



WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Marriage, Family and Human Cloning

A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations
of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

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What Child Is This?

Marriage, Family and Human Cloning

INTRODUCTION

In February 1997 the world was introduced to Dolly, a sheep whose genetic instructions came entirely from one other animal rather than from the DNA¹ combination of a male and a female sheep. Intense public discussion concerning the merits of cloning immediately ensued and initiated a debate that continues today. The possibility that humans might be cloned has especially caught the public's attention.

Proposals to bring new human persons into the world through reproductive cloning raise many far-reaching ethical and spiritual questions, including questions about marriage, family and procreation. In this report the Commission on Theology and Church Relations responds to a request of the Synod that we reflect on the science and ethics of reproductive cloning in the light of our Christian faith.²

G.K. Chesterton observed in 1933 that

private theories about what the Bible ought to mean, and premature theories about what the world ought to mean, have met in loud and widely advertised controversy, especially in the Victorian time; and this clumsy collision of two very impatient forms of ignorance was known as the quarrel of Science and Religion.³

As Christians we patiently seek knowledge both about genetic science and about our Christian faith. In the words of Chesterton, we want no clumsy collisions issuing from impatient ignorance. We must exercise patience both

¹ See the glossary of terms and abbreviations included at the end of this report for this and other technical terms used in this document.

² In 1998 Resolution 3-15B "To Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations Study Document on Issues Raised by Cloning" the Synod requested that the Commission prepare "a study document to help the church, on the basis of the Word of God, make informed ethical judgments concerning cloning and attendant issues." The Synod further noted that this assignment is "in keeping with the Synod's mandate that the CTCR continue to provide guidance in the area of bioethics (1977 Res. 3-26, Bylaw 3.925 b 4)" (1998 *Convention Proceedings*, 120).

³ G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1933), 98.

to discover the genuine promises and to recognize the real threats that arise in modern science's study of genetics and cloning.

Contemporary genetic science is making discoveries at a breathtaking pace and is pursuing insights that are revolutionizing scientific understanding of the biological processes of life. We Christians will find much to celebrate in genetic science's development of human ability to understand and work with the beautiful mysteries of God's creation, but we will also find much that troubles us. We must be ready to witness against the sin that infects all human endeavor, including scientific pursuits, but we must also beware lest we create conflict where God's Word exposes no conflict.

The aim of this report is to make a contribution to the ability of Christians to discern when to celebrate emerging gifts and when to witness against looming evils. Many in our culture are tempted to turn away prematurely from thoughtful reflection on difficult questions in science and ethics. Some fall into despair in the face of what appear to be intractable disagreements. Others take disagreement to be a sign that the issues must not be so important after all. Still others cut short the debate and seek to impose premature answers through political and other means. Trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance through the Scriptures, however, enables us to resist the temptation to turn away from thoughtful reflection. In these pages we seek to promote careful thought and dialog by identifying, focusing on and addressing questions raised for Christian faith by reproductive cloning.

The complexities of this study require that Christians approach the controversies surrounding reproductive cloning from several different directions. In the pages that follow we subject the proposal to clone human beings to close analysis specifically in light of what the Scriptures teach concerning marriage, family and procreation,⁴ and in light of God's redemptive purposes.

Reproductive cloning makes use of genetic science in ways that also provoke significant ethical and moral questions concerning research and technology that manipulate cells that give rise to human life. The Commission is subjecting such questions to biblically disciplined scrutiny and will address these and other issues in subsequent studies.⁵

⁴ People of biblical faith tend to use the word "procreative" in recognition of the human privilege of participating in God's creation of new human beings, but the word "reproductive" is also often used, especially in scientific and medical contexts.

⁵ Other issues will include: 1. How are we to respond to questions surrounding therapeutic (as opposed to reproductive) cloning, including questions raised by stem cell research? 2. Who will have access to the blessings of genetic knowledge and who will be oppressed by its burdens? 3. Can we expect that society will strive to maximize blessings and minimize banes? 4. How should Christians seek to influence the pursuit and development of genetic science and cloning? 5. What roles can Christian congregations play in helping Christian people seek God's will in these matters?

The discussion below first provides a description of how reproductive cloning might bring about a new human individual and compares this technology to other ways that new persons come into the world. Insights from Scripture are then brought to bear on the questions raised by this new technology. We find that simple but enduring insights concerning marriage and family provide a firm basis for the conclusion of this study: emphatic rejection of the proposal that human persons be cloned.

