Chapter 2

Legal and Ethical Aspects of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in the Teaching of Christian Churches and Religious Associations

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Abstract

The subject matter of the present study concerns the legal and ethical aspects of assisted reproductive technology in the teaching of Christian churches and religious associations. The author analyses the teaching of selected religious entities functioning in the Republic of Poland. The largest Christian community in Poland, as well as worldwide, is the Catholic Church of the Latin Rite. Notably, most references to bioethical problems appear in the teaching of this confession, including those concerning assisted reproductive technology. The author reviews the doctrine of the Catholic Church both from the perspective of both documents adopted by the Holy See and the position of the Polish Bishops' Conference. The Catholic Church consistently opposes methods of assisted procreation, asserting that conception outside the conjugal act is morally unacceptable. Alongside the doctrine of the Catholic Church, the teaching of the Orthodox Church and Protestant religious communities is also investigated. In Poland, the largest denomination representing the Orthodox Church is the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which has not developed an official position on issues of assisted reproductive technology but follows the universal Orthodox doctrine. The Orthodox Church does not support *in vitro* fertilisation, yet it does not categorically prohibit it, leaving the decision to the conscience of spouses. Protestant churches do not hold a unified position on assisted reproductive technology. An exception is the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the

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Republic of Poland, which has officially expressed support for the use of *in vitro* fertilisation.

Keywords: assisted reproductive technology, Catholic Church, orthodox churches, Protestant churches, churches and other religious associations

1. Introductory Remarks

Infertility is a phenomenon which, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), permanently or periodically affects approximately 60-80 million couples. In Poland, the corresponding figure ranges between 1 and 1.5 million, a substantial percentage of the population.[1] Research on artificial insemination has been carried out since as early as the seventeenth century, initially on fish and insects, and by the late eighteenth century, successful artificial insemination of dogs' bitches had been achieved. In 1799, the first artificial insemination of a woman was carried out using her husband's semen. By the end of the 19th century, further successful attempts were made using semen from outside the marriage.[2] The twentieth century brought the development of techniques enabling insemination outside the woman's body. In the 1960s, research on *in vitro* fertilisation commenced at the University of Cambridge, initially on mice, later on rabbits, and finally on human embryos. On 25 July 1978, the first child conceived through IVF was born, a girl named Lesley Brown.[3]

Methods of assisted reproduction provoke strong emotions among various groups, and some churches and religious associations take an active role in the debate. These entities evaluate such practices in light of their doctrine and the legal norms functioning within their respective communities. It must be emphasized that no unified position exists even within Christian confessions. The present study aims to present the teaching of several Christian churches and denominations concerning their stance on assisted reproductive methods. The Catholic Church has the most extensive doctrine and has expressed its views on these issues since the nineteenth century; thus, the greatest attention will be devoted to this entity. Additionally, the position of Christian communities outside the Catholic Church that address assisted reproductive techniques in their doctrine will also be presented. The study predominantly offers a national perspective, focusing on those confessions active in Poland.

1 Koperwas and Głowacka, 2017, p. 33.
2 Olczyk, 2017, p. 96.
3 Kubicki, 2012, p. 21.

2. The Catholic Church

The attitude of the Catholic Church towards assisted reproductive methods (artificial insemination) was officially articulated on 17 March 1897 when the Holy Office responded to the question of whether artificial insemination could be permitted. It stated unequivocally that it could not. The position was subsequently accepted by Pope Leo XIII.[4] Pope Pius XII also presented negative responses in his speeches to Catholic doctors and midwives.[5] Pope John XXIII addressed assisted reproductive techniques in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*,[6] emphasising that human life should be transmitted within marriage through a natural and conscious personal act. Furthermore, means acceptable in the propagation of plant and animal life are not permitted in human procreation (n. 193). John Paul II in his address 'Experimentation in Biology' to the members of the Week of Studies at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,[7] condemned all forms of experimental interference with the human embryo.[8] In the Charter of the Rights of the Family issued in 1983, the Holy See states that respect for human dignity excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo. Any intervention on the human genetic heritage not aimed at correcting anomalies violates the right to bodily integrity and contradicts the good of the family.[9]

A comprehensive exposition of Catholic doctrine, whose basic principles remain valid today, is included in the Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum vitae* of 22 February 1987.[10] As Edmund Kowalski notes, scientific activity, like any rational and free human activity, is subject to moral evaluation. Thus, the Catholic Church' official position must be comprehended within this framework.[11] The terms 'artificial insemination' or 'artificial transmission of life' are interpreted as the use of technical methods intended to achieve conception without sexual intercourse. In the chapter on biomedical research, it is emphasised that the gift of life, which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to humanity, calls for recognition of its inestimable value and for responsible stewardship. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith recognises the progress of biological and medical sciences and the increasing availability of effective therapeutic interventions, but it also notes the emergence of methods allowing interference with human life from its earlier stages of development. This may lead individuals to attempt to determine their own destiny and exceed the limits of rational control over nature.

4 Wróbel, 2009, p. 184.
5 Ibid.
6 John XXIII, 1961.
7 A selection of doctrinal statements of the Catholic Church from the list on the official website of the Polish Bishops' Conference, see Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, 2024.
8 Ibid.
9 Art. 4 b. and c.
10 Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, 1987.
11 Kowalski, 1989, p. 45.

