

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION— FROM CREATED TO CREATOR

PRESENTATION BY DR. JAMES I. LAMB

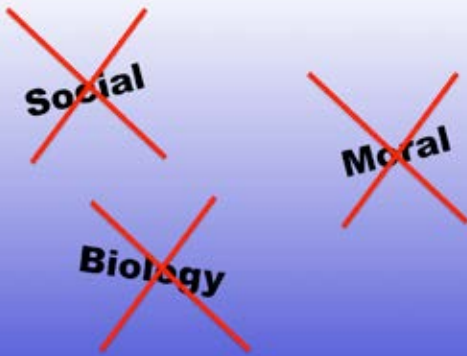
This presentation begins with the critical question, “Where does the theologian begin when discussing in vitro Fertilization?” The theologian begins with theology! Where in our theology do we begin? Lamb suggests the best place is the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed, specifically the incarnation of our Lord. His conception by the power of the Holy Spirit not only testifies to Christ’s divinity at that moment, but also to the value He gives to all humanity from the moment of conception. From there we can move to the First Article and the value God’s creating hands give to life from that moment. Finally, we move to the Third Article and the value that God’s desire to call each life into an eternal relationship with Him gives to all human life.

With this theology as the foundation, the process of IVF is given in simple terms. The goal is to understand the process and make judgments about the process based on our theology. It is not the intent to pass judgment on any who may have used IVF and received the gift of children through this process. Even many of these couples are not aware of the total process involved. Once the process has been discussed, the latter portion of the presentation turns back to our theology and makes connections to the IVF process. It is both the process and theology that the Christian must consider when making decisions about the use of IVF.

From Created to Creator – *in vitro* Fertilization



Where does the Lutheran theologian begin when discussing in vitro fertilization (IVF)?



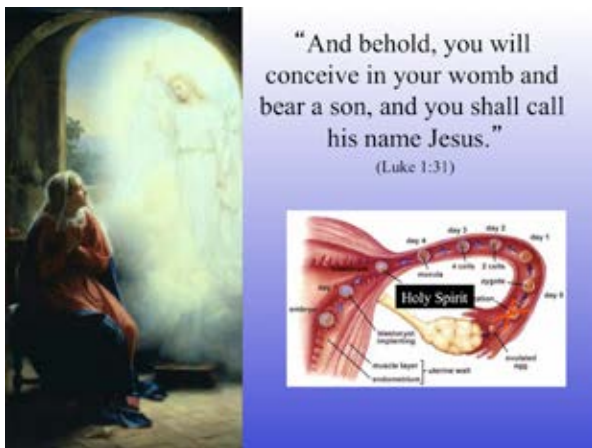
I pray it is obvious that we do not begin with the social implications involved in IVF. We do not even begin with moral propositions. We do not begin with the biology involved. You would think it would be self-evident, but sadly it is not always so.

Theology

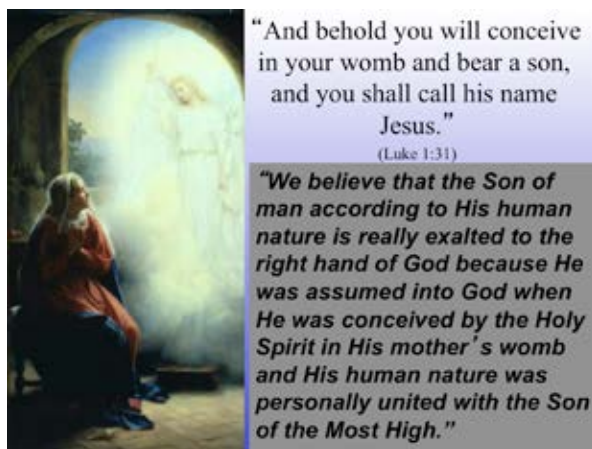
As theologians we begin with our theology. That leads to our next question, where in our theology do we begin?