REPRODUCTIVE CLONING OF HUMANS:

“WHAT CHILD IS THIS?”

Questions Raised by Cloning

God’s Word in Genesis 2 locates the conception and birth of a child in the sexually intimate relationship of a man and woman and intends husband, wife and child to live together in a family. In Matthew 19 and Mark 10 Jesus uses Genesis 2 to point to God’s intentions for the integrity of marriage and family. Similarly, St. Paul employs Genesis 2 in his instructions in Ephesians 5. Until the present time, human reproductive biology also tied sexual intimacy and the procreation of a child tightly together.

Very early in the history of humankind, however, a variety of settings emerged in which children were conceived and born. The book of Genesis tells of children born in and out of marriage, conceived not only by marital intercourse but also by surrogacy, incest, and prostitution. Sexual intimacy is such a profound human relationship that human beings have explored countless alternative ways of experiencing this dimension of human life—and not always in keeping with the Creator’s intent.

Modern genetic science and the technology of cloning raise for us new questions about the settings in which, and the technologies by which, children are conceived and born. If we take conception and birth within a marriage relationship to be the reference point, what shall we think about the significance of the parents’ Christian faith or lack of it? What shall we think about children—wanted or unwanted—born outside of marriage?

If the intimate union of sexual intercourse is our reference point for how a child is conceived, what shall we think about conception through the variety of technologies related to *in vitro* fertilization? What does it mean for a child if he or she is conceived by artificial insemination, either with the husband’s sperm or with donor sperm? Does gestation in another woman’s womb alter the humanity of a child? And what shall we make of cloning, a technique that relates the child to one and only one other individual as the source of the child’s genetic instructions? The Commission has addressed some of these questions in its previous reports on *Human*

Sexuality (1981) and *Procreative Choices* (1996). This report draws on this previous work as we reflect on related but also new and more complicated questions.

Genetics, Reproduction and Cloning

Physically, the development and growth of the human body is directed by our genes, some 40,000 to 60,000 sets of physical instructions encoded in the DNA in our cells.⁶ Except for cells that are involved in our reproductive systems, every other cell in our body contains the entire set of genes, a complete double set of instructions for our physical being. But cells in our bodies differ from each other because only certain of the genes in a cell are actively directing the production, for example, of new skin cells or new muscle cells.

Our cells' genetic instructions come in a double set of paired genes. In the usual case our mother has contributed one complete set of genes and our father the other. Thus, we are physically similar to our parents and yet different because each parent has contributed only half of her or his own double set of instructions to the new set that is our own. This is because sperm and eggs include only one half of the double set of genes found in the other cells of our bodies. Each sperm and egg draws upon the father's or mother's double set of genes in ways that make each sperm and egg genetically different from the others despite their coming from the same parent. When sperm and egg fuse in conception a new and unique double set of genes is formed from the single contribution of each.

We turn now to a survey of more recent technologies involved in the conception of new human persons.

Artificial insemination is a relatively simple technique that introduces sperm into the woman's body by some means other than sexual intercourse. Sperm often comes from the woman's husband, but donor sperm from outside a marriage is also used. This technique changes the way that sperm is made available, but it does not change the basic genetic fact that the embryo conceived has a new double set of genetic instructions that combines a set of genes from the egg and a set from the sperm.

Modern day *surrogacy* is the practice of having a woman who is not intended to be the social mother of the child provide the womb in which the child develops until he or she is able to be born. Embryos can be conceived in the surrogate's womb by natural intercourse or more likely by artificial insemination. In this case the surrogate's egg contributes half of

⁶ Estimates of the total number of human genes currently range from 40,000 to 60,000. See, for example, a recent report indicating there may be "50 to 60,000 human genes and that previous estimates of 30 to 40,000 human genes are too low" (News Release from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory; see <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2001/11/011129044642.htm>).

the genetic instructions for the child. *In vitro* fertilization and the technology of cloning (see below) make it possible to introduce into the womb an embryo that is in no way genetically related to the surrogate. In the usual practice of *in vitro* fertilization the child will have a new double set of genetic instructions combining genes from whatever egg and sperm were brought together to form the embryo. As we will see, cloning changes the way the double set of genetic instructions comes into the new life.

In vitro fertilization refers to a variety of highly sophisticated techniques whereby an embryo is brought about outside a woman's body. Several different methods are used for transferring the embryo into the woman's womb. The usual practice of *in vitro* fertilization changes the place and the way that sperm and egg come together, but this practice does not change the basic genetic fact that the embryo has a new double set of genetic instructions resulting from the fusion of sperm and egg. *In vitro* techniques often use sperm and eggs from a married couple, but the technology, of course, can use any source of eggs and sperm.