This document further states that the Church does not claim competence to judge the nature of scientific progress but only to offer moral evaluation of research, especially that concerning the origins of human existence. Criteria include respect for, development and protection of, and care for the human person, the right to life, and human dignity. According to this position, knowledge and technology should serve man, his well-being, and his inalienable rights, and must remain compatible with moral principles. The document notes that technological development has made it possible for reproductive cells to be integrated outside sexual intercourse. However, not everything that is technically possible is morally acceptable. According to Church teaching, the gift of life should be transmitted within marriage by acts that are proper and exclusive to the spouses. According to the Congregation, the conception outside the mother's body violates personal dignity, as from the point of view of the Catholic Church, the human embryo is already endowed with this attribute. Cryopreservation is evaluated negatively, since frozen human embryos are exposed to risks of death or damage to their physical integrity. Genetic manipulation that allows interference at the conception stage with features determining human identity, such as gender or eye colour, cannot be justified by concern for the good of future generations.[12]

The Church opposes artificial homologous insemination within marriage, except in situations where the technical means employed do not substitute the conjugal act, but merely support and help in achieving its natural aim. Political authorities were also urged to ensure that, for the good of the family, they would not guarantee the use of artificial insemination techniques in which human gametes are transferred between unmarried persons. Furthermore, the Congregation believes that the creation of 'embryo banks', *post mortem* insemination and surrogate motherhood should be prohibited.

Assisted reproductive techniques and other bioethical issues were also addressed in the Charter for Health Care Workers (CFHCW 94), issued in 1994 by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance for Health Care Workers.[13] As emphasised in the literature, this document analyses and recalls the ethical dimension of medicine.[14] It is not a typical set of principles articulated in legislative-style format; rather, it is dominated by an anthropological-ethical reflection justifying the ethical positions invoked.[15]

The Charter recognises that scientific developments in the field of genetics provide astonishing prospects for medicine, yet they simultaneously generate new and ethical questions (n. 12). It distinguishes between strictly therapeutic genetic interventions and non-medical manipulations altering the human genetic patrimony. The first category, genetic surgery is aimed at improving the individual's health.

12 Ibid.
13 The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance for Health Care Workers, 1995.
14 Garbarz, 1997, pp. 179–184.
15 Biesaga, 2006, p. 20.

The second includes practices aimed at producing human beings with specific characteristics, such as gender or eye colour (n. 13). The Charter further notes that techniques of artificial reproduction, even when used with the intention of serving human life, may create new possibilities for illicit interference with its essence (n. 22). It stresses that every medical intervention concerning human procreation must not substitute the conjugal act but may only have an assistive function (n. 22). The Council states that methods aimed only at facilitating the natural act should not be immediately rejected; this includes, for example, homologous artificial insemination (within marriage, using the spouse's sperm obtained through the normal conjugal act) (n. 23). However, homologous inseminations in a test tube (spousal cells), as well as all heterologous techniques using cells from outside the marriage are condemned. The dangers associated with these fertilisation methods include the destruction of frozen embryos and the serving of the connection between conception and the natural conjugal act. The freezing of embryos and surrogate motherhood are also negatively evaluated (n. 24–28).

The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance for Health Care Workers clarified its position in the New Charter for Health Care Workers (2016).[16] The new document aimed to present updated scientific and doctrinal issues in the field of medical science, in an accessible manner.[17] It addresses the cryopreservation of the oocytes, which was introduced to avoid ethical concerns surrounding the freezing of fertilised embryos. The Charter states that if oocytes are frozen for the purpose of *in vitro* fertilisation, the practice is unacceptable even when the aim is to protect the cells from anticancer therapy (n. 38). A different assessment applies to the preservation of ovarian tissue intended for orthopaedic transplantation to restore fertility (n. 37). It is considered morally unacceptable to undertake fertilisation between human and animal gametes, the development of a human embryo in an artificial or animal embryo, reproduction through twinning, cloning, parthenogenesis and similar procedures (n. 39).

The Council calls for the establishment of ethics committees and clinical ethics consultation services within healthcare institutions. In addition to administrative control of the procedures, ethics committees should evaluate biomedical practices, while consultation services ought to assist staff, patients and families in evaluating proposed diagnostic and therapeutic procedures (n. 140). In different countries, these bodies may take different forms, for example, committees for scientific ethics, advisory bodies, national bioethics councils or ethics committees for animal research. In Poland, bioethics committees operate at medical universities, universities with medical faculties, and medical research and development units.[18]

16 The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance for Health Care Workers, 2016.
17 Ibid., p. 10.
18 Smykowski, 2021, pp. 177–186.

Their functioning is regulated by the regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of 11 May 1999.[19]

Papal teaching forms the principal reference point for documents issued by the Holy See and its institutions. Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical '*Evangelium vitae*' contains a comprehensive exposition of the Catholic Church's doctrinal principles on respect for human life at all stages. The Pope states that 'artificial reproductive techniques' are unacceptable because they separate procreation from its proper human context of the conjugal act. He also condemns the fact that many embryos are exposed to the risk of death. Moreover, embryo research undertaken to develop science and medicine, diminishes human life to the role of 'biological material' (n. 14).[20]

Twenty-one years after the publication of the Instruction *Donum vitae*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the Instruction *Dignitas personae* (2008) to update Catholic teaching on bioethical issues.[21] As noted in the literature, the motivation for recalling and clarifying the Church's teaching was that, after the release of *Donum vitae*, the situation in many countries had changed. Many highly industrialised countries adopted legal solutions that were more or less contrary to the indications contained therein. The number of people accepting the new reality also increased, while understanding of the moral indications included in Catholic doctrine diminished.[22] Furthermore, as emphasised in the Instruction itself, the teachings contained in *Donum vitae* remain valid, both in terms of the principles presented and the moral evaluations formulated. However, because new biomedical technologies have raised questions, particularly regarding research on human embryos, it was decided to issue a new document (n. 1).

