



This is the first of our two-issue series on the recent Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas personae*. The call for papers brought in a raft of excellent submissions, not all of which we could print. My aim was to have comprehensive coverage on all aspects of the document, so that every topic in it would be addressed. We came close.

As always with this journal, the fact that an article is printed here does not mean that it has received the stamp of approval from The National Catholic Bioethics Center or its ethicists. This is a forum for debate and discussion. The journal only sets the outside parameters. We do not print what is contrary to Church teaching, and as we all know, that leaves plenty for disagreement.

Dignitas personae has come in for some criticism, as readers will see. To a certain degree this was inevitable, as experts compared the document to the earlier and more systematic presentation of *Donum vitae*. That document, now more than twenty years old, needed updating; yet it also established the central themes and principles that guide the Church in this area. The purpose of *Dignitas personae* was not to replace that earlier document but to serve more as an extended addendum.

Of particular interest to me as editor was the number of submissions received on *Dignitas personae*'s handling of embryo adoption. The parties to the debate had anticipated an announcement on the subject with some anxiety, but it appears that the Vatican has not arrived at a definite decision. The debate, in any case, continues. No topic was the object of more submissions to this journal than the question of how to interpret the Vatican's response to this topic.

In view of that strong interest and the many fine submissions received here, I have given space to four authors on this subject, two of whom appear in this issue and two in the next. They are divided in their interpretations of the document, two supporting the view that embryo adoption is permitted and two asserting that embryo adoption is forbidden.

Christopher Tollefsen argues that *Dignitas personae* does not properly appreciate the nature of adoption, an act through which, he says, spouses become parents through each other in a way directly parallel to ordinary parenthood. Instead, the Instruction discusses adoption as a form of infertility treatment or as a rescue effort, neither of which captures the essence of true adoption—a gratuitous act exemplified by God’s adoption of his chosen people.

Tracy Jamison takes the opposite view. He holds that embryo adoption is wrong in itself and introduces the phrase “artificial impregnation” to describe what occurs when a woman is made pregnant with a child not her own, drawing a parallel to “artificial insemination.” Artificial impregnation, he contends, is a substitute for conjugal union and therefore contrary to the design of human nature.

Although the science is in its infancy, gene therapy is destined to present us with serious ethical challenges. Modifications of the germ line are inherited by succeeding generations and thus would bring about permanent changes in the human race. Robert Scott Smith, M.D., Bryan A. Piras, and Carr J. Smith, combine their talents to lay out what some of those central challenges may be, especially in regard to possible future programs of eugenics.

Rev. Benedict Guevin, O.S.B., a frequent contributor to our pages, discusses a broad range of reproductive technologies, summarizing the main findings of *Dignitas personae* and adding some additional topics not covered there. The central moral quagmire in this area is in vitro fertilization, a widely accepted but fundamentally unethical means of conception. Father Guevin shows how this practice violates ordinary principles of justice, the sacredness of the marital union, and the inherent dignity of the human embryo.

Allison LeDoux takes on the question of emergency contraception, a topic of considerable recent debate. *Dignitas personae*, she argues, moves the Church toward greater restrictions on the practice. She asks whether it is ever possible to administer the types of drugs that are used in these protocols without the serious risk of the loss of human life.

Another topic of much recent debate has been whether it is possible to produce embryo-like entities that are not human beings but could provide researchers with embryonic stem cells. E. Christian Brugger addresses this topic and, in particular, whether and how we can know that a “biological artifact” is not a human being. This is the key moral question in the effort to advance debate on this question. Brugger contends that the fundamental marks of a human being are absent in the entity produced by ANT-OAR.

Finally, Jason Eberl gives us one of two comprehensive overviews that will appear in this series. (The other is in the next issue.) Eberl finds fault with *Dignitas personae* for what he sees as its lack of carefully articulated argumentative strategies. He advocates that the Vatican give greater consideration next time to the ongoing debates within the wider scholarly field when it addresses issues in bioethics. That would give the Church’s teaching a much wider range of influence.

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