripted reality unfolding before us.

In our search for cultural resources that can help infertile couples, we now turn to what Miranda considers as the quintessential Filipino virtue: *kagandahang-loob*.¹³² *Kagandahang-loob* literally means “beauty-of-the-will.” It is almost synonymous to *kabutihang-loob* as “goodness-of-the-will.” In the Filipino psyche, moral goodness is characterized as beautiful.

Virgilio Enriquez describes *kagandahang-loob* as generosity or goodness towards *kapwa* that springs spontaneously from a person's *kabaitan* or goodness-of-heart.¹³³ Miranda describes it as “the outflow of goodness, a reaching out from humanity to humanity, a completion of one's humanity.”¹³⁴

This indigenous Filipino virtue is a fertile ground on which the Christian virtue of charity can be inculturated. Although *kagandahang-loob* cannot be equated with the theological virtue of charity, *kagandahang-loob* is nevertheless analogous to love as *benevolentia*, “benevolence” or “goodwill.”¹³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas says, “Goodwill properly speaking is that act of the will whereby we wish well to another.”¹³⁶ *Kagandahang-loob*, furthermore, is analogous to the Christian virtue of *miser cordia*, “mercy.” St. Augustine says, mercy “is heartfelt sympathy for another's distress, impelling us to succor him if we can.”¹³⁷ This Augustinian description conveys the strong emotional and emphatic connotations of *kagandahang-loob*. Another translation renders the same text as, “a kind of fellow feeling in our hearts for the misery of another which compels us to help him if we can.”¹³⁸ This emphasizes the fellow feeling, *pakikiramay* of the *loob-kapwa* relationship. St. Thomas goes further

¹³¹ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 157.

¹³² Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 182.

¹³³ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 57.

¹³⁴ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 181.

¹³⁵ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 180.

¹³⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 27, a. 2, *respondeo*.

¹³⁷ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book IX, art. 5 quoted in *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, art. 1, *respondeo*.

¹³⁸ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 365.

to say that God's omnipotence is chiefly manifested in mercy and thus mercy is a *attribute* most proper to God.¹³⁹

A couple's aching longing for a child springs from this deep human desire to love and to diffuse one's inherent goodness. Through the notion of *kabutihang-loob*, the Church can encourage couples to channel this energy for love to a recipient who is already alive and in need of love. After exhausting all legitimate medical procedures, struggling couples are encouraged to adopt an already living orphan. The Catechism encourages struggling couples to "give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others."¹⁴⁰ Instead of fixating on a longed-for biological child, couples can focus their energy on providing a home to an orphan who is himself in need of love.

Kagandahang-loob as a virtue qualifies and enriches the understanding of adoption. Rather than being a desperate attempt to fill up a gnawing emptiness in the life of a couple, adoption becomes an impulse of mercy and *kagandahang-loob* towards an abandoned child. Adoption is further emphasized as something positive and other-oriented, because *kagandahang-loob* means the "acts of generosity must spring from the person's goodness of heart or *kabutihan*. A display of *kagandahang-loob* must have no motive save that of kindness and inherent graciousness."¹⁴¹ *Kagandahang-loob* emphasizes that adoption is not merely a substitute that infertile couples are forced to settle with, but a voluntary, *life-giving* decision to welcome a child who is in grave need of a home. In adoption, a couple *rescues* an abandoned child and lessens the suffering in the world. In adoption, financial resources for IVF can be more meaningfully spent on raising an abandoned child.

Furthermore, Albert Alejo describes *kagandahang-loob* as a welcoming attitude with arms outstretched and open to receive the *kapwa*:

Sino ba ang tinatagurian nating may magandang-loob? Siyang mapagbigay, 'bukas-palad.' Sapagkat ang kagandahang-loob ay ang pag-unat ng bisig at sabay na pagbubukas ng palad upang hindi lamang maghandog ng kung anuman ang hawak kundi upang tumanggap sa pinaghahandugan. Sino ang mapagbigay? Siyang marunong tumanggap sa mga humihingi. Ang tinatanggap ng humihingi ay iyong bagay na kanyang hinihingi; samantala, siya mismong humihingi ang pinapatuloy ng nagmamagandang-loob.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, a. 4, respondeo.

¹⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2379.

¹⁴¹ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 57

¹⁴² Albert Alejo, *Tao po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1990), 111.

