

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IN-VITRO FERTILIZATION FROM THE CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT: *The act of procreation exists vehemently for all people in their quest to producing and this idea (procreation) is common to all humans whether religious or impious. However, most couples have this dream of bringing forth children of their own shattered. Childlessness is often stigmatized and leads to profound social suffering for couples especially women in the developing nations. So, in the wake of infertility, many individuals may seek assistance elsewhere (scientific means) and very common is by the use of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF). The birth of Louise Joy Brown in 1978; the world's first successful In-Vitro Fertilization with the expertise and assistance of Drs. Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edward was the start of a revolution in infertility treatment. What was then an innovative scientific advancement now has become a routine medical treatment. Beside these help that is being brought to humanity by these advances in biomedical technologies, the adverse effects of them should not be overlooked. In line with this, the article has examined the technique involving In-Vitro Fertilization as well as some ethical concerns from the Christian and Islamic points of view.*

KEYWORDS: *In-Vitro Fertilization, Christianity and Islam, Infertility, Procreation, Ethics*

INTRODUCTION

In all areas of the world, both men and women of reproductive age face the challenge of infertility causing considerable personal suffering and disruption in family life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) approximately 8-10% of couples in the industrialized countries have problems with childbirth³. Scientifically, the factors that mostly contribute to infertility among women are problems in ovulation, blocked or scarred fallopian tubes, and

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³ World Health Organization Scientific Group on Recent Advances in Medically Assisted Conception, "Recent Advances in Medically Assisted Conception: A Report of WHO Scientific Group", World Health Organisation (Geneva:WHO, 1992).

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endometriosis. In the developing world, the reasons for infertility involve prevalence in sexually transmitted diseases and infections which increase the rate of secondary infertility. Infertility as it is to be noted is not only associated with women as commonly perceived in most less developed settlements. In about half of the couples with reproductive problems, there is a contributing male factor. Among men, most cases of infertility are a consequence of abnormal or too few sperm⁴. *In-Vitro Fertilization* (IVF) has, therefore, offered hope for most couples or individuals who are childless and seek to procreate and make babies of their own.

The term '*in-vitro*' is from the Latin root, meaning "in glass". This is because early biological experiments which involved cultivation of tissues outside the organisms (from which they were brought) were carried out in glass containers such as Petri dishes, beakers and test tubes⁵. In the simplest form, *in-vitro* fertilization involves the fusion of male and female gametes (sperm and egg) outside the body in a laboratory to form a zygote (thus, a fertilized egg). Unlike artificial insemination in which the sperm is placed in the uterus and conception follows normally, *in-vitro* fertilization combines a man's sperm and a woman's egg in a laboratory dish, where fertilization occurs.

This advancement in science (*In-Vitro Fertilization*) has for that matter existed to reduce cases of infertility. From the medical/scientific point of view, IVF makes conception possible and represents a head way in procreation. Its objective is to reduce if not to totally cease the problem of infertility and childlessness. In spite of its positive objective, many theologians and ethicist have considered the possibilities of a future ill-use of the technology and have consequently confronted society with new ethical and moral enquiries.

Indeed, there have been several religious views and debates surrounding this form of fertilization, hence procreation. This debate surrounds not only the technique itself but the uses to which it is being put, especially the status of the embryo and has attracted the interest of religious people, ethicists, physicians, academicians and the cross section of the society⁶. The paper therefore makes inquiries into views and opinions, particularly from the religious perspective. It probes into the science of *in-vitro* fertilization from the Christian and Islamic points of view. Views from these two major religions are considered due to their pivotal role in the affairs of its numerous followers as well as their immense interests in pertinent issues that confront humanity in the twenty first century.

⁴, Martin I. de Melo, "Ethics and Uncertainty: In Vitro Fertilization and Risks to Women's Health", Risk: Health Safety and Environment 9(1998):201-277.

⁵ Wikipedia, "In- Vitro Fertilization", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_vitro_fertilisation, (Accessed on 13/08/2014).

⁶Amit Kumar Banerjee, "An Insight into the Ethical Issues Related To In Vitro Fertilization", Internet Journal of Health, Volume 6, Number 1. (2006), <http://ispub.com/IJH/6/1/4581>(Accessed on 10/08/2014).