Cloning marks a significantly different approach to a child's origin. In cloning the double set of genetic instructions that directs the embryo's physical development derives not from the combination of genes from two parents but from a double set of genetic instructions identical to that of the single "parent" from which the clone is generated. The word "clone" comes from the Greek *klōn* (κλών), meaning sprout or twig. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Tenth Edition) defines a clone as "an individual grown from a single somatic cell of its parent and genetically identical to it." ("Somatic" means a body cell that has a complete double set of paired genes, rather than a sex cell that has only half of the double set of paired genes.) The use of the word "clone" as a noun in the English language dates from the beginning of the 20th century. The word became a verb in the middle of the 20th century.

Cloning is not a new feature in the world of biology. In the plant and insect world there are many examples of reproduction occurring by an identical offshoot coming from the parent stock. Indeed, our own human development from embryo to adult human involves the cloning of the original single cell produced at the moment of our conception. All the cells currently in our body are clones of that original cell.

The phenomenon of identical twins is also an example related to cloning. Identical twins occur when, very soon after the moment of conception, the embryo splits into two distinct entities. Both entities have identical sets of genetic instructions, but each grows independently. In the earliest stages of embryonic development all the genes in the instruction set are equally at work or dormant in each cell alike, so that when the embryo splits, full development of both new entities is possible. Not long into the development, however, cells in the embryo begin to differentiate. Some

begin to form heart muscle, others other organs, etc. Once the cells begin to differentiate, the possibility of natural identical twinning is past.

Genetic science is now pursuing the possibility of taking a differentiated cell from an adult human, returning it to a state where it can direct the entire development of an embryo, introducing it into an egg that has been emptied of its own genetic instructions, and then inducing the cell to use the nutrients in the egg cell to begin to develop into a new individual. The new individual will thus be what some have called a “time-delayed identical twin” of the individual who has supplied the cell from which the cloned individual has developed. In this technology we have the possibility of a very different relationship of parent to child. No one previously has ever been in a position to produce a child that was one’s own time-delayed identical twin. The question before us, then, is this: What shall we think and say about this way of producing new humans?

What Child Is This?

What shall we think and say about the moral and spiritual significance of humans in relation to the circumstances that produced them? In this report we will use the words “person” and “personhood” when we are speaking of the moral and spiritual significance of a human being. On what basis can we determine what the personhood of any child might be, whether born in the time-honored way, in some different way, or by cloning?

God’s Word introduces a fundamental distinction into our understanding of the personhood of any and all human beings. The Gospel of John can guide us here. In John 1 we read of Jesus, the Word, that “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (12–13). Jesus himself teaches this in his words to Nicodemus in John 3: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew’” (5–7).

These words teach us that every child of humanity is a child conceived of the flesh. In biblical language this means that every human individual is now conceived into a natural situation in which the trajectory of life is limited by the cycles of birth and death. More than that, God’s Word teaches that all human life—indeed all of nature—is in a bondage brought about by sinful rebellion against, and separation from, God. The Gospel of John reminds us of the wonderful humility and love the sinless Son of God showed when he assumed our flesh and dwelt among us to redeem us (1:14).

Psalm 90 is a reliable guide here concerning human life born of the flesh. The psalmist begins with the material cycle of nature:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayest, "Turn back, O children of men!" For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers (1-6).

But then the psalm moves on to a much more challenging perspective:

For we are consumed by thy anger; by thy wrath we are overwhelmed. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days pass away under thy wrath, our years come to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of thy anger, or thy wrath according to the fear of thee? (7-11).

The psalm concludes with a prayer that God would prosper our numbered days:

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on thy servants! Satisfy us in the morning with thy steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad as many days as thou has afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. Let thy work be manifest to thy servants, and thy glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it (12-17).

There may be important differences between being born into a usual family, being born out of wedlock, or being born from artificial insemination or from cloning. We will explore these differences in more detail later in this document. However, from God's standpoint, no matter how a human life has begun, it has begun from flesh. And, except for the Word who became flesh and freely bore the burden of our sin, to be born in flesh means to be born in sin and estrangement from God. This is why Nicodemus and all sinners have a need to be born again of water and Spirit, baptized in the name of Jesus, the Word, the Son of God.