Kakandahang-loob is a *kapwa*-oriented virtue that reaches out to provide for the good of the other, especially when the *kapwa* is in dire and grave need. However, one does not only give but in giving, one receives the very person who is in need. Alejo beautifully sketches this dynamic movement of giving and receiving, because it is not enough to give to the other. One must also receive and welcome the very person of the other into one's *kalooban*. Adoption is a radical Christian expression of *kagandahang-loob*, where a couple welcomes an apparent other into their very lives. Reyes goes on to say that it is through *kagandahang-loob* that one actualizes the other as *kapwa* and regard him as such.¹⁴³ In other words, it is through *kagandahang-loob* expressed in adoption that the otherness of an orphan is overcome and he is established as part of oneself, a shared self, a *kapwa-pamilya*; and the other affective and emotional experiences that accrue and sustain the relationship of a shared-self just naturally follows. But one first needs to reach out to the other out of one's *kagandahang-loob*.

An embodiment of *kagandahang-loob* finds its inspiration from the maternal love that each of us normally should have experienced. A Filipino mother, Bulatao notes, is one who “tends to create and maintain a situation where the child remains an extension of her self rather than as a being, independent in his own right. She tends to identify with her child rather than to look on him as ‘other’”¹⁴⁴ Through *kagandahang-loob*, this intimate mother and child relationship can be established and fostered in adoption.

Kagandahang-loob is so *kapwa*-oriented that Miranda describes it as an act of affirmation and appreciation, a valuing and applauding of the presence of the other as a fellow human, as a *kapwa*.¹⁴⁵ Adoption as an expression of *kagandahang-loob* is a sensitivity to the suffering and a recognition of the innate goodness and worthiness of an abandoned child. Because of the *loob-kapwa* worldview of the Filipino, it is relatively easier to see a *kapwa*, although biologically unrelated, as part of the family, in a very real sense of the word.

Although blood relationship offers deep psychological, existential, and biological sense of fulfillment, welcoming a child into one's home can be an equally fulfilling vocation to undertake. In adoption, one can discern a double movement of giving and receiving. The adoptive parents do not only give, but they also receive something deeply meaningful and fulfilling when they welcome a child into their life.

¹⁴³ Jeremiah Reyes, “*Loob and Kapwa: Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics*,” (PhD. Diss. KU Leuven), 126-127.

¹⁴⁴ Jaime C. Bulatao, SJ “Hiya,” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1964): 436.

¹⁴⁵ Miranda, *Buting Pinoy*, 181.

An adopted child opens up unlimited possibilities of hope and a future to the family. An adopted child gives a new sense of direction and meaning in the life of a couple that somehow makes up for the deep pain of infertility. Just as Miranda characterizes *kabutihang-loob* as a “completion of one’s humanity,” adoption can give completion and fulfillment to an infertile couple’s marriage.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, IVF is morally illicit and contrary to the natural law because IVF separates the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act, it objectifies the human fetus, and it leads to the evils of cryopreservation. However, the moral issue of IVF in the Philippines is a complex reality, where easy answers do not always convince, but could even trivialize the reality of the cross of infertility. Sometimes, like the Biblical Job, we are simply left speechless before the unfathomable and impenetrable mystery of human suffering. In the face of moral challenges, the Church is not only a teacher, but she is also an accompanying and compassionate mother.

The researcher would like to end this paper with two recommendations. Firstly, an effective catechesis of the faithful from their early years is very important. Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is a powerful resource that should be utilized by Catholic schools and catechetical institutions. The convincing power of a moral framework is often influenced by its emotional associations within a person and a person’s subjective loyalty to a set of values. If the Church’s teachings are only taught to a couple who is already struggling, these teachings, although beautiful in themselves, would probably be perceived as cold ideas that are difficult to reconcile and internalize during the dilemma of the moment.

Secondly, struggling couples can be given morally acceptable alternatives like Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology.¹⁴⁶ NaPro Technology identifies abnormalities that cause infertility and corrects the underlying problem while cooperating with the natural fertility cycle. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the diagnosis of the underlying condition and the treatment of the cause of infertility is “the correct scientific approach to the question of infertility...”¹⁴⁷ NaPro

¹⁴⁶ See Thomas Hilgers, *The NaPro Technology Revolution: Unleashing the Power in a Woman’s Cycle* (New York: Beaufort Books, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life” (February 25, 2012).