In defining the criteria used to assess the ethical value of biomedicine, it was emphasised that unconditional respect is due to every human being in all phases of his or her existence (n. 10). With regard to the development of new techniques, it was specified that they should meet the following requirements: first, respect for the right to life and physical integrity of every human being from conception to natural death; second, acceptance that the unity of marriage entails reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with one's spouse; third, recognition that the specifically human values of sexuality require that the procreation of a human person be the fruit of the conjugal act expressing spousal love (n. 12). It is therefore necessary to exclude all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilisation that substitute the conjugal act. On the other hand, techniques that aid the conjugal act and its fertility are permitted (n. 12). Acceptable methods include, for example, hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, and the unblocking of fallopian tubes or their surgical repair (n. 13).

19 Regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of May 11, 1999 on detailed rules for the appointment and financing and mode of operation of bioethics committees (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws of 1999, No. 47, item 480)

20 Wróbel, 2021, pp. 69–89.

21 Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, 2008.

22 Kraj, 2009, pp. 283–294.

The Congregation also addresses several specific techniques. *In vitro* fertilisation is considered unacceptable because of the deliberate destruction of human embryos (n. 14). Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), a technique that can address certain forms of male infertility, is likewise considered unacceptable. As with IVF, it is deemed intrinsically illicit due to its complete separation of procreation from the conjugal act (n. 17).

Cryopreservation of embryos is also unacceptable, since many embryos do not survive freezing and thawing. Moreover, embryos are temporarily deprived of the possibility of developing in the womb (n. 18). The freezing of oocytes for *in vitro* fertilisation has also been criticised (n. 20). It is morally unacceptable to reduce embryos or foetuses present in the womb; such practices are described as intentional selective abortion (n. 21). Pre-implantation diagnosis, aimed at discarding embryos identified as having genetic defects before their transfer to the woman's body, is likewise considered morally acceptable (n. 22).

Papal teaching on the dignity of human life and its protection from the moment of conception remains central to the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II often addressed these issues,[23] as did his predecessors and successors.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritatas in Veritate*,[24] noted that bioethics is a battleground in the cultural struggle between the absolutism of technology and the moral responsibility of the human person. According to Benedict XVI, the fundamental question is whether the human being is the product of his own making or depends on God (n. 74). Referring to assisted reproductive technology, the Pope observed that biotechnology places the manipulation of life under human control (n. 75).

During one of his audiences, Benedict XVI referred to the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on *in vitro* fertilisation.[25] In November 2012, the Court stated that embryos are not persons and therefore do not possess human rights, including the right to life. Consequently, the Court held that a ban on IVF to protect embryos violates the human rights of infertile persons.[26] The Pope interpreted this position as undermining the protection of life from the moment of conception. He consistently rejected IVF in his other statements, drawing upon the Catholic Church's established teaching.[27]

Statements of Pope Francis also include references to assisted reproductive methods. In a 2014 address, he spoke firmly on bioethical issues, including abortion, euthanasia, and IVF. He emphasised that Catholics have a duty to express conscientious objection to these practices. Assisted procreation, he argued, results in the child being treated as something owed, rather than as a gift. He described such

23 More extensively on this topic: Struzik, 2009, pp. 149–162.
24 Benedict XVI, 2009.
25 The Holy See, 2013.
26 Pogodzińska, no date.
27 Radio Watykańskie, 2012.

practices as a scientific assault, since children are produced in the laboratories., and noted that lives are theoretically sacrificed to preserve others. According to Pope Francis, there is no room for leniency or misplaced compassion towards those who participate in killing or producing children.

Particular references to bioethical issues also appear in the intentions Pope Francis recommends to the followers. In the indications for March 2022, he emphasised the need to use biotechnological achievements on the basis of respect for human dignity. The Pope noted that, with the development of science, Christians face numerous bioethical problems. Human embryos cannot be treated as disposable material. Rejected embryos form part of what he termed as 'culture of exclusion'. According to Pope Francis, this culture must not be spread, as it causes great harm and rests upon profit-driven biomedical research. Human dignity cannot be sacrificed for progress, thus, the two must remain inseparable.[28]

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si*[29] raises issues concerning respect for the human embryo, including in the context of biotechnological research.[30] The Pope accuses some environmental movements of failing to apply the same principles to human life when defending the integrity of the environment. He claims that, when experiments are carried out on human embryos, it is forgotten that the inalienable worth of a human being transcends his or her degree of development. When technology disregards fundamental ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit (n. 136).

The Church's magisterium consistently teaches the unacceptability of methods that remove the conception process from the conjugal act. The essence of this approach is the recognise that human life begins at the moment of the union of a female cell with a male cell. According to official teaching, every human being is endowed with inherent and inalienable dignity.