PROCEDURES IN *IN-VITRO* FERTILIZATION

Before undergoing an *in-vitro* fertilization, the history of the couple needs to be taken.⁷ This is followed by physical and laboratory examinations that include test for the sperm count for the male and pelvic examination and cervical culturing for the female. Once these tests are completed the woman is given a course of hormone treatments to cause her ovaries to produce multiple eggs. This is necessary because a single fertilized egg has only a small chance of survival. The eggs are surgically removed just prior to ovulation. They are then placed in a culture dish with the father's sperm. In the next few days, the dish is periodically examined to see if fertilization has occurred. Within approximately 48 hours, when the embryos reach the eight-cell stage, those that appear healthy and are growing normally are transferred into the uterus -where it is hoped that some will implant and develop full term⁸.

In-Vitro Fertilization is of importance because it has and continues to help solving the problem of infertility by allowing previously infertile couples to finally have children of their own. Also, an important scientific argument for IVF is that by studying fertilization and early embryonic development outside the womb, certain birth defects can be detected and prevented. *In-Vitro* Fertilization, however, can be an expensive procedure. It is quite demanding-physically, psychologically and emotionally. Aside these, the procedures involved in this technology particularly in relation to the status of the embryo have raised a lot of debates among ethicists and objections from various religions.

CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM AND *IN VITRO* FERTILIZATION

The main theological and doctrinal views discussed in respect of *In-Vitro* Fertilization are from the perspective of two of the major religions (Christianity and Islam). The idea of procreation from their perspective is so much in-line with each other due to their conception of a common creator of the universe (God). Both Christianity and Islam emphasise a natural process of procreation of which anything contrary will be highly debated. One of the central pillars of orthodox religions is the doctrine that God created the world and he is the beginner of all lives. This position re-introduces the effervescent relationship between theology and the beginning of life. A discussion of *In-Vitro* Fertilization from the perspective of the two major religions therefore re-opens the debate which for long has existed; the relationship between science and religion.

⁷ Amnon Goldworth, "The Ethics Of In Vitro Fertilization", Paediatrics in Review. Journal of the American Academy of Paediatrics. (1999), <http://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/20/8/e28.full>. (Accessed on 10/08/2014)

⁸ Evangelos G. Papanikolaou, and others, "In Vitro Fertilization with Single Blastocyst-Stage versus Single Cleavage-Stage Embryos", New England Journal of Medicine, 354(11), (2006): 1139-46.

CHRISTIAN VIEW

Shortly after the creation, God instructed Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and increase in number”⁹. Research testifies that the desire to have a baby remains one of the most primal and deep-seated desires of Christian couples. Without the biological urge to reproduce, all God-created species would die out. As pressure mounts to have children (from society, family, and even church members), frustrations escalate within couples and their marriage. However, a quick fix to this problem has for the years past been centred on Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART). According to Goldworth, over many centuries since God’s injunction, children have been born by natural means. However, among the estimated millions of infertile couples around the world, IVF offers new promise to them¹⁰.

Many Christians are of the view that this technique is an intrusion in the divine process of procreation, an intrusion into the bonds of marriage and parenthood, the sanctity of life in relation to the status of the embryo, among others. Although IVF seems to be a good solution to the problem of infertility, going down the route can lead to much more heart ache than not having children. In Christianity however, many denominations hold different views on *in-vitro* fertilization but the major denomination, that is, Catholic and Protestants views will be delved into.

The Catholic View On *In Vitro* Fertilization

The Roman Catholic Church has long rejected any reproductive technologies that manipulate human embryos. The Catholic Church only condones procedures that ‘assist’ conception that would happen naturally. Pope Benedict XVI addressing members of the Pontifical Academy of Life (PAL) on the issue of couples struggling with infertility made it known that the Church pays great attention to the suffering of couples with infertility. The Church cares for them and, precisely because of this, encourages medical research. He, however, warned against the lure of technology of artificial insemination which is not permitted by the Church¹¹.

Catholic teaching prohibits *in-vitro* fertilization, maintaining that a child has the right to be conceived in the marital embrace of his parents. This prohibitive stance is based on a 1987 document entitled *Instruction On Respect For Human Life In Its Origin And On The Dignity Of Procreation (Donum Vitae)*, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Regarding the transmission of human life, Russell E. Smith in a symposium on: *Religious Law: Roman Catholic, Islamic, And Jewish Treatment Of Familial Issues, Including Education, Abortion, In Vitro Fertilization, Prenuptial Agreements, Contraception, And*

⁹ Genesis 1:28

¹⁰Ibid 7.