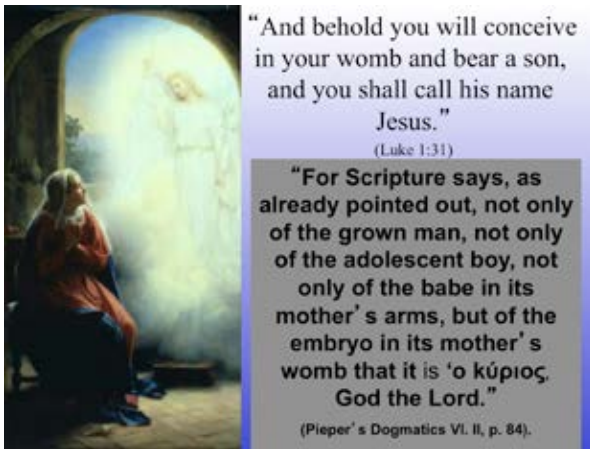
Many begin with the Fifth Commandment and the prohibition of taking judicially innocent human life and the positive aspect of helping and befriending our neighbor in his bodily need. To be sure, embryos created in IVF are judicially innocent human lives and they are our neighbors whom we are to help and befriend. We will certainly get there in this discussion, but it is not the best place to start. Some might start with the First Commandment. IVF and other biotechnologies do run the risk of becoming “gods,” something we look to for more help and good than from God as Luther puts it in the Large Catechism. Others may begin with the Sixth Commandment. Marriage between one man and one woman and the one flesh union is a big consideration in the discussion of IVF. But we will not start there either. So, where in our theology do we begin when discussing a technology that involves human life at its very beginnings? I believe the best place to start is with Him who came to redeem human life from its very beginning and who started His human life at life’s very beginning. For the theologian, the best place to start in a discussion of IVF is the incarnation of our Lord. And that discussion does not take us to a manger in Bethlehem, but to a fallopian tube in the virgin Mary.



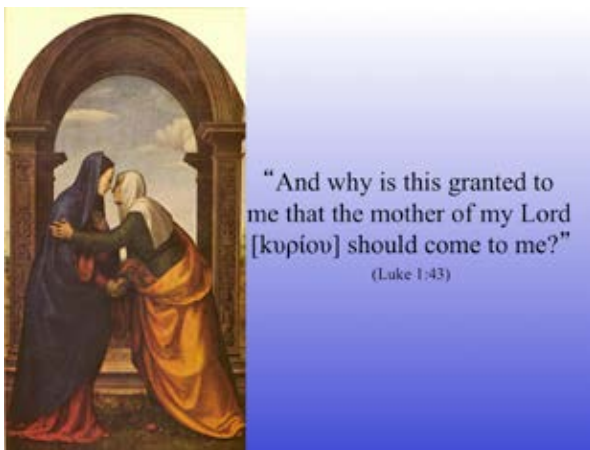
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us nine months before Jesus’ birth. The angel’s words to Mary, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son” (Luke 1:31a), describe two events, not one. The former is miraculous, not the latter. There was nothing miraculous about Jesus’ birth. The miracle happened when the Holy Spirit, the “power of the Most High” (1:35), overshadowed Mary. So we need to eliminate conception in the normal way and bring on the “power of the Most High.” There was Mary’s egg with twenty-three chromosomes, and then, suddenly, through this Most High power, there is Jesus, a zygote, a one-celled human being with 46 chromosomes, the God-embryo.



Our confessions so state: “We believe that the Son of man according to His human nature is really exalted to the right hand of God because He was assumed into God when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb and His human nature was personally united with the Son of the Most High.” (Epitome, p. 15, Art. 8)

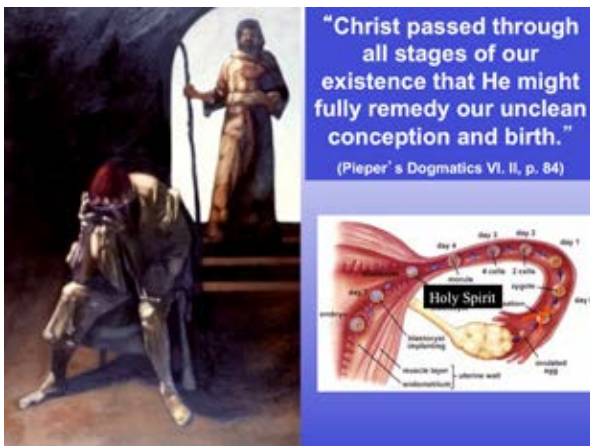


Pieper writes, "For Scripture says, as already pointed out, not only of the grown man, not only of the adolescent boy, not only of the babe in its mother's arms, but of the embryo in its mother's womb that it is 'o kúpios, God the Lord.'" (Pieper's *Dogmatics* VI. II, p. 84)



Let's go with Mary to Elizabeth's house. You know her words to Mary. **"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord [kúpiou] should come to me?"** (Luke 1:43) Here kúpiou is used as the counterpart of the Old Testament name of God, Yahweh. The timing of this visit is important. Mary leaves right after the angel's visit, that is, right after the conception of Jesus. She "went with haste into the hill country of Judah" (1:39). If we give her ten days to make this journey, Jesus is just beginning to implant in Mary's uterine wall. He is a speck capable of sitting on the point of a pin and yet He is referred to as "Lord," the God of the universe.

Thus, when we say in the Second Article, "conceived by the Holy Spirit," we attest to Jesus' divinity at that moment. But I would suggest we give thought to the idea that we also attest to the value Jesus' conception gives to humanity at that moment. It is part of the price with which we were purchased.



