

## The Path to the 3 Parent-Child

### St Paul

The first New Testament document to be written was Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. It precedes the Gospels by 20 years and gives us some insight into the earliest teaching about the Christian Faith. Paul, Timothy and Sylvanus had evangelised Thessalonica in 50 AD, immediately after a horror visit to Philippi. In Philippi Paul had angered the locals. The district authorities had also got their backs up and Paul was flogged, imprisoned and driven out of town. The daunting and degrading experience still did not discourage Paul. On into Thessalonica he went, a port city sparkling on the Aegean, and was welcomed and loved there by those who delighted in hearing the Word and the Truth. No doubt it would have also provided Paul a God-given space and time of recovery and rejuvenation.

The eternally lit Church teaching on many bioethics issues can be flogged and hounded, but never drowned. There are always those for whom it is light-giving and life-saving. There will always be those who welcome it with relief and who rejoice in its freedom from modern social dictates. The locals and the authorities might be outraged, but in the footsteps of Paul - mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually - we persevere in His Truth knowing He will provide ports to gather, recover, refresh and continue giving in loving support.

It is both telling and timely for us to read this first New Testament document in which Paul continues to encourage the fledgling community:

*'We are not trying to please men, but God who tests our hearts'.* 1 Thessalonians 2:4

*'Encourage one another and build each other up'.* 1 Thessalonians 5:11

*'Test everything. Hold onto the good. Avoid every kind of evil'.* 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

### The path to 3-Parent IVF

There are two outpourings of benefit arising from Church teaching on bioethics. The first are the blessed provisions - known and unknown – of personal choices derived from the eternal wisdom and infinite knowledge of God. The second are the Church's endeavours to find ethical solutions, fostering new scientific developments and better ways to flourish. A classic example is the IVF culture. It uncovers both these gifts in the Church but also uncovers the persecution and denigration of Paul in that of modern faithful Catholics, even from within Catholic lay officialdom.

Secular IVF ethics endorse human embryo experimentation. What is abhorrent to Catholicism, and to the Commandments themselves, breezes through secular ethics. In 2016 a laboratory in the U.K. gained permission to experiment on human embryos for gene editing. These were leftover IVF embryos no longer wanted, cherished by no one, that were donated to research. Using a gene editing tool derived from the molecular machinery of bacteria ('CRISPR'), researcher Kathy Niakan and her team experimented on these young embryos in a London laboratory. The result was that about half of them acquired major unintended genetic 'edit' abnormalities. All the embryos were destroyed before two weeks gestation. Chinese scientists (Jiankui He et al. 2018) have since claimed to have implanted experimental gene edited babies. This is heritable, germline editing. While the onlooking scientific world was initially horrified, it didn't take long for the 'some say' response: that this, however abhorrent, might help couples who have genetic concerns about reproducing.

Fast forward four years. Very quietly, in early April 2022, Australia legislated away cloning prohibitions in favour of embryo experimentation. These aren't the unwanted, unloved leftover embryos, but new embryos created for the sole purpose of experimentation and harvest. This puts

Australia down in taboo territory with China's rogue scientists like Jiankiu He. It was passed by a conscience vote without publicizing calls for public – or other expert – input to inform politicians. Scott Morrison, Greg Hunt and Anthony Albanese voted for it. Why the secrecy? Possibly to avoid international scientific outcry over the known safety and ethical concerns. Possibly to avoid full public awareness.

### **Why 3 parent IVF? (Inherited Mitochondrial Disease)**

The pursuit of this experimentation on embryos is to find a way around inherited mitochondrial disease. Mitochondrial diseases can have devastating effects. As they involve all the cells in our body, and are inherited disorders, we cannot yet cure them. Any possible preventive research therefore has a strong emotional appeal, and may be well-intentioned. However, the current research means utilizing embryo harvesting for a planned outcome of 3-parent IVF babies.

Mitochondria are very tiny organelles within each of our cells responsible for producing energy in our body. Mitochondria contain their own DNA, which is inherited from our mothers. Mitochondrial diseases, due to abnormal mitochondrial DNA, can show up at any age. The more severe ones show up earlier in life. When this DNA is defective, the ultimate aim of embryonic research will be, via IVF, to use the father and mother's DNA but to use the mitochondrial DNA of an egg donor. This would enable the mother to have a genetically related child but with another woman's genetic contribution. 3-parent IVF will not eradicate existing mitochondrial disease or save life because it can't. It will help to make 'healthy' embryos with unknown sequelae from the procedures and unknown germline effects for generations to come.

Beyond the evil of embryo experimentation are other ethical objections raised by scientists: safety concerns and risks to children; germline engineering concerns; egg donor exploitation; egg donor anonymity; investment of public resource in an ethically problematic line of pursuit, diverting it away from disease treatment research that would assist those who are actually sick now with the disease.

### **Philippi**

As in Philippi, and even within lay officialdom in the Catholic Church, there will be disparagement. A recent webinar, organized by the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) to discuss the Plenary Council, hosted the Director of Catholic Education in Tasmania. She lamented that the Church is still 'remote' from IVF. It is disappointing to know that even Catholics in leadership positions are ignorant or unconcerned about the processes of IVF which at best involve embryo formation in chemical environments of unknown effect, increased congenital abnormality rates, possible 'selection' to a frozen uncertain future, or 'non-selection' to somewhere in the plumbing. It is concerning that authorities, as in Paul's time, follow the crowd-pleasing ethic, disparaging Truth. It is also of some concern the approach of pragmatism may spread a false ethic into an education system and encourage a spirit of disregard – even disobedience – in those entrusted with the care and education of the next generation of Catholics.

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*Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Pray for us*

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