British scientists have created a substance that mimics a mother's womb, allowing human embryos to implant on the side of a petri dish and continue their development long past the previous technological limit of seven to eight days. In short, this new technology makes it possible to grow human beings in a lab. Completely removed from the context of a nurturing family, they are cultivated solely for experimentation, often under the guise of curing common problems related to pregnancy and fetal development.

Pope Francis predicts that the technological domination of nature — and its attendant "logic of . . . exploitation" (Laudato Si' 230) — will only continue ever more hastily if humanity refuses a call to conversion. But with that conversion slow in coming, how are we to counter the logic of exploitation with what the Holy Father deemed in a July 9, 2015 homily the "logic of love . . . ?" At the moment of conception, a unique human being comes into existence — one who possesses an innate, God-given dignity worthy of protection at all stages of his or her development. That is true whether he or she was conceived in the usual way or through technological manipulation. If coerced experimentation on adults is immoral, how much more so is experimentation on a developing human who lacks the voice to give his or her consent — or to cry out for help. It is particularly egregious to create human beings solely for the purpose of experimentation.

The Church has addressed embryo experimentation often in recent years. In Evangelium Vitae . . ., Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that "the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person" (EV 63). Our U.S. bishops addressed embryo-destructive research in their statement "On Embryonic Stem Cell Research" after taking on the many ethical problems raised by in vitro fertilization and other artificial reproductive methods in "Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology . . ." And just this year, Pope Francis dedicated an entire paragraph (n. 136) to embryo exploitation in Laudato Si' . . .

Servant of God Dr. Jerome Lejeune lived a vibrantly Catholic life in which medical science and faith were seamlessly integrated. Lejeune would have appreciated authentic research designed to increase our understanding of miscarriage, infertility, and birth defects. But he would have strongly condemned any research that destroys embryonic humans in the pursuit of therapies to save others who are the same size and age. His search for cures never competed with his respect for life. Rather than giving in to the logic of exploitation, Lejeune’s advocacy for the defenseless and his tireless work on behalf of persons with disabilities
obeyed the logic of love.

Pray to Mary, the heavenly Mother of all human beings, including those who will now spend their lives trapped in a petri dish under a scientist's gaze. Entrust these tiny children — and the scientists — to her "maternal affection" (LS 241). Pray that we find cures through methods of research that we can all live with!

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