

Dear Reader,

Printed below, is a document entitled, Resources for Office-Bearers in dealing with Bio-Ethical Questions. This document is the first phase of a goal of the synodical Ethics and Public Affairs Committee, which is: developing a comprehensive document that addresses a wide variety of ethical issues for the benefit of our officebearers. The thoughts in the two opening paragraphs come from various writings by the late Dr. James M. Grier, Distinguished Professor of Ethics, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, and Adjunct Professor at Puritan Theological Seminary. His biblically based writings provided us, as members of the committee, with a hitch-post from which we could explore, reflect, and ascertain principles and key considerations. We also benefited greatly from various books and periodicals; they will be listed in a future article. The Synod of 2013 endorsed our document, and urged us to print it in the Messenger and also make it available on the FRC web site. We do, however, wish to stress that our document is a work in progress. It is not a final authority on the issues stated. We do not even wish to declare the material to be a set of guidelines. Our intent is to provide resources and considerations for the reader to prayerfully contemplate. Printed below is the first section. It deals with conception and the development of human life. The second section has not been completed and it will be printed later. It deals with end of life questions. Alongside the work on this resource document, the committee is also exploring the issue of harvesting organs and transplantation. Finally, please know that the committee reviewed the possible abortifacient effect of the birth control pill. A complete document has been placed on the website for your information. Questions and comments regarding the material below or other related items can be brought to the attention of any member of the committee: Dr. L. Bilkes, Dr. J. Hamstra, Dr. G. Kenyon, Dr. E. Nieuwenhuis, Mr. T. Postma, or email the committee: [tpostma@ccshamilton.ca](mailto:tpostma@ccshamilton.ca)

## **RESOURCES FOR OFFICE-BEARERS IN DEALING WITH BIO-ETHICAL QUESTIONS**

### **Biblical Principles of Word-Based Ethics**

The Lord God's perpetually binding moral commands are His Creation ordinances; they were addressed to Adam in the garden and added to after the flood. In the Decalogue, the Lord expanded on His commands for His redeemed people. Further developed and applied through the prophets to the urban situation of His people, the Lord's commands are, then, seen embodied and advanced in the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. They are then integrated into the life of the church through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the last day they will be implemented as the standard of judgment. In the Lord's commands we see the holiness, righteousness and truth of God. Without them the Lord's biblical ethic disintegrates.

The present worldview crisis, together with expanding medical technology, brings a fundamental challenge to applying the principles of the Word-based ethic to the present situation. Most of the bio-ethical issues focus around the meaning of the 6th commandment: no unlawful killing! The imperative, or positive aspect of the sixth commandment can be stated as: "You are to be totally included in the class of persons who do all possible to nurture and sustain life." In God's commands, especially in this positive representation of the 6th command, the principle of life is found. The following standards or

principles submit to Word-based ethics (i.e. God's full moral revelation, beginning with His creation ordinances) regarding bioethical issues confronting His people.

#### A) Principles Dealing with the Conception and Development of Human Life

1. All human lives are persons from the point of conception (the joining of the egg and the sperm) until death.
2. Every attempt must be made to avoid the destruction of unborn persons. Anything less is in violation of the 6th commandment.
3. Any reproductive technology that produces the image of God (a person) for destruction or which significantly increases the risk of death of an embryo (unborn person) is in violation of the 6th commandment.
4. Any reproductive technology that exposes an embryo to danger, such as storing it in a hostile environment (for example, by freezing) even if the intent is to unfreeze it at a later date, is in violation of the 6th commandment as well as the requirement to not dishonour the image of God but to love our neighbour as ourselves.
5. The Lord mandated that procreation result from the consummated love relationship between husband and wife. Any reproductive technology that produces the image of God with the use of third party gamete material is in violation of the 7th commandment.
6. Any use of anything to cause an abortion, either as a means of contraception or as a means to disrupt the implantation of an embryo after conception or as a means to abort an embryo after implantation, is a violation of the 6th commandment.
7. The killing of embryos for stem cell research is forbidden by the 6th commandment.

Key Considerations – There are important matters to consider when a husband and wife earnestly seek to conceive a child but are unable. As a last resort, in vitro fertilization (IVF) is available, but should it be attempted? The couple, when researching IVF, must explore whether there will be any violation of the 6th and 7th commandments from beginning to end. Furthermore, they should also consider the following points:

- i) The Bible speaks of God's tender care of His children, including those in the womb. The womb was especially designed to provide a caring, secure and nurturing environment for a living person – an image of God. Parents are charged to care for their children, including the unborn. The petri dish is not a womb but a hostile environment, and frozen embryos are positioned in a state which is not respectful of the image of God.
- ii) IVF is about technology and fertilization. It is not about cleaving and "begetting". Our God is a God of relationships. The triune God created. Christ and His bride (or the sons and daughters) together glorify

the Father. His image bearers are creatures of relationships. The petri dish represents the absence of relationship including the cleaving of husband and wife, which is a departure from God's design.

iii) IVF has a low success rate, which tempts a couple to follow the path of higher probabilities and of least expense. This could mean fertilizing many eggs at one time or storing excess embryos (frozen) for later implantation. Stored embryos imply a presumption that the parents will be there even in the near future to proceed with implantation of their child.

iv) If considering the use of reproductive technologies, it is important to research all aspects of the technology before proceeding. Some aspects of IVF involve the intentional death of embryos, and most aspects of the process of IVF, as it is practiced today, increase the risk of death of embryos.

v) IVF reproduction involves the presence and intervention of a human third party who selects, controls and manages the process. The doctor's role includes introducing chemicals to hyperstimulate the gametes and to select preferred gametes for fertilization. The doctor also implants the embryo. The sovereign God does all of these things in His good wisdom to enable natural procreation.

vi) Our pursuit in producing our own children should be considered in light of how a child is viewed: Is a child a gift or an entitlement? It also should be considered in light of how God is viewed: Is He sovereign? Is there anything too hard for Him?

To follow:

- Principles dealing with end of human life
- Bibliography