Particular Churches in individual states also address bioethical issues in their official statements.[31] The Polish Bishops' Conference (PBC) has frequently spoken on this issue. It is not possible to discuss and quote the whole teaching; nevertheless, selected parts are presented here to illustrate its standpoints.[32]

The Polish Bishops' Conference, established by the Holy See, consists of bishops canonically tied with the territory of the Republic of Poland.[33] In the Letter of the Council of Bishops for the Family of 8 December 2007, addressed to Members of Parliament and Senators, the position of the Church's Magisterium on the method of *in vitro* fertilisation was reiterated.[34] It was emphasised that numerous embryos die during every attempt, and this was described as 'a kind of sophisticated abortion'.

28 Ołdakowski, 2022.
29 Vatican.va, 2015.
30 Muszala, 2016, pp. 39–65.
31 More extensively on this topic: Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2008.
32 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2003.
33 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, no date.
34 Wiara.pl, 2007.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged that every child has the right to be born of the loving conjugal act of its parents. It was also stressed that the child cannot be treated as a thing, and that future parents cannot justify their decision regarding *in vitro* as a 'right to the child'. As the PBC stresses, the birth of a child conceived through this procedure 'is always accompanied by the death of its brothers and sisters'.

In a firm Communiqué from the 352nd Plenary Assembly of the Polish Bishops' Conference of 20 June, it was acknowledged that those using the *in vitro* method commit a 'grave sin' (n. 5). Pastors, catechists and all people of goodwill were urged to learn and communicate the truth about objectively immoral medical procedures (n. 6).[35]

A comprehensive position of the PBC concerning assisted procreation was expressed in the 'Bioethics Document' adopted at the 361st Plenary Assembly of the Polish Bishops' Conference on 5 March 2013.[36] The *in vitro* method was described as another experiment on human beings. It was argued that this technique constitutes a form of control over the human person. The freezing of 'surplus embryos' was criticised because many of them die, a process deemed to violate human dignity. According to the PBC, *in vitro* excludes harmony and unity of the spouses. Sperm is obtained from the father through an act of self-abuse, the mother's body is repeatedly subjected to medical manipulation, and the child itself becomes a product.[37]

The document provoked considerable comments both in favour and against the Church. Supporters emphasised that the Church consistently proclaims its teaching, while opponents, including persons conceived through IVF, alleged that they were discriminated against and stigmatised.[38] The dispute particularly concerned passages which the PBC pointed to an increased risk of genetic defects in children conceived through IVF. Referring to these claims, members of the PBC's Team of Experts on Bioethics maintained that their position was based on 'reliable and credible scientific studies'. At the same time, they emphasised that the position expressed should not be interpreted as discrimination against either the children born through this method or their parents.[39]

The activity of the PBC on bioethical issues increased significantly during the work on the draft law on medically assisted procreation. The PBC formulated its doubts about the bill in an appeal addressed, inter alia, to Catholic MPs and senators debating its final version.[40] It stressed that a Catholic participating in the legislative process has a duty to show loyalty to Christ and the Church's teachings, and should engage prudently and with integrity in public life. A Catholic cannot be involved in the adoption of a law that is morally imperfect. The government was urged to develop solutions to infertility by supporting, among other things, research into

35 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2010.
36 Opoka.org.pl, 2013.
37 Ibid.
38 Kmieciak, no date.
39 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2013.
40 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2015a.

naprotechnology (identification and treatment of infertility). In the PBC's view, the *in vitro* procedure cannot be qualified as a method of treating infertility. Moreover, the previous position of the PBC, expressed in the document of 5 March 2013, regarding the dangers of the technique, were recalled.

On 25 June 2015, the Act on Infertility Treatment[41] was adopted. The matters regulated include: principles of embryo and germ-cell protection; methods of infertility treatment, including medically assisted procreation; tasks of public authorities; the conditions for the donation, collection, processing, testing, storage and distribution of germ cells, and embryos intended for medically assisted procreation; the principles governing the operation of medically assisted procreation centres and germ-cell and embryo banks.[42]

The explanatory memorandum to the Act emphasises that it

> aims to protect reproductive health and to create conditions for the use of methods of treating infertility in a way that protects the rights of persons affected by infertility and children born as a result of medically assisted procreation procedures.[43]

The Polish Bishops' Conference evaluated the adopted solutions several times through its various bodies. In a statement by the Expert Team for Bioethics, it was acknowledged that the Act has numerous negative ethical, medical, social, and legal nature. According to the Team, in the light of the Church's teaching and that of Pope Francis, the *in vitro* method should be considered unecological and contrary to the principle of intergenerational justice. The behaviour of Catholic MPs who voted in favour of the bill was also condemned.[44] Speeches addressed to the President of the Republic of Poland[45] and to the Senate[46] after the adoption and signing of the Act were similar in tone.

The teaching of the PBC aligns with the Magisterium of the Church on bioethical issues. The Catholic Church in Poland articulates a negative position toward *in vitro* fertilisation and other assisted reproductive techniques, claiming the moral wickedness of these methods.

When analysing the doctrinal statements of the Catholic Church, it is also essential to mention the position expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)[47] on bioethical issues. In the section entitled 'The Child as a Gift', it is emphasised that techniques that separate parenthood through the intervention of a third party, such as sperm donation, egg donation, or surrogacy, are profoundly illicit.

