

Spiritual counseling for infertile persons in orthodox Christianity

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Statement of the Problem: Infertile couples attempting to conceive via Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), while desiring to maintain their religious affiliation, often seek clarification and advice from their spiritual leaders. The religious representative needs to have clear guidelines for determining ethical options for infertility treatment. Researchers have pointed out that the Russian Orthodox Church lacks clear articulation of ethical boundaries for fertility treatment. As a result, a couple's counselor typically presents different opinions regarding the permissibility of ART that are not officially supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. As a rule, this kind of unauthorized advice leads to a ban on the use of any reproductive intervention, which increases the psychological suffering of infertile couples. The purpose of this study is to describe the counseling process for infertile couples, seeking help in the Orthodox Christian context.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: Participant observation and in-depth interviews involved ethnographic research using hermeneutic dialogue. The findings were compared to the Orthodox Church's teachings on the treatment of illness and the purpose of the family.

Findings: In the discourse of the Orthodox Church, a couple is permitted to refer to reproductive technology if a husband's and wife's gametes are used and the number of embryos that will be transferred into the uterus of the wife is formed.

Conclusion: Infertile couples adhering to Christian commandments may seek medical treatment for infertility, including in vitro fertilization with some restrictions. Recommendations found in the research can be extended to assist in counseling of other infertile couples. They may also be helpful to reproductive physicians in discussing a fertility treatment plan with Christian couples.

Recent Publications

1. Delkeskamp-Hayes, C. (2010). Psychologically informed pastoral care: How serious can it get about God? Orthodox reflections on Christian counseling in bioethics. *Christian bioethics*, 16(1), 79-116.
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4. Tarabrin, R. (2020). Orthodox Perspectives on In Vitro Fertilization in Russia. *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality*, 26(2), 177–204. doi:10.1093/cb/cbaa004.
5. Shok, N. (2020) “From ‘Bioethics’ to ‘Christian Bioethics’: Significance of H.T. Engelhardt’s Legacy in Today’s Russia”, *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom* 38(4): 7–43.] <https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2020-38-4-7-43>

Biography

Roman Tarabrin is a researcher of Privolzhsky Research Medical University (Nizhny Novgorod, Russia), an assistant professor of Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University (Moscow, Russia), working within the project of the Russian Science Foundation ‘Problems of bioethics in the historical context and socio-cultural dynamics of society’ (№ 18-78-10018). He has his expertise in ethics of reproductive technologies. Counseling of religious infertile couples, he created approaches to ethical dilemmas within the religious community that can be extrapolated for an interdisciplinary analysis of the provisions of various ethical systems as compared to a religious understanding of human continuation in the postmodern. The Russian experience of interaction between religious and secular systems of ethics, analyzed by the author, provides significant impetus to the development of a bioethical health agenda in a multireligious and multicultural society from a global perspective.

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