The sin that clings to our flesh leads some to demean the personhood of those who are born out of wedlock. The temptation is to think that our moral and spiritual significance varies depending upon some standard of

purity concerning our origins. This same temptation has led some to propose that should humans result from cloning they would have a debased personhood. But God's Word makes plain that there is no difference: "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). And all human beings, apart from their origin and despite sins committed, "are justified by his [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

The good news that comes in Jesus is that God patiently and wonderfully reaches out to us all, regardless of our origins or our current sin, with the new birth from the Spirit. The church, the Body of Christ, is God's instrument in the world for offering new birth freely to all.

The question "What child is this?" is the prior and most important question we must ask as we address new and difficult questions about genetics, procreative technologies and cloning. In asking this question we are led to the answer that God's Word has always given, summed up in words often used at Baptisms:

...we all are conceived and born sinful and so are in need of forgiveness. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent his Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.⁷

One person may have been born into a fine family of Christians, while someone else may have been born into a fine family of non-Christians. Others may have been born in non-family circumstances, or be the product of artificial insemination or some other reproductive technology. In future years people born from a process of cloning may walk among us. However, the most important thing is this: No matter how a person's life begins, *anyone*—despite being born in the flesh—can become a child of God through the rebirth of Holy Baptism.

This means that we cannot determine the pluses and minuses of various ways and means of producing humans by thinking that some people either are more human or less human because of their origins. Whatever we discover about the wisdom or "unwisdom" of various ways of procreation, we need to recognize these twin truths: 1. "there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and 2. all "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:22–24).

⁷ *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 199.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Developing a biblical perspective on cloning and other procreative technologies requires that we now turn to a study of what it is to be a parent. This study will draw on the distinction between flesh and spirit and offer some guidance on how Christians will and will not enter the calling of parenthood.

Every facet of human life is affected by the struggle between flesh and spirit. It is therefore no surprise that this should be true also of marriage and parenting. A Christian wedding service gives vivid expression to this struggle:

The Lord God in his goodness created us male and female, and by the gift of marriage founded human community in a joy that begins now and is brought to perfection in the life to come. Because of sin, our age-old rebellion, the gladness of marriage can be overcast and the gift of the family can become a burden. But because God, who established marriage, continues still to bless it with his abundant and ever-present support, we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored.⁸

Consider for a moment what marriage and parenting would look like without reference to the Spirit and the life to come. From the standpoint of our existence in the flesh, marriage and parenting are expressions of the biological imperative to reproduce. We create a new generation that replaces us while we sink back into nonexistence. Various religions and philosophies have in one way or another analyzed our situation as “being toward death.” John Zizioulas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, summarizes this view of life in the flesh in the observation that marriage and parenting simply “supply matter for death.”⁹ The ancient Greek tragedies, contemporary Country and Western music, the Blues, and countless expressions in between explore in painful detail the limitations, frustrations, disappointments and death that characterize life in the flesh.

Marriage: A School of the Spirit

The good news of the Gospel proclaims that Christ has come and that we are now called to be children of God, persons drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity and thus finally beyond the reach of the futility of life toward death. So difficult for us to come to, however, is a life like God’s life, a lively outflowing of community and purpose (John 10:10).

⁸ *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 203; cf. *The Lutheran Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 36 and 54.

⁹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 47.

This is where marriage and parenting take on a new dimension. God guides us everywhere and always to go beyond the imperatives of the fleshly life. Many see marriage and parenting as simply temporary and ultimately doomed responses to biological necessities. Others view marriage and parenting as institutions to be used for self-fulfillment. But God's Word invites us to think of marriage and parenting as opportunities to experience and practice the life of the Spirit.

The marital union of man and woman is a fundamental created setting in which God desires to transform children of the flesh—both parents and children—into children of God. Because we are destined for a new heaven and a new earth, we cannot and do not absolutize marriage and family. We must hear the hard sayings of Jesus: “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25; cf. Matt. 22:30, and Luke 20:35) and, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). So, we accept God's guidance that in marriage we are learning how to live not simply as children of the flesh but as children of God.

Thus it is that men and women are to learn to see their relationship to each other not as a temporary opportunity for a little self-fulfillment but as an occasion for loving as God loves. Fathers and mothers and their children are to learn to see each other not as objects and resources for fulfilling their goals in life, but as persons given to each other by God to be loved as God loves. But people who are born of the flesh do not easily learn the loving rhythms of life in the Spirit.

