

**ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA  
MEDIA OFFICE**

**Archbishop's Curia, Floriana**

Tel: (356) 21241281 Fax: (356) 21242971

E-mail: [info@maltadiocese.org](mailto:info@maltadiocese.org)

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**STATEMENT BY THE THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION  
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA**

**Biotechnology and bioethics in Malta**

The principal aim of medicine and biotechnology is the promotion of a culture in favour of life. This was affirmed by Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). The great strides made in contemporary biotechnology have been accompanied by great hopes, but have also created new threats and risks to human life, especially in its initial stages, when it is weak and defenceless.

The document *Dignitas Personae* (*The Dignity of the Person*), published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 12 December 2008, aims not to hinder scientific and technological progress, but to defend human life when this is threatened by the irresponsible use of certain methods of assisted procreation, by the diagnosis of fertilised embryos in the laboratory during the IVF process, and by the research on stem cells. During the last two decades, since the Vatican Congregation's document *Donum Vitae* (*The Gift of Life*, 1987), new threats to human dignity have arisen.

Faced with new methods of manipulation upon human life, *Dignitas Personae* affirms that the human embryo – at no stage of its development – can ever be considered as a piece of biological material. Experimentation on human embryos with the aim of scientific research, their destruction because they are considered extra or because they cannot develop normally, their being freezed even with the intention of their being implanted shortly, all go counter to the dignity and the integrity of human life.

It is in the interest of society that civil legislation ensures that the new methods of human procreation respect the dignity and the rights of the human person.

Among the fundamental rights which civil legislation has to safeguard, one mentions the right of each person to life and personal integrity, from conception to death. Thus, legislation should not tolerate that any person, even when still in the embryological state, be treated as an object for experimentation, be wounded, or destroyed with the excuse that he/she is extra or that he/she cannot develop normally.

The State has the duty to safeguard the family as the basic cell of society, as well as the right of the child to be conceived, born and raised by its parents in its natural environment which is the family. Civil legislation should not approve of procreative techniques which involve the donation of gametes between individuals who are not legally bound to each other by marriage.

Facts show that the rapid developments in the field of artificial reproduction are not ethically neutral. There are many risks entailed when such techniques are adopted without any recourse to an ethically-formed conscience. The ethical issues regarding the use of these techniques are not the private concern of infertile couples only. The moral values regarding the dignity of human life and the integrity of the family in the field of artificial reproduction affect the whole of society. Thus, more information and more ethical and moral education on these techniques are required, both for the members of the medical profession, as well as for the general public.

Our country requires legislation which is inspired by fundamental ethical values with the aim of regulating the use of biotechnology. Among these values, one mentions: the right of the couple to the direct and active participation in the procreation of their children; the respect of the dignity and the integrity of human life from conception; the protection of the family and marriage; the protection of the rights and the interests of the unborn child.

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