41 The Act on Infertility Treatment of 25 June 2015 (Dz.U. – Journal of Laws of 2020, item 442, consolidated text).
42 Art. 1.
43 Sejm.gov.pl, 2015.
44 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2015b.
45 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2015c.
46 Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, 2015d.
47 Pallotinum, 1994.

Both artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilisation, using the genetic material of a third party violate the child's right to be born of natural parents united in marriage (n. 2376). Homologous insemination (artificial insemination or IVF) within marriage is also considered morally unacceptable, since it separates the sexual act from the procreative act (n. 2377).

A degree of ambiguity remains regarding homologous insemination. Indeed, in the already examined Instruction *Dignitas Personae,* it is stated that all heterologous assisted reproductive techniques must be excluded, as well as those methods of homologous insemination that substitute for the conjugal act. Conversely, practices that support the conjugal act and its fertility may be accepted (n. 12). However, the document does not specify which methods are intended. The New Charter for Health Care Workers, issued by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Health Care Workers, states that:

> interventions that aim to remove obstacles to natural fertility, or that are intended solely to facilitate the natural act or to bring about the attainment of the proper end as normally performed, are certainly licit. This may be the case with homologous artificial insemination within marriage, using the husband's semen, when it is obtained through the normal conjugal act and the temporal continuity between the conjugal act and conception is respected (n. 25).

The Catholic Church is the largest religious community in Poland, with approximately 90% of the population belonging to it. However, it faces significant problems in its functioning. Its conservative teaching is questioned even by those who identify as Catholics. This is particularly evident in matters of bioethics, such as abortion, euthanasia, and assisted reproductive methods. In his publication, Janusz Mariański presented the attitude of Poles toward *in vitro* fertilisation, observing that approximately two-thirds of self-declared Catholics approve of IVF, while the remainder accept the Church's teaching on the matter.[48] There is an obvious inconsistency between doctrine and attitudes. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the Church's attitude on the issue has not changed since its first statements in 1897. The doctrine developed over centuries continues to be transmitted to contemporary Catholics.

3. Position of Other Churches and Religious Associations

Since its beginnings, Christianity has been characterised by division. From the first centuries, a distinction existed between Chalcedonian and Monophysite

48 Mariański, 2022, p. 59.

Christians.[49] The Council of Chalcedon (in 451) led to religious conflicts. The doctrine of Pope Leo the Great, asserting that Christ has two natures, divine and human, was accepted at the time.[50] Christians who rejected this doctrine were referred to as followers of Monophysitism, which itself had differing interpretations. According to the first conception, divinity and humanity fused into a third 'nature' through the Incarnation; according to the second view, Christ's divine nature absorbed his human nature, in the same way that the ocean absorbs drops of water.[51]

The division of Christianity into Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions appeared in 1054. The Great Schism, as this separation is known, deepened existing divisions between the churches. Disagreements related to numerous issues, including the formula of the profession of faith, the primacy of the Pope, and disciplinary differences. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael I Ceruralius, and Pope Leo IX imposed excommunications. Doctrinal issues gradually transformed into political problems, and despite several attempts at reunification, the schism continues to this day.[52]

Another major split appeared in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther, who in 1517 started the movement known as the Reformation. However, its foundations however, were laid by Jan Hus and the Hussite movement in the early fifteenth century. Luther's aim was the renewal of Christianity, but the outcome was the establishment of religious organisations independent of the papacy and the formation of national churches, in which secular rulers became the heads of local communities. As a result of divisions, currents such as Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Calvinism appeared.[53] Within Protestantism, numerous denominations developed that function throughout the world.

Polish Radio, referring to the Catholic News Agency and the 'Study of Global Christianity' conducted by Boston-based researchers, reported that in 2023 the total number of Christians worldwide had increased significantly to 2.6 billion. Every year, the number of Christians increases by 30 million, or about 82,000 per month. Growth in the Catholic Church is mainly observed in Africa and Americas, with an annual increase of 0.93%. For Protestant communities, the figure is 1.87%.[54] As far as Orthodox believers worldwide, according to various estimates, their number ranges from 250–300 million.[55]

In addition to the three main streams of Christianity, there are also independent or evangelical movements, which independently determine their doctrine.[56]

49 Chadwick, 2009, p. 12.
50 Grzywaczewski, 2012, pp. 137–179.
51 O'Collins and Farrugia, 2002.
52 Stanios-Korycka, 2016, pp. 273–274.
53 Medwid, 2013, pp. 267–292.
54 Polskieradio.pl, 2023.
55 Kompasje.pl, 2024.
56 Zbawiciel, 2023.

Referring the data to the Polish background, it should be noted that the dominant church, in terms of numbers, is the Latin Rite Catholic Church, with 31.587.211 believers. Other Catholic rites include: Ukrainian Greek (Byzantine) Church with approximately 60,000 members; Armenian Catholic Church with 630; and the Byzantine-Slavic with 117. The Orthodox Churches include: Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (503,966), Eastern Old Believers Church in the Republic of Poland (1.452), and the Old-Orthodox Church of Old Believers (502).