¹¹Jim Graves, “The Church Teaching On In Vitro Fertilization”, http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/1774/church_teaching_on_in_vitro_fertilization.aspx (accessed July 25, 2014)

Martial Fraud, explained that, the covenant of heterosexual marriage is the only appropriate forum for sexual expression. It also holds that the loving union of the spouses and the bringing forth of offspring are the two essential purposes of marriage as expressed most dramatically in the conjugal act. Thus, an act of technology cannot replace the conjugal act.¹² The Catholic Church opposes *In Vitro* Fertilization on various reasons with the eminent one being the disposal of embryos. Catholics believe an embryo is an individual with a soul who must be treated as such. It must be allowed to reside in its original and natural position and which with time will reach a stage appropriate to be called a human being. Most of the embryos conceived which the Church holds to be human life die, are frozen indefinitely for later implantation, are used for research or are discarded. *In-Vitro* Fertilization makes the child a commodity produced in a laboratory and makes doctors, technicians and even business people part of the conception process. Also, the sperm used is usually obtained by masturbation, which the Church teaches to be immoral. In some cases the sperm or egg used may not come from the couple desiring the child; because one of the spouses may be infertile, it may be necessary to use the sperm or egg of an outsider. Nonetheless, Catholics teachings posit that, it is not objectively evil to be infertile and advocates adoption as an option for such couples who still wish to have children¹³.

As devastating as the problem of infertility can be, couples can, by God's grace, acknowledge His will in all things and recognize that the promise is true and meaningful¹⁴. An attempt to form a baby in a dish or glass among fluids contrasts the Catholic Church's position concerning conception and the beginning of human life.

The Protestant View on *In-Vitro* Fertilization¹⁵

Like all Christians, Protestants see children as gifts from God, and not a right to the parent. Some couples have been blessed by God with many of such gifts and others these blessings have been withhold. Consequently, the way in which children are conceived, in Protestant tradition, is not only a matter of individual concern, but also of familial, social, and Christian concern.

In Protestant thought, sexual relations within marriage are often more closely tied to companionship than to having children. The main concern of Protestants is moving procreation out of the loving embrace of couples and into the medical laboratory because this

¹² Symposium on Religious Law: Roman Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish Treatment of Familial Issues, Including Education, Abortion, *In Vitro* Fertilization, Prenuptial Agreements, Contraception, and Martial Fraud, 16 Loy. L.A. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 9 (1993), <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ilr/vol16/iss1/2> (accessed August 13, 2014)

¹³ Alina Dain, Reconciling Religion and Fertility, Medill Reports (Northwestern University: Chicago, 2009), <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=136743> (accessed August 13, 2014)

¹⁴ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (New Living Translation; Romans 8:28)

¹⁵ The Free Library, "Protestant perspectives on the uses of the new reproductive technologies", The Free Library, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Protestant+perspectives+on+the+uses+of+the+new+reproductive...-a097823699> (Accessed August 13, 2014)

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seems to mechanize and objectify procreation¹⁶. In their view, it is wrong to use the new reproductive technologies to design children in their parents' own image and according to parental tastes, rather than to bring forth children who are to be loved and nurtured in their own right as unique individuals¹⁷.

Also, the question of the moral status of these early embryos; a reason why Catholics reject *in-vitro* fertilization and the protection they should be given has been a thorny one for Protestants. Some believe that the same protection should be accorded to the newly fertilized egg as to a postnatal human being. Regardless, Protestants maintain that, the embryos are owed respect and that they should be treated in ways that are potentially beneficial to them whenever possible¹⁸. This implies that only as many embryos should be produced as are strictly needed over the course of attempts at in vitro fertilization, and that every effort should be made to avoid leaving behind "surplus" frozen embryos.

Nevertheless, children born with the aid of reproductive technologies can spring from a love between man and woman and that is as deep and intimate as that between couples whose reproductive channels bear fruit without medical assistance.¹⁹ So, when couples elect to use new reproductive technologies because these provide the only way in which they can evade natural processes that have gone askew, their choice is not in itself wrong but protestant thinkers seek to know about which reproductive technologies should be used, whose gametes and for what purposes²⁰.