Luther praised family life over monastic life because, instead of merely satisfying human desires, it puts people into a truly spiritual struggle. Marriage is understood biblically as a relationship in which wife and husband, parents and children, are challenged to live by faith in God rather than by confidence in their own abilities to protect themselves from their vulnerabilities to each other.¹⁰

This means that for Christians marriage and family press beyond themselves to a reality that transcends this life. Marriage has roots in our biological and flesh-oriented existence, but it images a richer spiritual reality—the community of persons born of the Spirit. Marriage is a school for practicing how the children of God relate to God, themselves and one another. Marriage is thus a created image and analogy of relationships in the church, the Body of Christ.

Our principle then is that marriage is to be held in highest regard as the context in which children born of the flesh are best brought into the world.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7,” *Luther's Works*, American Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 28:17–20.

Marriage is the context where wife, husband and children may perhaps find, as one of the church's prayers says, "a foretaste of our eternal home."

It is in this light that we consider how Christians enter sexual relationships and how they understand themselves as parents. From this perspective we will also be able to provide wisdom to the world at large, though we will not expect that persons who choose to continue living life only in the flesh will necessarily be persuaded by a vision that calls them to repentance and new life in the Spirit.

Marriage, Family and Procreation

Given this understanding of God's plans for marriage and parenting, we can directly understand why Christians ought not choose to pursue sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Every proposal for experiencing sexual intimacy outside of marriage is a proposal to continue living as individuals doomed to flesh-oriented, frustrated biological existence.

Sexual relationship outside of marriage speaks a loud "No" to God's intent that men and women enjoy this gift in a context of self-giving. In one way or another an extramarital union says that the man and/or the woman will give and receive only in a fragmented and limited way—always leaving open the option that when a more fulfilling possibility comes along, it may be seized. Most often the notion is, as the saying goes, "you only go around once in life."

Perhaps the most troubling feature of same-sex relationships is that these relationships wholly circumvent God's intention that there be challenging otherness and difference in the sexual relationship as well as the sexual self-fulfillment that so many seek. In the Hebrew, Genesis 2:18 more than hints that the partner God intends for the man is not only a partner but also a *counter*-partner. A *counter*-partner is one who, by the very fact of being *counter*, invites the spouse out of preoccupation with selfish self-fulfillment. Christians need also to see that God intends them to locate reproduction and the procreation of children within a marriage. To understand this requires patient consideration of two important insights.

1. Openness to Procreation: Hindering the Potential for Sexual Self-Exploitation in Marriage

Sexual intimacy, even in marriage, threatens constantly to turn marriage into a socially accepted setting for two people to use each other for selfish self-fulfillment. Sinful human beings use and hurt each other inside a marriage as well as outside of it.

God's original creation and the promise of his continuing guidance urge married couples to open their love of each other to a third party, that is, to the children that so often can be the fruit of sexual intimacy. In this way husband and wife are helped to look beyond themselves to someone

else, someone to whom they together can give themselves in a love resembling God's love for us.

This insight says much to us about the need for wisdom in using contraception in marriage. It is one thing to think carefully about when to have children and how many to have, and whether to use contraception. But when husband and wife decide that their sexual intimacy will never be allowed to bring forth children, they should examine with care whether they are selfishly seeking to circumvent the natural plan for marital intimacy to turn outward in love for children. The Commission's 1981 report on *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* observes,

In view of the Biblical command and the blessing to "be fruitful and multiply," it is to be expected that marriage will not ordinarily be *voluntarily* childless. But, in the absence of Scriptural prohibition, there need be no objection to contraception within a marital union which is, as a whole, fruitful.¹¹

A first insight, then, is that openness to procreation can help husband and wife transcend the preoccupation with self that is characteristic of our fallen condition, and aid them in resisting temptations to selfish sexual exploitation of each other.

2. Procreation: Hindering the Exploitation of Children in Marriage

A second insight is that procreation, even in marriage, threatens constantly to provide opportunities for husband and/or wife to add one more selfish project to their list of accomplishments. Having and raising a child can become not an opportunity for love but one more occasion for engineering our own self-fulfillment.

To counter this threat God has designed the procreation of a child to be a complex uniting of two similar but significantly different individuals whose union bears a new flesh that is rooted in but different from the flesh of the parents. The child is "mine," but also stubbornly not mine. God teaches us to love our children the way he loves us all. We are not to love our children because they may be or become a fulfillment of one of *our* dreams. As we will see, one of the great dangers of cloning is that the cloned person may be brought about because some other person, the "parent," wants to produce another person exactly like himself or herself.