The largest number of confessions is found within Protestantism. These include: the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (60,244), Pentecostal Church in Poland (27,309), Seventh-day Adventist Church (9.949); Church of Christ in Poland (6,650), Baptist Christian Church of the Republic of Poland (5,760), Church of God in Christ (5,058), Evangelical Methodist Church in Poland (4,216), New Apostolic Church in Poland (3,476), Free Christian Church in Poland (3,212), Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland (3,200), Church of God in Poland (3,018), Evangelical Christians' Church in Poland (2,391), Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (1,646), Community Evangelical Pentecostal Church (622), Evangelical Community for Christ (formerly Evangelical Brotherhood) in Poland (560), The Saturday Day Christian Church (329).

Taking all the data into consideration, the Catholic Church in all its rites is estimated to have 31,647,958 believers, the Orthodox Churches 505,950 believers, and the Protestant Churches 137.640, with a total population of 36.754.000.[57] Several points need to be clarified. First, these are not all religious communities, but only those included in available statistics. In Poland, 100 persons are sufficient number to establish a church or religious association. The current list includes about 190 entities and can be found on the website of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.[58] Second, the number of believers is estimated by the communities themselves based on internal criteria. For example, in the Catholic Church, the count is based on the number of persons baptised. The data do not include official censuses, as the Constitution of the Republic of Poland specifies that no person may be compelled by public authorities to disclose their philosophy of life, religious convictions, or beliefs.[59] Consequently, the probability of presented data may be unreliable. However, this does not change the fact that the Catholic Church in Poland is the largest religious community, with rich historical and cultural traditions. Given the huge number of confessions within Christianity, it is only possible to examine the teachings of selected denominations. Therefore, the doctrines of selected religious communities on the territory of the Republic of Poland will be presented.

57 Statistics Poland, 2024, pp. 107–109.

58 Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji, no date.

59 The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 (Dz.U. – Journal of Laws, No. 78, item 483, as amended), Art. 53(7).

3.1. Orthodox Church

As noted in the literature, Orthodox theologians hold diverse views on *in vitro* fertilisation. Some argue that it dehumanises human life and is incompatible with the aims of the sacrament of marriage; others view the procedure as a form of support for spouses who cannot have children.[60] Official statements appear in documents from the Greek, Russian, and American Orthodox Churches. In addition, bioethics committees and advisory bodies attached to the Synods of local Orthodox Churches have expressed their positions.[61]

The Orthodox Church's attitude towards the human embryo largely corresponds to the teaching of the Catholic Church. It is accepted that, from the moment of conception, the embryo has its own genetic and personal identity. From the moment of combination of male and female cells, a human being is present. Every life is sacred and inviolable, including that created through *in vitro* fertilisation.

As Artur Aleksiejuk points out, from an Orthodox perspective, the decisive role in fertilisation lies in divine intention rather than human will or technical possibilities. Therefore, the question of whether parents who choose IVF, and the doctors and technicians involved, act against God's will is therefore complex. According to Aleksiejuk, there is no harmony on the issue, and an absolutist approach would be incompatible with the spirit of Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the Church does not recommend the use of artificial fertilisation as a method of fertility treatment.[62]

Orthodox ethics holds that human life is unique and exceptional. It is a gift from God and is therefore sacred and inviolable from its very beginning. Consequently, the creation of new life must not reflect pride or selfish motives, but must respect the dignity of the being brought into existence.[63]

Orthodox doctrine explicitly condemns the destruction of unused embryos, as life is believed to begin at the moment of conception. Heterologous fertilisation, involving sperm from an extramarital donor, is also unacceptable. Surrogate motherhood is excluded due to the involvement of a third party in the fertilisation process. Nonetheless, the decision to implement assisted reproductive techniques is left to the conscience of the spouses, who must mutually consent. The Church's role is to advise them against such solutions rather than impose prohibitions.[64]

As Aleksiejuk, a lecturer at the Christian Academy of Theology, stressed in an interview with the Polish Press Agency, the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church has no official position on IVF and relies on doctrinal documents developed by the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches.[65] In 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church

60 Leśniewski, 2019, p. 190.
61 Aleksiejuk, 2010.
62 Ibid.
63 Pawłowicz, 2011, p. 320.
64 Leśniewski, 2019, pp. 189–190.
65 Non-Catholic churches allow the *in vitro* method in exceptional situations. See Gazeta Prawna, 2008; Kuźma, 2022.

adopted the document *Fundamentals of Social Conception*, which stated that all types of *in vitro* fertilisation involving cryopreservation and the deliberate destruction of surplus embryos are morally unacceptable. However, following suggestions from Orthodox dioceses outside Russia, particularly in the European Union and the United States, discussions began on revising this position. A draft document *Ethical Problems Associated with In-Vitro Fertilization* was presented for consultation. It considered the possibility of allowing the method for spouses of childbearing age and examined the issue of cryopreserving oocytes (ova) for potential use in subsequent fertilisation attempts. According to the draft, the final decision regarding IVF would be left to the priest who spiritually cares for the couple concerned.[66]

Summarising the Orthodox Church's teaching on assisted reproductive technology, it should be stressed that although such methods are not recommended, there is no clear objection in situations when spouses, after exhausting other options, choose to use *in vitro* fertilisation.