We know our need for a Savior from the moment of conception. **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me"** (Ps. 51:5 NIV). Again from Pieper, **"Christ passed through all stages of our existence that He might fully remedy our unclean conception and birth."** (Pieper's *Dogmatics* VI. II, p. 84)

As we indicated earlier, the path to the cross and empty tomb did not start in a manger, but in a fallopian tube.



Christ needed hands and feet to be pierced and bleed.



Christ needed a mouth to utter His forsaken cry.



Christ needed a brow to be crown with thorns.



Christ needed a beating heart to be stilled in death.



Christ needed a body to be buried in a tomb and to rise again.



Luke refers to the crucifixion as θεωρίαν, a spectacle (23:48). But before there could be a spectacle on a cross, and before there could be the spectacular of the resurrection, there needed to be a speck in a womb. Jesus took our place not just in the living of His life, not just on the cross, and not just as the first born of the dead. He took our place from the moment of conception. A holy, God-embryo giving value to unholy human embryos from the moment of conception.

**So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.**
(Genesis 1:27)



With the incarnation as our starting point, we can move “backward” in the creed to the First Article to discover the reason for this “speck to spectacle” event. It was God’s great love for the work of His hands, His creation, especially the crown of His creation, human life. Having created the backdrop and set the stage, on day six God brings human life onto the scene made for them. Male and female He creates them. In His image He creates them, a distinction given to none other. Though shattered in the fall, this original and lofty position still raises the value of human life above all of God’s creation.

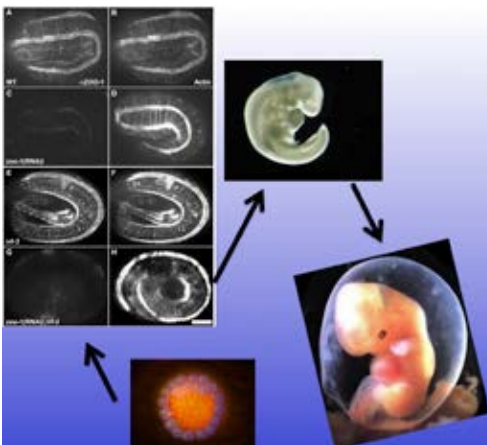
Male and female He creates them and then brings them together bone of bone and flesh of flesh. He tells them to be fruitful and multiply and sets into motion a biological process for procreation. He institutes marriage as the context for this one-flesh union and to reflect His relationship with His own. But He does not remove His creating hands from the biology His hands gave.

**For You created my inmost
being; You knit me
together in my mother's
womb. I praise You
because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made.**
(Psalm 139:13-14a NIV)



We find a poetic picture of this in Ps. 139:13-14. “**For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made**” (Ps. 139:13-14a NIV). Using Hebrew idioms, the Psalmist creates an intimate picture of God’s hands-on involvement in the creation of each human being. I see here a kind of poetic biology. Now I know I’m imposing this on the text and I suppose it’s my undergraduate work in biology kicking in. On the other hand, I am not surprised that this God-inspired poetry for procreation reflects the biology God uses for the same.

God creates our “inmost being,” that which is essentially us, our very souls. That’s what happens in biology. At the moment of conception, you were you. Male/female, tall/short, brown hair/light hair, blue eyes/brown eyes . . . you were you, and uniquely you. You are the result of a possible 1 and 70 trillion chromosomal combinations. Next our poetry says, “You knit me together in my mother’s womb.” A little more literal, this comes out something like, “You wove a covering for me.” So God creates us and then weaves a covering for us, this body, this temple.



So it is in biology. Here we are as a blastocyst, a hollow ball with a single cell layer on the outside and a mass of cells forming on the inside. When we arrive in our mothers’ womb, this outside layer of cells forms the placenta and umbilical cord. The cells that are on the inside begin to change and differentiate and fold forming three layers eventually becoming bone and muscle and skin and nerve forming our body, this temple. After three weeks we look like this, and in just six weeks like this. Yes, and both Scripture and embryologists would agree, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” As I tell the children when I speak to them, we could all have a tag attached to our necks which would read, “Handmade. By God.”



The reason, then, for the incarnation and the nail-pierced hands was His love for the work of His hands in Creation. And the value God gives to human life has just doubled—created by His hands and redeemed by His hands.



We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:4)

Again, with the Second Article as our starting point, let's move forward to the Third Article. Those God creates with His hands and has redeemed with His hands, He desires to call and hold them in His hands. God would have all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). God desires that all would be brought to the waters of Holy Baptism. God wants every human being to have an eternal relationship with Him. God wants every soul to be saved and every body to be redeemed so that it might be raised to eternal glory on the last day.

We are God's handiwork!

Created by God's Hands



Redeemed by God's Hands

Called by Held by God's Hands



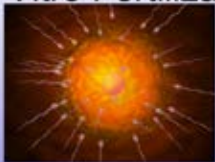
We are God's handiwork! Created by the hands of God, redeemed by the hands of God, and called to be held by the hands of God—this is the source of the value of human life. It gives value to all human life regardless of their size or where they live or the condition of their health or degree of dependency on others. This is the foundation from which we address IVF.