ISLAMIC VIEW ON IN VITRO FERTILIZATION (*al talqiih al istinaa'e al khaariji*)²¹

Islam recognizes the inherent desire of married couples to have their own children. The inability to have children is one of the serious hardships that a married couple endures since the essence of mankind having spouses and bringing forth children is a very strong human instinct and Allah reminds His people of that in the Holy Qur'an; "wealth and sons are allurements of the life of this world"(Al-Kahf: 46). However, the Holy Qur'an (Surah 42: 49-

¹⁶ Lisa Sowle Cahill, Between The Sexes: Foundations For A Christian Ethics Of Sexuality, (Augsburg Fortress Publishing: Minneapolis, 1985) 53-56

¹⁷ Sondra E. Wheeler, "Contingency, Tragedy, and the Virtues of Parenting", In Beyond Cloning: Religion And The Remaking Of Humanity, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001)117-19.

¹⁸ Ibid 15

¹⁹ Ibid 15

²⁰ Gilbert C. Meilaender, Body, Soul, and Bioethics,(University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1995)65-66

²¹ "Islamic Medical Education Resources-040602- Contemporary Ethico-Legal Issues from an Islamic Perspective", <http://omarkasule-04.tripod.com/id1042.html>. (Accessed, August 13, 2014)

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50²²) makes it clear that infertility is ordained by Allah and will happen to certain couples the same as other hardships/disasters which afflict humankind now and then. This does not mean that Islam asks the infertile couple only to pray to overcome this problem. Islam encourages reproduction and it advocates treatment of infertility as well. A basic Islamic principle permits persons facing hardship to use all 'lawful' means to solve their problem, while at the same time preserving their trust in God that He will help them achieve their goal.²³ The *hadith* narrated on the authority of Usamah bin Shuraik briefly put it as follows, "The Prophet (PBUH)²⁴) said, "Seek remedy (of your illnesses), for Allah has never created an illness unless He has also created a cure for it, save the (illness of) old age"²⁵

Due to the rapid evolving of reproductive technologies, modern Muslim jurists have found it necessary to research the subject of assisted reproduction as it relates to the Qur'an. In most Muslim countries, non-binding but authoritative Islamic religious proclamations called *fatwas* have profoundly affected the practice of *in-vitro* fertilization. Lane and Rubinstein (1991) described that, in recent years, many such *fatwas* on a wide variety of reproductive health issues have been issued in Egypt and other Muslim countries²⁶.

According to Afroz Ali, in his article; *The Conditional Permissibility Of In-Vitro Fertilisation Under Islamic Jurisprudence*, there are no clear proofs in the primary text; the Qur'an and Sunnah, to allow a Jurist to place *in vitro* fertilization as obligatory, recommended, permissible, reprehensible or prohibited. However, based on secondary sources of the Islamic Law; *Istihsaan* (equity) and *Masala al- Mursala* (clear societal benefit), *in vitro* fertilisation is a permissible consideration²⁷. The basic reason to consider *in vitro* fertilization for legally married couple is when they have attempted natural means to conceive but have failed due to infertility causes.

Similar to Christianity with its divergent views on *in vitro* fertilization by various denominations(Catholics and Protestants), major divergences have also occurred between

²² To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female (children), and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them (both) males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent.

²³ Fadel, H. E., "The Islamic Viewpoint on new Assisted Reproductive Technologies". Fordham Urban Law Journal: 30(1) (2002). 147-157

²⁴ "PBUH" means Peace Be Unto Him and is a phrase that Muslims say after uttering or hearing names of any of the Islamic prophets.

²⁵ Abdul-Razzaq Abdul-Majeed, "Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART): The Islamic Law Perspective", in Islam and Bioethics, ed. AlaroBerna Arda and Vardit Rispler – Chaim, (Turkey: Ankara University, 2012) 97

²⁶ Marcia C. Inhorn, "Fatwas and ARTs: IVF and Gamete Donation in Sunni v. Shi'a Islam". Journal of Gender, Race and Justice 9(2006):291–317.