This learning to love beyond oneself happens best when husband and wife together live and love and raise their children. For this reason Christians look with sadness and dismay upon all the new arrangements that

¹¹ *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee, 1981, 19. For further reflection on this matter see the *Christians and Procreative Choices: How Do God's Chosen Choose?*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1996, 23–33.

remove procreation from the context of the life-long union of husband and wife. Sadly, contemporary attitudes toward marriage tempt people to continue living the doomed life of limited, fleshly self-fulfillment rather than the free life of the children of God.

A second insight, then, is that child-bearing that unites sexual love with husband's and wife's ongoing care for a new person can help husband and wife transcend selfish exploitation of children as projects.

No one can claim that the simple fact of marriage with children will automatically save men and women from their selfishness. We are so sunk in our sin that even in the best of circumstances we manage to bring much evil out of good. We therefore need to return continually to God's Word and the holy sacraments so that the circumstances provided in marriage accomplish God's purpose of carrying us beyond ourselves.

Furthermore, we must carefully note that God continually raises up children of God also in circumstances that seem removed from God's intention. Divorced persons struggling with single parenthood are touched by God's grace and drawn to the life of the Spirit. They accept their children as gifts from God and love them to God's glory. God also blesses and calls unwed mothers who conceive and bear children to life in the Spirit. Children conceived and born in circumstances outside of marriage are still fully the object of the love of a Savior who has come to save us all. Healthy familial interactions are seen in a variety of extended family structures, and the church welcomes all of God's children precisely because God invites and welcomes us all as his children by adoption in Baptism.

Nonetheless, God's Word teaches us never to pursue sexual intimacy and/or procreation of children apart from God's institution of marriage and family.

PROCREATION IN SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Christians and Reproductive Technologies

With these biblical insights about marriage and family in place, we can now turn to specific questions concerning reproductive technologies, including cloning.

Given the struggle between the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit that marriage and parenting at their best represent, what use might be made of reproductive technologies? Our reference point will be the marital union of woman and man fruitful in the procreation of children.

The reproductive technologies have been developed primarily to help rectify problems of infertility in marriage—a burden endured also in biblical times. The Bible includes many stories of infertility and often portrays the gift of a child as the overcoming of what stands in the way of new life

and the joy it brings under God's favor.¹² We would seem to have every reason to explore the possibilities of using genetic scientific insight and technique to address hindrances to the bearing of children in marriage.

While we may find a legitimate role for a variety of reproductive technologies, we should note in passing that many Roman Catholic Christians have examined the possibilities and argue that the connection between natural sexual intercourse and procreation should be left undisturbed. Similar reasoning leads to the rejection of the use of contraceptives, because they too disturb the natural connection. Consequently, Roman Catholic teaching tends to return a negative verdict against the technologies we will be discussing.¹³ The use of fertility drugs is considered a different matter as long as they do not disturb the natural context of conception in connection with sexual intercourse.¹⁴ Not all Christians have thought that Roman Catholic reasoning on these matters is sufficiently rooted in the Scriptures, and some have therefore taken different approaches.

The basic premise at work in the Commission's 1996 report on *Christians and Procreative Choices* is that God's Word establishes as the appropriate context for procreation the loving relationship of husband and wife conceiving a child from their bodily lives as father and mother. This means that as long as a child is conceived from the sperm of the husband and the egg of the wife in a faithful marriage, the fundamentals of biblical guidance are being observed.

Within this context the technique of *artificial insemination* with the husband's sperm is considered a possible approach to overcoming infertility. However, artificial insemination with donor sperm from outside the marriage conceives the child in a way that disturbs the delicate balance between sameness and difference in God's plans for marriage. Remembering that ours is never less than an *embodied life*, we see that the child is in this case the product of the wife's body and the body of an absent (and usually anonymous) donor. This asymmetry in the relation of husband and wife's bodily life to the child's bodily life disturbs the way the child relates to each parent. Artificial insemination by donor is therefore an inappropriate remedy for infertility.¹⁵

Surrogacy presents similar but also different problems. As noted in the beginning of this report, modern day surrogacy is the practice of having a woman who is not intended to be the social mother of the child provide the womb in which the child develops until it is able to be born. Surrogacy that conceives the child from the surrogate's egg rather than the wife's egg would be ruled out in much the same way as artificial insemination by

¹² See, for example, Gen. 11:30; 21:1–7; 25:21; 1 Sam. 1:1–2:11; Luke 1.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), par. #2376.

¹⁴ Cf. Fr. A Coutinho, <http://www.thegospeltruth.org/Quest148.htm>.

