

Vatican: Nobel to IVF pioneer raises questions

October 4 2010, By NICOLE WINFIELD , Associated Press Writer



Professor Robert Edwards, the British pioneer of IVF treatment, sits with two of his 'test-tube-babies', Sophie and Jack Emery who celebrate their second birthday in London in this file photo dated Monday July 20, 1998. Test-tube baby pioneer Robert Edwards of Britain has won the 2010 Nobel Prize in medicine it is announced Monday Oct. 4, 2010. Edwards and some of his IVF test-tube children gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the birth of Louise Brown, the world's first "test tube" baby born in 1978. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant, File)

(AP) -- The Vatican's top bioethics official said Robert Edwards, who [received the Nobel Prize in medicine Monday](#) for developing in vitro fertilization, opened "a new and important chapter in the field of human reproduction" but is also responsible for the destruction of embryos and the creation of a "market" in donor eggs.

Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, the newly appointed head of the Pontifical Academy for Life, said awarding the Nobel to Edwards is "not completely out of place." But he said it raised a great number of questions, not least because his research didn't treat the underlying problem of infertility but rather skirted it.

Edwards, an 85-year-old Briton who is professor emeritus at the University of Cambridge, won the prestigious award on Monday. The Nobel medicine prize committee said some 4 million people have been born through IVF.

The Vatican is opposed to IVF because it involves separating conception from the "conjugal act" - sexual intercourse between a husband and wife - and often results in the destruction of embryos. Church teaching holds that human life begins at conception, and must be given the consequent respect and dignity from that moment on.

In a statement e-mailed to The Associated Press, Carrasco nevertheless said Edwards "is not a figure to be underestimated."

"He has inaugurated a new and important chapter in the field of [human reproduction](#), whose best results are evident to all," he said citing Louise Brown - the first baby to be born through IVF, in 1978. Carrasco noted the woman, now 32, is herself the mother of a naturally conceived baby.

Still, he said, "without Edwards there wouldn't be a market of eggs."

"Without Edwards, there wouldn't be freezers full of [embryos](#) waiting to be transferred in utero or, more likely, be used for research or to die, abandoned and forgotten by all," Carrasco said.

Carrasco stressed that he was offering a personal opinion, not a Vatican statement.

He was appointed in June to head the Vatican's pro-life academy, an advisory office composed of Catholic doctors, bioethicists, clergy and others who advise the pope on such hot-button and emotionally-charged issues as abortion, the right to die and assisted procreation.

In his statement to the AP, Carrasco blamed Edwards for the "current state of confusion of assisted procreation: children with four or five parents, babies born from their grandmothers."

"Edwards built a house but opened the wrong door," Carrasco said. IVF paved the way for "donations and sales involving human beings" and Edwards did not address the pathology of infertility.

Carrasco said the solution to the problem of infertility lies elsewhere and called for patience in research.

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