3.2. Protestant Churches

The Reformation appeared in Poland a few years after Martin Luther's intervention. Between 1520 and 1525, King Sigismund issued edicts forbidding the dissemination and reading of Luther's works under penalty of death. Lutheranism became popular among the bourgeoisie of Royal Prussia and Greater Poland, while Calvinism found support among the nobility. Poland became a country in which followers of various confessions, persecuted in their own countries, found protection.[67] In 1573, the Act of the General Confederation of Warsaw was signed, guaranteeing peace and religious freedom to those of different faith. This document was groundbreaking in the development of the idea of human rights and, in 2003, was added to UNESCO's *Memory of the World* list, which includes the most important documents in the history of humanity.[68]

When Poland regained independence in 1918, there were more than one million Protestant believers within its borders. That denomination differed from other religions in that it was not centred around a single entity, but consisted of numerous churches and denominational associations. Membership in Protestant communities was mainly linked to nationality, as in the case of the Greek Catholic Church.[69]

After the Second World War, the number of Protestants significantly decreased, and by the end of the 1960s, the Protestants population was estimated at around 150,000 followers,[70] a figure that remains similar today.

66 Human Life International – Polska, 2021.
67 Jagiełło, 2015, p. 103.
68 Popławski and Kąkolewski, 2023, p. 198.
69 Alabrudzińska, 2004, p. 9.
70 Szlak Dziedzictwa Protestanckiego w Krakowie, no date.

Bioethical issues appear in the teaching of some Protestant communities functioning in Poland. However, there is no identical position among those confessions that have expressed views on *in vitro* fertilisation. As Paweł Przyłęcki emphasises, divergences sometimes exist even within the same confession.[71]

In Poland, only some Protestant communities have articulated clear positions on assisted reproductive methods. One such entity is the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, which in 2009 issued a statement on the admissibility of IVF.[72] The introduction emphasises that the Evangelical Church worldwide has not developed a uniform position; nevertheless, Polish Lutherans accept IVF as a method of treating infertility. The statement expresses clear opposition to creating and storing surplus embryos, when there is no intention of implanting them in the mother's body. The IVF method is recognised as a form of family support. Homologous fertilisation, where the sperm is obtained from the legal father, is approved. However, heterologous fertilisation and the use of surrogate mothers are not accepted. The statement also calls on the state to provide financial support for couples who are unable to have children, and it affirms the Church's duty of pastoral care for such couples.

The claim that IVF treats the child as a consumer good is explicitly rejected. IVF should be a last resort, not an impulse or whim. The statement stresses the need to protect the human embryo from being used for research purposes. In agreeing to the admissibility of IVF, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession refers to the biblical imperative of fertility, where God is the source of life who grants the blessing of children. The statement also encourages adoption for couples who cannot have biological children.[73] The literature notes that this approach reflects personalism, which emphasises the inherent and autonomous value of personality,[74] and the unique perfection of human person among other entities.[75]

3.3. Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Poland

The second largest Protestant denomination in Poland is the Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Poland. It is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the country, belonging to the Pentecostal European Fellowship, the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, the Evangelical Alliance in Poland, and the Bible Society in Poland.[76]

The literature states that the Pentecostal Church in Poland has not developed a clear position on assisted reproductive techniques. A statement of the Church Council affirms that holy married life is oriented towards procreation. Mariusz Kocoł draws attention to the fact that the Church's official periodical, '*Chrześcijanin*'

71 Przyłęcki, 2013 pp. 65–66.
72 luteranie.pl, 2009.
73 Ibid.
74 Zapart, 2011.
75 Encyclopaedia of the Polish Scientific Publishers, no date.
76 HISTORIA kościoła, no date.

(the Christian) contains publications discussing these issues. The author refers to the opinion of Tomasz Józefowicz, who emphasises that many Protestant Churches tend to accept IVF under certain conditions. Only married couples may use IVF; there must be no selection of embryos; and the number of embryos created should correspond to the spouses' ability and willingness to accept and raise them.[77]

The World Assemblies of God Fellowship, to which the Pentecostal Church in Poland belongs, issued an official statement in 2010 addressing IVF.[78] It states that, based on the Holy Scriptures, conception should take place through the sexual act of a man and a woman performed within marriage. However, when a couple cannot have children, they may face the decision whether to use IVF. The statement stresses that there are a number of ethical concerns, including: the manner of obtaining sperm and ovum; the protection of human embryos, especially those not intended for implantation; and considerations regarding the health and life of the mother if several implanted embryos survive, which may lead to selective abortion. Therefore, couples choosing IVF are therefore encouraged to cooperate with medical personnel on an ethical basis.[79]

Among the Christian denominations functioning on the territory of the Republic of Poland, only some of them officially express their views on assisted reproduction techniques: specifically, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and certain Protestant Churches. In non-Christian communities, such as Judaism and Islam, reference to this issue also appear, though divergences arise depending on the faction within each confession.

4. Summary

Summarising the findings of the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

(1) Since as early as the 17th century, research on artificial insemination has been carried out, initially on fish and insects, and, by the end of the 18th century, also on animals.
(2) By the end of the 19th century, successful attempts were already being made using semen from outside the marriage.
(3) The 20th century brought the development of techniques and methods that made insemination outside the woman's body possible.
(4) On 25 July 1978, the first child conceived through the *in vitro* method was born.