With that theological background, we can now look at the biology involved in IVF.

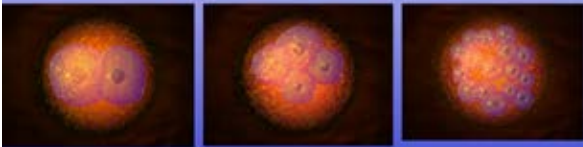
In Vitro Fertilization



In Vitro Fertilization



"In glass"



Is IVF a blessing from God that Christians may use or are there problems that need concern us? This presentation will look at the basic procedure involved in the normal IVF process. But before we move on, let me make it clear that the purpose of our discussion is not to judge those Christians who have used IVF and have children by this process. I personally know such couples and their children. But I have learned from these relationships that not all couples are clearly aware of the process involved. So that is our purpose, to lay out the basic facts of IVF in a simple way and then make some

The basic procedure of IVF begins with unfertilized eggs. The woman is hyper-stimulated so that she produces many eggs per cycle instead of only one. The eggs are placed in a Petri dish full of sperm. Please note that this allows for the use of donor eggs and donor sperm. The egg is fertilized and the normal development begins. This occurs in a glass petri dish, hence the name *in vitro*, which means "in glass."

judgments about the process, not the people who have used the process.

Many eggs are fertilized because this is an expensive and time consuming process. Most clinics will not perform this procedure on just one egg. Many new lives are created in this process.

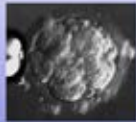
The next step in the process is embryonic grading.

In Vitro Fertilization

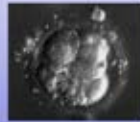
• Embryonic grading



Grade 4



Grade 3



Grade 2



Grade 1



Grade 0

A laboratory technician assigns a grade to each embryo based on his visual microscopic assessment of how "good" each embryo appears. Grade 4 is the best grade and Grade 0 is the worst. In the clinic where these slides came from, "Grade 2" was the cut off point. Anything below that are destroyed. Many couples are unaware that this even happens.

In Vitro Fertilization

- Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis



It is at this point that pre-implantation genetic diagnosis is possible. A nucleus from one of the embryo's cells is removed and his or her genetic code analyzed. This procedure was developed to detect genetic diseases like Tay-Sachs or cystic fibrosis. If a genetic disease exists in the baby, then the embryo is destroyed. Also, since your gender is determined at the moment of conception, there are clinics who are now using this technique to determine the gender of the embryo and then the clinic will only implant the babies of the gender that the client chooses. This has been going on for some time as this January 26, 2004, issue of *Newsweek* indicates.

In Vitro Fertilization

- "Good" embryos
Several implanted
Selective reduction
Stored by freezing
Vitrification – water solid without freezing
Non-receptive uterus



So what happens to "good" embryos? They are implanted in the uterus. The procedure generally calls for several embryos to be implanted because not all the embryos will develop. However, when multiple embryos do begin to develop, doctors will recommend that you selectively reduce some of them so that only 1 or 2 remain. Of course, selective reduction is a euphemism for abortion.

Now, if the first attempt is successful, the extra babies are frozen. They are placed in glass straws called "cryo" straws. These, in turn, are placed in a larger glass tube which is then plunged into a tank of liquid nitrogen at minus 346 degrees F. and frozen. Embryos may be harmed in this freezing process and, harm may also occur when they are thawed. To combat this, a newer procedure called "vitrification" is used which is a process for making water solid without freezing. This is a complicated process, however, and not many clinics do it or even want to do it. This may be a good place to discuss the idea of a "non-receptive womb." If the reason for the infertility is the inability of the uterus to allow implantation, it would seem we are putting embryos at risk through this process. Such non-receptivity may or may not be discovered during pre-IVF workups.

What options do couples have in regard to their frozen embryos? Let's discuss those on the next slide.

In Vitro Fertilization

1. Implant later
2. Donate to research
3. Adoption
4. Allow them to die



Couples who have frozen embryos generally have four options for what to do with them. They may desire to have more implanted at a later date. They can donate them for research where the embryos would be destroyed for their stem cells. They could seek to have them adopted by another couple, or they could allow them to die by removing their life support, in other words, allowing them to thaw. Most clinics will only keep the embryos for five years so decisions will need to be made sooner or later.

That, in very simple terms, is the *in vitro* fertilization process.

Connection to Word of God?

Marriage

5th Commandment

Pro-Creation

1st Commandment

Second Article

Parenting

Coveting

What are some theological principles that come into play with In vitro? i.e. How does it connect to the Word of God? What doctrines apply?

Questions

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Any questions?