²⁷ Afroz Ali, The Conditional Permissibility Of In Vitro Fertilization Under Islamic Jurisprudence, al Ghazalli Centre Awareness Paper, (Australia: al-Ghazali Centre, 2004), 6- 12.

Sunni and Shi'ite religious authorities in Islam but their differences lies in the issue regarding the permissibility of third-party gamete donation, with new *fatwas* emerging from the Shi'ite world in recent year.²⁸

Sunni Islam on *In Vitro* Fertilization²⁹

Sunni Islam is the dominant form of Islam in the world. Based on a *fatwas* declared by the Grand Sheikh of Egypt's famed Al Azhar University, Sunni Islamist are opined that, *in vitro* fertilization can be employed by couples if the egg and sperm that is going to be used for fertilization are derived from the husband and wife and the fertilized egg is transferred back to the uterus of the wife. This is even allowed on grounds that, the procedure is indicated for a medical reason and it is carried out by an expert.

Also, no third party should be part of the process of fertilization. The reason being that, marriage is a contract between the wife and husband so during the span of the marriage there should not be any intruder in the marital function of sex and procreation. So, a third party is not accepted whether he or she is providing sperm, eggs, embryos or a foetus. Using a third party is likened to committing *zina* (adultery). *In vitro* fertilization can also not be performed on the ex-wife if the marriage has come to an end due to divorce or death of the husband. Nevertheless, embryos preserved by cryopreservation are acceptable. The frozen embryos are seen as the property of the couple alone and may be transferred to the same wife in a successive cycle, but only during the duration of the marriage contract.

Shi'a Islam on *In Vitro* Fertilization³⁰

Shi'a is the minority branch of Islam found in Iran, and parts of Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. On the whole Shi'ite religious authorities support the majority Sunni view that states that third-party donation should be strictly prohibited. However, in 1999 the Supreme Jurisprudent of the Shi'a branch of Islam, Ayatollah Ali Hussein Khamanei, the successor to Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa effectively permitting donor technologies to be used. With regard to both egg and sperm donation, Shaikh Khamanei stated that both the donor and the infertile parents must abide by the religious codes regarding parenting.

Regardless of this declaration, there have been several disagreements pertaining to it. These arguments centre on whether the woman should perform a temporary marriage with the donor to prevent *zina* (adultery), whose name the child will bear, whether donations should be accepted from anonymous donors, among others.

²⁸Ibid 26

²⁹ Marcia C. Inhorn, "Making Muslim Babies: Sunni versus Shi'a Approaches to IVF and Gamete Donation". Paper to be presented at Session 108 on Infertility and New Reproductive Technologies. IUSSP Annual Conference Tours, France, July 2005; <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/papers/50567>, (accessed on August 14, 2014)

³⁰ Ibid 27

Despite these disagreements, infertile Shi'ite couples who accept the idea of donation perceive the introduction of donor technologies has as a “marriage saviour,” that has helped them avoid marital and psychological disputes that normally take place if the couple's case is otherwise untreatable.

In summary, among the Sunni's, *in vitro* fertilization is permissible as long as the semen and ovum are from the couple who are legally married and the fertilization takes place during their marriage, not after divorce or the death of the husband. A divorced woman is not allowed to receive the fertilized ovum (embryo) from her ex-husband. Similarly, a widow is not allowed to take it after the death of her husband.³¹ But this is not the case among the Shi'ites since they accept a third party (donor).

Thus, the use of IVF and related new reproductive technologies in the Sunni Muslim world, has clearly led to an entrenchment of deeply held religious beliefs about the importance of biologically based kinship, family life, and parenthood. Yet, the globalisation of these technologies to other parts of the world has primarily distorted understandings of the ways in which families can be made and the ways in which marriages can be saved through the uses of new reproductive technologies³²

DISCUSSION

Both Christianity and Islam have and continue to contribute in diverse ways to scientific discussions that have the propensity to influence and change the lives of their adherents. Their ideals on procreations have for that matter influence their thought on the introduction of *In-Vitro* Fertilization as an adjunct solution to the problem of infertility. Both religions (Christianity and Islam) view Allah/God as the sole author of procreation. The Bible in the book of Genesis (1:28) states clearly the commands that God gave to mankind concerning reproduction. It states; “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (New King James Version). Likewise, the Qur'an states;

“And Allah has made for you from yourselves mates and has made for you from your mates sons and grandchildren and has provided for you from the good things...” (Qur'an 16:72). Since God/ Allah is the sole giver of children, children are seen by these religions as a gift from God rather than a guarantee.