77 Kocoł, 2018, p. 78.
78 Ag.org, 2010.
79 Ibid.

(5) Methods of assisted reproduction provoke extreme emotions among various groups; some churches and religious associations take an active part in the debate, evaluating the implemented practices in the light of their doctrine and the legal norms functioning within their particular community.

(6) The attitude of the Catholic Church towards assisted reproductive methods (artificial insemination) was officially articulated on 17 March 1897, when the Holy Office referred to the posted question whether artificial insemination could be implemented. As a response, it firmly stated that it could not.

(7) A comprehensive exposition of Catholic doctrine, which in its basic principles remains valid, is included in the Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum vitae* of 22 February 1987.

(8) According to the Catholic Church, knowledge and technology should serve the human, his well-being and his inalienable rights, while remaining in harmony with respect for morality. (D.v.).

(9) The Church is opposed to artificial homologous insemination within marriage, except in situations where the technical means used do not substitute the conjugal act, but merely assist in achieving its natural aim (D.v.).

(10) According to the Catholic Church, techniques of artificial reproduction (assisted reproductive technology), although often intended to serve human life, may in fact create possibilities for illicit interference with its essence (D.v.).

(11) The Catholic Church does not accept the freezing of oocytes for the purpose of *in vitro* fertilisation. This fact is unacceptable even if the reason is to protect the cells from anticancer therapy.

(12) The Catholic Church considers morally unacceptable attempts involving fertilisation between human and animal gametes, the development of a human embryo in an artificial or animal embryo, and reproduction by twinning, cloning, parthenogenesis, and other analogous practices.

(13) Twenty-one years after the publication of the Instruction *Donum vitae*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith updated its teaching on bioethical issues by issuing on 8 December 2008 the Instruction Dignitas personae (D.p.).

(14) In the Constitution *Dignitas personae*, it was specified that assisted reproductive techniques should meet the following criteria: firstly, respect for the right to life and physical integrity of every human being from conception to natural death; secondly, acceptance that the unity of marriage requires reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse; thirdly, recognition that the specifically human values of sexuality require that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses.

(15) Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) is also unacceptable; although it allows some male infertility problems to be addressed, it remains intrinsically illicit method due to the complete separation of procreation from the conjugal act (D.p.).
(16) It is unacceptable to freeze oocytes for the purpose of *in vitro* fertilisation (D.p.).
(17) It is morally unacceptable to reduce embryos or foetuses present in the womb, as these practices constitute intentional selective abortion.
(18) In addition to documents issued by institutions within the Holy See, the position of the Catholic Church is also shaped by papal teaching.
(19) Particular Churches within individual states also refer to bioethical issues in their official statements. The Polish Bishops' Conference (PBC) has frequently spoken on this issue.
(20) The teaching of the PBC aligns with the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church on bioethical issues. Consistently, the Catholic Church in Poland articulates a negative position towards *in vitro* and other assisted reproductive techniques, claiming their moral wickedness.
(21) According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), techniques that separate parenthood through the intervention of a third party (e.g., sperm or egg donation, surrogacy), are profoundly illicit. Both artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilisation using the genetic material of a third party violate a child's right to be born of natural parents united by marriage (n. 2376).
(22) Homologous insemination (artificial insemination, *in vitro*) within marriage is also considered morally unacceptable, as it separates the sexual act from the procreative act (n. 2377).
(23) Orthodox theologians hold varied opinions on *in vitro* fertilisation. Some believe that it causes dehumanisation of human life and is incompatible with the aims of the sacrament of marriage; others view the procedure as a support for spouses who cannot have children.
(24) The Orthodox Church's attitude towards the human embryo largely accords with that of the Catholic Church: from the moment of conception it has its own genetic and personal identity. From the moment of combination of male and female cells, we are dealing with a human being. Every life is sacred and inviolable, including that created through *in vitro* methods.
(25) Orthodox doctrine explicitly condemns the destruction of unused embryos due to the belief that life begins at the moment of conception. Heterologous fertilisation, in which the sperm of an extramarital donor would be used, is also unacceptable. Surrogate motherhood is also excluded due to the involvement of a third party in the fertilisation procedure.

(26) In the Orthodox Church, the decision to implement assisted reproductive techniques is left to the spouses' conscience, provided they mutually consent. The Church's role is to ask them not to implement such solutions.
(27) Bioethical issues are present in the teaching of some Protestant communities in Poland. However, it should be emphasised that there is no identical position among the confessions that officially speak on *in vitro* fertilisation.
(28) In Poland, only some Protestant communities have clearly articulated their positions on assisted procreation methods. One such entity is the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, which in 2009 issued a statement on the admissibility of the *in vitro* method.
(29) Polish Lutherans accept this method as a way of treating infertility.
(30) The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession expresses clear opposition to the creation and storage of surplus embryos, when no clear purpose exists for their later implantation in the mother's body.
(31) Lutherans approve homologous fertilisation; heterologous fertilisation and surrogate motherhood are not accepted.
(32) The Pentecostal Church in Poland does not have a clear position on the issue of assisted procreation techniques.
(33) The World Assemblies of God Fellowship, to which the Pentecostal Church in Poland belongs, issued an official statement in 2010. It stated that, according to God's plan, conception of a child should take place through the sexual act of a man and a woman within marriage. However, when a couple cannot have children, they may face with the decision whether to use *in vitro* fertilisation.

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