

Catholic condemnation of Nobel Prize stirs Italian press reaction

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Rome, 5 October (ENI)--Vatican authorities have strongly criticised the awarding of the 2010 Nobel Prize for Medicine to Briton Robert Edwards, stating that the scientist's work on in-vitro fertilisation does not help in the defence of life.

At the same time, a number of editorials in the Italian press attacked the Roman Catholic position.

Vatican Radio carried an interview with Lucio Romano, president of the Science and Life Association, on 4 October in which he said, "The award was for a technique which reduces humanity to a product. The assignation of the Nobel Prize to Edwards ignores all ethical issues linked with IVF."

Romano argued that Edwards did make a big impact on modern science because he extrapolated techniques used in the breeding of livestock and applied them to human beings.

"This absolutely does not represent progress for the human person," said Romano, a professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at Frederick II University in Naples, Italy.

The president of the Vatican-based International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, José María Simón Castellvi, said, "Although IVF has brought happiness to the many couples who have conceived through this process, it has done so at an enormous cost. That cost is the undermining of the dignity of the human person."

Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, admitted there were some merits in Edwards' discoveries but underlined that with artificial insemination from a person who is not a woman's mate, motherhood and fatherhood are "trivialised".

"There are scientists more worthy than Edwards of the Nobel Prize," Carrasco told

the Rome-based La Repubblica newspaper.

Still the same newspaper ran a comment saying that the Holy See is unable to accept "a scientist who dares investigate what for millenniums was an inscrutable mystery, the mystery of procreation".

The editorial recalled that in October 1964, during the Second Vatican Council discussion on birth control, the Belgian Cardinal Leo Suenens, told more than 2000 bishops, "I pray, fathers: let us avoid a new process against Galileo."

The Italian scientist Galileo Galilei, the "father" of the modern astronomy in the 17th century was condemned by the papacy because he stated that the sun, and not heaven, was the centre of the universe.

"The Vatican condemns the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Edwards," declared the Milan-based Corriere della Sera newspaper, noting, "It was the time to award a Nobel Prize for Medicine to Edwards. It's a prize richly deserved. Those who contest this choice are not taking into account that Edwards has made a fundamental contribution to the promotion of life."

In giving the prize to Edwards, Sweden's Nobel assembly in Stockholm said: "His contributions represent a milestone in the development of modern medicine." It said, "His achievements have made it possible to treat infertility, a medical condition afflicting a large proportion of humanity, including more than 10 percent of all couples worldwide.