

Nobel prize ignores moral problems with IVF, says Italian professor

VATICAN CITY - Honoring one of the inventors of in vitro fertilization with the Nobel Prize for Medicine “ignores all the ethical problems” connected to the creation of so-called “test tube babies,” an Italian professor told Vatican Radio.

British scientist Robert Edwards, a retired professor at the University of Cambridge, England, was named the Nobel winner Oct. 4 for the development of in vitro fertilization.

His work led to the birth in 1978 of Louise Brown, the world’s first “test-tube baby.”

In a press release, the award committee said, “Approximately 4 million individuals have so far been born following IVF. Many of them are now adult and some have already become parents. A new field of medicine has emerged, with Robert Edwards leading the process all the way from the fundamental discoveries to the current, successful IVF therapy. His contributions represent a milestone in the development of modern medicine.”

Lucio Romano, president of the Italian association Science and Life, told Vatican Radio Oct. 4 that Edwards did make a huge mark on modern science because he took techniques used for breeding livestock and applied them to human beings.

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

Awarding the Nobel to Edwards, he said, ignores all the ethical problems connected with IVF, in which human eggs are removed from a woman and fertilized in a laboratory. The fertilized eggs are implanted in a woman’s uterus with the hope the pregnancy will progress normally from that point. Usually, multiple eggs are fertilized at once with only a select few being implanted.

A 2008 document on bioethics issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith repeated earlier Vatican condemnations of in vitro fertilization because it

separates procreation from the conjugal act in marriage, and because in practice unused embryos are often discarded, thus violating the principle that “the human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception.”