Technology is effective, with statistically higher pregnancy rates compare to IVF.¹⁴⁸ It is also significantly cheaper, making it more accessible to those who refuse fertility treatments due to financial reasons. As Randolph L. Flores suggests, “[I]t is best that the government chose NaPro Technology as the National Policy to treat infertility.”¹⁴⁹ The Catholic community, especially those in the Family and Life ministry, can take up Flores’ suggestion and lobby for these kinds of reproductive health services that are in keeping with Catholic values.**PS**

References

Books

- Alejo, Albert. *Tao po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1990.
- Asci, Donald P. *The Conjugal Act as Personal Act: A Study of the Catholic Concept of the Conjugal act in the Light of Christian Anthropology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Ashley, Benedict M., Jean DeBlois, and Kevin D. O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics: A Catholic Theological Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006.
- Augustine. *The City of God*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Austriaco, Nicanor Pier Giorgio. *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021.
- Bulatao, Jaime. *Phenomena and their Interpretation: Landmark Essays 1957-1989*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1992.
- Concepcion, M. & E. de Guzman. *To Have or Not to Have: Perspective of Three Generations on the Value of Children*. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Institute, 1981.
- De Guia, Katrin. *Kapwa: The Self in the Other*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2005.
- De Mesa, Jose M. *And God said, “Bahala Na!”* Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology Press, 1979.
- Enriquez, Virgilio. *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1992.

¹⁴⁸ Flores, “Infertility in The Philippines and Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology,” 329.

¹⁴⁹ Flores, “Infertility in The Philippines and Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology,” 330.

- Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Catholic Education. *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*. Manila: ECCCE, 2007.
- Hilgers, Thomas. *The NaPro Technology Revolution: Unleashing the Power in a Woman's Cycle*. New York: Beaufort Books, 2010.
- Ileto, Reynaldo. *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979.
- Jocano, F. Landa. *Filipino Social Organization: Traditional Kinship and Family Organization*. Anthropology of the Filipino People. Manila: PUNLAD Research House, Inc., 1998.
- Kung, Hans. *On Being A Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976.
- Lana Tamerlane. *Ethos et Eros: The Ethical Link of Lovemaking and Lifemaking in Christian Marriage*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 1997.
- _____, et al. *Marriage and Family: A Life of Love and Commitment*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2004.
- Medina, Belen. *The Filipino Family*. Quezon City, Philippines: The University of the Philippines Press, 2001.
- Mercado, Leonardo N. *Elements of Filipino Ethics*. Tacloban City: Divine Word Publications, 1979.
- _____. *Elements of Filipino Theology*. Tacloban: Divine Word University Publication, 1975.
- Miranda, Dionisio M. *Butihin Pinoy: Probe Essays on Value as Filipino*. Manila: Logos Publication, 1992.
- Philippine Society of Reproductive Medicine. *Guidelines on the Ethics and Practice of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Intrauterine Insemination*. Makati: OVT-Graphic Line, Inc., 2016.
- Reyes, Jeremiah. "Loób and Kapwa: Thomas Aquinas and a Filipino Virtue Ethics." PhD. Diss. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2015.
- Sher, Geoffrey et al., *In Vitro Fertilization: The A.R.T. of Making Babies*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013.

Church Documents

Benedict XVI, "Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life," February 25, 2012.

Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines, *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*. Manila: ECCCE, 2017.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1997.

Holy See, *Charter of Rights of the Family*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1983.

John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1988.

_____. *Evangelium Vitae*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana 1995.

Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1965.

Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1968.

Pius XII. *Discourse to those taking part in the Second Naples World Congress on Fertility and Human Sterility*, 19 May 1956.

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana 1974.

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Dignitas Personae*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2008.

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Donum Vitae*. Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1987.

Articles

Austriaco, Nicanor Pier Giorgio. "On the Catholic Vision of Conjugal Love and the Morality of Embryo Transfer." *Human Embryo Adoption: Biotechnology, Marriage, and the Right to Life*, ed. Thomas Berg and Edward Furton. Philadelphia: National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2009. 115-134.

Aquino, Corazon C. "Family, Spirituality and the Filipino Sense of Nationhood." *Filipino Spiritual Cultural Social Transformation and Globalization*. Marikina: Monastery of St. Therese and Kalayaan College, 2003.

Breger, Chaya Raizel. "In Vitro Fertilization Brings Joy to Infertile Couples." *Reproductive Technology*, ed. Cindy Mur. New York: Greenhaven Press, 2005.