Also, Christianity and Islam hold the view that, birth and death are directly related to the creator's (God/Allah) will, therefore, not being able to give birth is accordingly, His will. However, Catholics hold that trying to go for an assisted reproduction technique (IVF) is like ‘playing God’. That is, taking up the role of God because God and God alone has the power

³¹ Muzammil Siddiqi, “In vitro fertilization: Islamic view”, <http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/family/pregnancy-and-newborns/169483.html> (accessed August 18, 2014)

³² Ibid 27

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over nature³³. McColley (1991) explains this ‘playing God’ as the tendency of man to control his fate, to be the master of his destiny, to glorify himself; and this tendency leads him to believe that anything he can do, he should do.³⁴ On the other hand, Islamists believe that trying to conceive and fight against infertility is not an act against God. As long as man is alive he deserves a better living and herein lies the role of medicine/technology which should ensure this good life for every human being. Since neither the *Hadith* nor Qur'an speaks directly against artificial methods of reproduction most Islamists can seek any help that can cure infertility provided they follow the conditions that have been stipulated according to the branch of Islam they belong; either Sunni or Shi'ite.

Besides, Christianity and Islam make it apparent that, children are gifted to couples by God and that couples are not entitled to them. That is, a child should be seen as a gift from God, not a right (although the child has rights). Some God has blessed with many such gifts, and from some God has chosen to withhold that blessing. According to most Christians, as devastating as the problem of infertility can be, these couples can, by God's grace, acknowledge His will in all things. Some scholars in Islam are also of the view that children are not a necessity so one can stay alive without children. Unlike water and food that are necessary for living and that one may even take unlawful food if lawful food is not available, this does not apply to making babies/children.³⁵

In addition, the two major religions are all in agreement that God has ordained heterosexual marriage and any attempts to have children must take place within this relationship. Marriage was designed to provide companionship, provide sexual fulfilment, and to produce children. Even with Islam in support of IVF, the conditions spelt out explain clearly that it should only be done in the confinement of marriage. Yet, the Church (Catholics) teaches that, IVF which replaces the conjugal act rather than therapeutically assisting it, offends the dignity of the offspring by treating a human person as a ‘product’ of technology. As clarified by L.A. Int'l & Comp. L., (1993);

“The personal dignity and inherent worth of an individual are not cheapened or compromised by the way they are conceived; nevertheless, a petri dish is not a worthy site of creation”³⁶. This is to explain that, there is no justification for the use of any form of baby-making technology in any relationship including marriage.

³³ John K. Opoku, and, Peter Addai-Mensah, Bioethics in the Theological Context: Beginning and the End of Life Issues. Volume 1, (Kumasi: Legacy Prints, 2013), 125.

³⁴ Dawn McColley, J.D, A Biblical Response to Baby-Making: Surrogacy, Artificial Insemination, In Vitro Fertilization and Embryo Transfer. *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine*, Volume 5, (3) 1

³⁵ Muhammad Nuama Shad, “*In Vitro* Fertilization (IVF) In The Light of Islam” <http://drnaumannshad.wordpress.com/2013/02/15/invitro-fertilization-ivf-in-the-light-of-islam>, (accessed August 18, 2014)

³⁶ Ibid 12

The destruction of embryos during the process of *in vitro* fertilization is a major issue between these two religions as well. In most assisted reproduction techniques, it is a common practice to discard embryos that have not developed normally and to encourage the abortion of foetuses that have genetic or physical problems. In Islam, if the remaining embryos are destroyed once pregnancy is successful, this would amount to abortion. Abortion is generally deemed illegal in Islamic law except on one condition, which is, when pregnancy threatens the health of the mother. Continuing from there, the remaining embryos with the consent of the couples can be used for research with the aim of saving lives and treating health-related disorders/issues. Christians, however, refute the act of destroying embryos because human life is precious from the moment of conception;

