Metropolitan Hilarion: There exist within the Church differing opinions regarding the permissibility of IVF



Pastoral necessity has forced a conversation within the Church on the permissibility of modern biotechnology and practices, as well as the examination of other issues on bioethics, believes the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion.

In speaking on the Church and the World TV programme about the draft document entitled 'The Ethical Dilemmas of Intro Viral Fertilization', which is to be presented at the Church's Inter-conciliar Presence, His Eminence noted: "This is a document for discussion, and it states that within the Russian Orthodox Church there exist differing viewpoints on this issue. There are those who believe that IVF is wrong under any circumstances. There is the point of view (which the document reflects) that under certain circumstances intro viral fertilization is quite possible."

Among those conditions are, so His Eminence stated, the ban on the killing of 'excess' embryos or their cryopreservation to be used as donor gametes.

“The document came into being within the Inter-conciliar Presence at the commission for theology and theological education, which I head. The subject of bioethics runs like a thread through the commission: we take one bioethical issue after another, discuss it and then prepare draft documents,” said metropolitan Hilarion.

He said that it was a very sensitive and complex question as to where to establish the boundaries in the sphere of biotechnology.

Describing how this issue is discussed at the Inter-conciliar Presence of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Eminence noted: “I have to admit that for us this is a very difficult issue because, for example, how can I – a church minister and a monk – have anything realistically to say on giving birth to children, on donor cells and so on? Of course, one may learn a thing or two from the literature on the topic, but in order to give competent answers we have to turn to experts in the field. We have invited such experts and they participate in the discussions at the preparatory stages. Moreover, we invite our own priests and lay people who are specialists in this area.”

At the same time the bishop emphasized that the discussion of these topics “is in no way caused by the desire to create a theoretical basis for a definite practice, but by a lively and relevant pastoral necessity.”

Reminding viewers that even among the members of the commission there was no unanimous viewpoint on the issue of IVF, the bishop noted: “We prepared this document and expounded within it the existing viewpoints, and now the Church is faced with the task of determining whether IVF is permissible under certain conditions or whether it is impermissible no matter what the circumstances.”

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