¹⁵ *Christians and Procreative Choices*, 21–22.

donor. It brings about an asymmetry in the relation of the child to the social father and mother. Any use of sperm or eggs from outside the marriage is an inappropriate disturbance. Furthermore, carrying a child for nine months is such an intimate act of parenting that, even if the sperm and egg are from the infertile couple, the surrogate's presence disturbs the child's relationship to its various biological and social parents. Consequently, surrogacy is discouraged.¹⁶

In vitro fertilization often uses sperm and eggs from the husband and wife, and the wife carries the child. In this circumstance there does not seem to be a disturbance of the marital relationship and the relationship between the parents and the child. On the other hand, *in vitro* fertilization can be practiced using sperm and eggs from any of a variety of donors. In such cases the violation of the purposes of marriage seems once again to occur.¹⁷

The prospect of *cloning* raises rather different questions. Clearly, the biblically informed line of thought we have been following would rule out cloning outside the context of marriage. Cloning, however, would not necessarily mean importing gametes from outside the marriage. Instead, the problem would be that the child would be fully the child of whichever parent provided the complete double set of genetic instructions.

Cloning is fundamentally unacceptable because only one person's bodily life provides the genetic instructions; the delicate balance of marriage is once again disturbed. The child stands in an asymmetric relationship to the father and the mother, because its total set of genetic instructions has come from only one parent. The parent who has supplied the genetic instructions is not only the child's parent, but also the child's genetic twin. (Indeed, some point out that the son or daughter is, genetically speaking, actually another child of his or her grandparents.) In short, cloning human beings is a fundamental assault on the created order of God. Through cloning, the parents will have erected significant barriers to their transcending the search for mere self-fulfillment.

We note also that a child produced by cloning is deprived of the normal conditions for establishing its own identity apart from the cloning parent. In the usual case, each of us develops physically from a unique double set of instructions that is drawn from, but is significantly different from, that of our mother and father. The fact that mother or father has developed a certain way physically may tell us something about ourselves, but the way our parents have developed physically is not a story that will be identical to our own. In the case of cloning, however, the cloning parent's physical development has been governed by instructions that are identical to those directing the development of the cloned person. The cloned person

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7–20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34–39. See also *Human Sexuality*, 36–39.

is thus deprived of the surprises of uniqueness that come with sexual procreation. In this respect there is a huge moral difference between the situation of naturally occurring identical twins and the “time-delayed” identical twins produced by cloning. Naturally occurring identical twins begin life together with the unique sets of instructions that come from both of their parents. They together begin a journey of surprises concerning their unique physical development. They are not in the situation where they could know and be oppressed by what their twin has already long ago accomplished or failed to accomplish with the unique composite of genetic instructions that conditions their development.

“Give Me Children or I Shall Die”

Christians are deeply sensitive to the sorrows of infertility. Not only Rachel cries out “Give me children or I shall die!” (Gen. 30:1). It is crucial also to remember that in this sinful world there is finally no such thing as a perfect marriage and family.

Assessments of reproductive technologies vary considerably from Christian to Christian. We have already mentioned that Roman Catholic moral reasoning tends to resist any technology that removes conception from the immediate context of loving sexual intercourse between husband and wife.

From the opposite direction, some Christians point to the widely accepted practice of adoption and ask, “If the adopting of a child whose genetic origin is completely outside the marriage can be a suitable way to create a family, why would we reject procreative technologies simply because they use gametes from outside the marriage?”

One response to this question is to argue that the practice of adoption provides only an imperfect analogy with reproductive technologies. In adoption a couple typically is rescuing a child who lacks a family, rather than purposely creating a child in a way that goes beyond the marriage. Furthermore, the adoptive parents are in a better position to maintain a symmetrical relationship to their adopted child. Neither parent has provided any part of the genetic instructions.¹⁸

Some Christians also argue that if marriage and parenting are significant analogies of God’s adoption of us in Christ, then perhaps the biblical guidance does not so strictly confine conception to the union of sperm and egg of husband and wife. In this view, committed love between husband

¹⁸ In the last twenty-five years the practice of *in vitro* fertilization has led to the preserving of many human embryos left over from a couple’s attempt to become pregnant. In a future report the Commission will address the moral and spiritual significance of this cryopreservation of human embryos. Some Christians recommend rescuing such embryos by adopting them and bringing them to term in an adoptive womb. The Commission considers this practice to be similar to regular adoption and therefore morally permissible. Just as we can approve and recommend regular adoption, so we can recommend and approve embryo adoption.

and wife incorporating children in a faithful way counts for more than the source of the child's DNA.