Bulatao, Jaime. "Hiya." *Philippine Studies* vol. 12, no. 3 (1964): 424-438.

- Cabral, Esperanza, “Reproductive Health Law in the Philippines.” *Journal of the ASEAN Federation of Endocrine Society*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019): 26-29.
- Castrance, Pura Santillan. “The Filipino and His ‘Masks.’” *Solidarity*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1970): 2-7.
- De Castro, Leonardo. “Debts of Good Will and Interpersonal Justice.” *Paideia*. Accessed May 18, 2021. Available from <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaDeCa.htm>.
- Dupont, P. “Life and Death in the Philippines.” *Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2013): 274-277.
- Elywood, Douglas. “A Theological Approach to Some Traditional Filipino Beliefs About Man.” *The South East Asian Journal of Theology*, vol. XI, Spring (1970): 37-53.
- Flores, Randolph L. “Infertility in The Philippines and Natural Procreative (NaPro) Technology: A Commentary.” *Scholars Academic Journal of Biosciences*, vol. 4 (2016): 328-331.
- Hui Sun et al., “Global, Regional, and National Prevalence and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years for Infertility in 195 Countries and Territories, 1990–2017: Results from a Global Burden of Disease Study, 2017.” *Aging* vol. 11, issue 23 (2019): 10952—10991.
- Jalandoni-Nalupta, Monica. “Suspicious of the Filipino Social Virtue of Fortitude.” *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* vol. 6, no. 1 (2016): 47-67.
- Jocano, F. Landa. “New Directions for the New Filipino.” *Solidarity* vol. VIII, no. 8 (1974): 5.
- Jones, H. W. “Moments in the life of Patrick Steptoe.” *Fertility and Sterility*, vol. 66, no. 1 (1996): 15–16.
- Lahl, Jennifer & Christopher White. “Biotech Babies: On the Moral Significance of Reproductive Technology.” *First Things*, April 2014. Accessed on May 20, 2021. Available from <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/04/biotech-babies>.
- Lauritzen, Paul. “Whose Bodies? Which Selves? Appeals to Embodiment in Assessments of Reproductive Technology.” *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, ed. Lysaught, M.T., Kotva Jr. J., Lammers, S., Verhey. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012. 850-858.
- Liamzon, Gabrielle Marie A. “Surrogacy among Filipinos who have struggled with infertility: A discourse analysis.” *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, vol. 15 (2021).
- Lyerly, Anne et al. “Fertility Patients’ Views about Frozen Embryo Disposition: Results of a Multi-Institutional U.S. Survey.” *Fertility and Sterility*, no. 93 (2010): 499–509.
- Sunkara, Sesh Kamal et al. “Association between the number of eggs and live birth in IVF treatment: an analysis of 400 135 treatment cycles.” *Human Reproduction*, vol. 26, issue 7 (2011): 1768–1774.

- Tudy, Randy Ale and Ida G. Tudy. "Struggles, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Childless Teachers in the Philippines: A Descriptive Phenomenological Approach." *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 25, no. 5 (2020): 1256-1278.
- Tully, Patrick A. "Cryopreserved Embryos and *Dignitas Personae*: Another Option?" *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 22/4 (2012): 367-389.
- Pacholczyk, Tadeusz. "Frozen Embryo Adoption Are Morally Objectionable." *The Catholic Citizen: Proceedings from the 26th Annual Conference of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*, ed. Kenneth Whitehead. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2010. 84-101.
- Pavone, Mary Ellen and Joy Innes, et al. "Comparing Thaw Survival, Implantation and Live Birth Rates from Cryopreserved Zygotes, Embryos and Blastocysts." *Journal of Human Reproductive Science*, vol. 4, issue 1 (2011): 23-28.
- Reyes, Jeremiah. "*Loób* and *Kapwa*: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics." *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 148-171.
- Shakespeare, Tom. "Nasty, Brutish, and Short? On the Predicament of Disability and Embodiment" in *Disability and the Good Human Life*, ed. by Jerome Bickenbach, Franziska Felder and Barbara Schmitz. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- United Nations Human Rights Office of Higher Commission, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," no. 23. Saxton, Marsh, "Why Members of the Disability Community Oppose Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion."
- Zegers-Hochschild, Fernando *et al.* "The International Glossary on Infertility and Fertility Care, 2017." *Fertility and Sterility*, vol. 108, Issue 3 (2017): 393-406.