"I formed you in the womb, I knew you and even before you were born, I consecrated you" (Jeremiah 1:5). From the Christian perspective, it is unfortunate to know that biblical respect for human life is being eroded in our contemporary society due to technology. These embryos are human lives that, given the chance to grow, would develop into a man or a woman. In support of the Christian view against the destruction of embryos, McColley states, "Our God is not a utilitarian God. It does not matter what scientific 'good' might come from such experimentation, or how many other lives could be saved".³⁷

Finally, the cryopreservation of embryos is another area of concern among these religions. Cryopreservation involves freezing of semen using a cryoprotectant and storing it at very low temperatures for later use³⁸. This technique may be used for patients diagnosed of having a disease whose treatment may result in infertility. The sperm is processed, kept and thawed at a later date and with the patient's consent, is used to fertilise the oocyte from the wife³⁹. Islam allows for cryopreservation of embryos between couples during marriage⁴⁰. This technique is legal as long as the couple is still within the marriage contract. However, the storing of the husband's sperm for the purpose of impregnating the wife in the event of his death is regarded as illegitimate as under Islamic law the event of death renders the marriage union to be void. On the other hand, the method of freezing embryos is not an acceptable norm in Christianity. Among Catholics, the condemnation of the practice of storing living embryos by cryopreservation, as found in the *Donum Vitae* remains both current and striking. Even when carried out in order to preserve the life of an embryo, cryopreservation constitutes an offence against the respect due human beings. By exposing them to grave risks of death or harm to their physical integrity and depriving them, at least temporarily, of maternal shelter and gestation, thus, placing them in a situation in which further offences and manipulation are possible represents a sinful act (*Donum vitae*, 1, 6). Catholics, therefore, believe that the

³⁷ Ibid 34

³⁸ David H Edgar and Debrah. A. Gook, "A Critical Appraisal Of Cryopreservation (Slow Cooling Versus Vitrification) of Human Oocytes And Embryos". *Human Reproduction Update* 18, no 5(2012).: 536; doi:10.1093/humupd/dms016, (Accessed August 13, 2014)

³⁹ Ibid 37

⁴⁰ Ibid 38 pg 104

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relationship between a parent and his or her offspring is a sacred one that must be protected and encouraged.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The emergence of *in-vitro* fertilization has indeed aided in solving the problem of infertility which is a major problem among many couples all over the world. Even with its positive objective, many people especially ethicists and theologians have considered the possibilities of the adverse effects that society can be confronted with the application of this technology. This article provides insights on how some major religions (Christianity and Islam) perceive *in-vitro* fertilization and the extent to which they have embraced its usage. Basing on *in-vitro* fertilization from the Islamic and Christian points of view, the paper establishes the fact that scientific technologies should be analysed to see both positive and adverse impacts they have before accepting it wholeheartedly.

CONCLUSION

In as much as *in vitro* fertilization seems to be a solution to infertility, the moral aspect of whether it is good or bad continues to create heated argument between scientists, ethicist and religious leaders. From the views gathered among the two religions it is quite evident that an agreement on *in vitro* fertilization cannot be achieved since technique touches on fundamental issues of life, family and society⁴¹. Indeed these structures are influenced in one way or the other by any of the two religious traditions which differ sometimes in thoughts and opinions. It can then be stated that, the technology itself is not dangerous but the techniques involved raises such moral discourse.

However, it should be agreed upon that, the decision to use *in vitro* fertilization should be left to the individual couples. But the fact that this technique has been developed and achieved some successes does not make it ideal. So, couples from a religious and ethical background who want to use this assisted reproduction method should have a full knowledge about the ethical implications of this procedure. Indeed modern scientific advances have so much to offer, but ethical principles regarding the respect of persons and the inherent dignity of humans whether born or unborn should guide these scientific technologies in order to prevent the abuse of this technology. Undeniably “science needs the compass of ethical restraints in order not to lead humanity on a path towards dehumanization in the name of progress.”⁴²

⁴¹ Banerjee, A. K., “An Insight into the Ethical Issues Related To In Vitro Fertilization”. In: *Internet Journal of Health*, Volume 6/1. (2006).

⁴² Sean P. O’Malley, *In Vitro* Fertilization: Ethical Implications & Alternatives, Life issues. (Japan: Kochi, 2004); http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/oma/oma_01invitro.html, (accessed august 18, 2014)

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