We may respond to this line of thought by pointing out that the biblical analogy of adoption suggests most persuasively the opposite. Couples who are not so focused on reproducing some of their own DNA are likely to be more prepared to share their love with the world in whatever way God calls them.

We of course have yet to see the end of developments in genetics and reproductive technology. Among the more challenging technologies on the horizon, for instance, are current efforts to develop an artificial womb. As we have noted previously, the Commission in a further study intends to deal with additional moral and spiritual questions raised by scientific manipulations of human cells.

As we struggle with these problems and questions we are given to understand more keenly the limitations of our human existence in the flesh, captured so well in Jacob's troubled reply to Rachel, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30:2).

CONCLUSION

"What Child is This?" Indeed, whose children are we? Every one of us, both those conceived in the procreative act of husband and wife and those conceived through extraordinary means, are born children of humanity, in the flesh and with a human will. God's Word teaches, as we have seen, that a full and abundant life will not emerge from the life of the flesh. But his Word also brings us the good news of a Savior and the new birth he brings through Baptism.

This living Word calls men and women to see that their life together in marriage is filled with opportunities to give glory to God and to practice unselfish love. Christians will therefore seek to discern how their lives in marriage and family may grow under God's guidance. To recognize the grave moral dangers inherent in the practice of cloning they will need to reflect carefully on the use of contraception and reproductive technologies. In this report we have sought to help provide guidance for Christians as they think about these issues in light of what the Scriptures teach concerning marriage and the family.

As we engage also in this task of assessing contemporary technologies of reproduction, our foremost concern is to ask what these technologies mean in light of Christ's promise of new birth from above through water and the Spirit. And we remember as Christians that our ultimate mission is to participate in making "disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

GLOSSARY¹⁹

Artificial Insemination (AI): A technique that introduces sperm into a woman's body by some means other than sexual intercourse. Sperm often comes from the woman's husband (AIH), but donor sperm from outside a marriage is also used (AID).

Clone: An individual grown from a single *somatic* cell of its parent and genetically identical to it.*

Cryopreservation: Preservation (as of cells) by subjection to extremely low temperatures.*

DNA: An abbreviation for "deoxyribonucleic acid." Any of various nucleic acids that are usually the molecular basis of heredity, localized especially in cell nuclei, and constructed of a double helix* (spiral). In humans this "double helix" structure in each bodily cell contains our *genes*, the sets of instructions that provide the basic framework for our physical development throughout life.

Embryo: The early developmental stage of an animal while it is in the egg or within the uterus of the mother. In humans the term is applied to the unborn child until the end of the seventh week following conception. From the eighth week the unborn child is called a fetus. In organisms that reproduce sexually, the union of an ovum with a sperm results in a zygote, or fertilized egg.

Gamete: A mature male or female germ cell (sperm or egg). These cells contain only one-half of the paired genes found in other body cells, and they are capable of forming a new and physically unique individual by fusion with a gamete of the opposite sex.

Gene: The basic physical unit of heredity. Each human body cell, except for sperm and egg cells, has 40,000 to 60,000 units of physical instructions encoded in the *DNA* in the cell. These instructions provide the basic framework for our physical development throughout life.

Genetic Science: The systematic study of how genes govern physical development, sometimes simply called genetics.

In Vitro Fertilization: A term referring to a variety of highly sophisticated techniques whereby an embryo is conceived outside a woman's body. Several different methods are used for transferring the embryo into the woman's womb.

¹⁹ Those definitions below marked by an asterisk (*) are taken from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Tenth Edition, 1993).

Reproductive Cloning: The use of technologies of cloning to produce a new individual animal or human. Reproductive cloning replaces the fusing of *gametes* (sperm and egg) with techniques that take a full set of paired genes from a body cell and that use this double set in an egg that has been emptied of its own genetic instructions. The resulting individual has the same double set of paired genes that the donor of the cell has and is sometimes called a “delayed identical twin” of the donor.

Reproductive Technologies: Term referring to a variety of technologies that have been developed to address problems of human infertility.

Somatic Cells: Cells of the body that compose the tissues, organs, and parts of that individual other than the germ cells. A somatic cell has the complete double set of paired genes and thus differs from a sex cell (germ cell) that has only half of the set of paired genes.

Surrogacy: The practice of having a woman who is not intended to be the social mother of the child provide the womb in which the child develops until it is able to be born.



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