



BE FRUITFUL *and Multiply*

by William M. Cwirla

Although we share much common biology with the animal world, human reproduction is, comparatively speaking, a rather inefficient business. Or as they say on Facebook, “It’s complicated.” Whereas God’s divine mandate—“Be fruitful and multiply”—in the animal world produces a rather straightforward and efficient set of impulses and instincts resulting in a profound plethora of puppies, kittens and rabbits, human procreation takes place within a complex dynamic of sexual intimacy between man and woman, what the Scripture calls “one flesh” (**GEN. 2:24**). While all creatures are driven by the creative impulse to “be fruitful and multiply,” man uniquely does this within a narrow context of intimacy, commitment, covenant and community.

Human sexuality is more than mere biology. It is intimacy between man and woman, to know and to be known in the most intimate of ways as “one flesh.” Marriage is the God-approved and God-appointed context in which this intimate knowing of man and woman takes place. It is a protective fortification built around the one-flesh union of man and woman so that no one may intrude. It is a signature of Scripture that human sexual activity is narrowly confined within a lifelong union of man and woman from which only death can part them. Marriage, intimacy and procreation must be seen together as a single divine gift that God has joined together for our blessing and good.

ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Science has opened the secret place of the womb to our curiosities as well as our tinkering and interventions. While we are no less fearfully and wonderfully made today, our modern, scientific worldview tends to ignore the final Cause who works hiddenly and focuses solely on natural causes. The advent of “assisted reproductive technologies” (ART)—everything from hormonal treatments to artificial insemination to invitro fertilization—has ushered in a brave new world of reproductive technology that fundamentally alters how we look at human procreation.

The one-flesh union of a man and a woman is no longer necessary to produce a child. One doesn’t even need a partner, much less a relationship, but simply the biological materials of sperm and egg, whether one’s own or that of another. That all this technology “works” and results in the birth of a child, at least some of the time, does not necessarily indicate God’s approval. That would be like saying that the law of gravity indicates God’s approval of my pushing you off a cliff. If anything, it is a testimony to the creative tenacity of the Word: “Be fruitful and multiply.”

PRINCIPLES AND OUTCOMES

Ethics seeks to weigh outcomes and consequences against underlying principles and values. The principles in play here are the

sanctity of human life as a gift from God and a mystery that runs deeper than our reason and senses can fathom, and the one-flesh union of husband and wife in which covenant and intimacy are the God-given context for our being fruitful and multiplying. The desired outcome, of course, is a healthy child born to happy parents eager to have children. Among the unintended consequences of fertility intervention are the depersonalizations of procreation, human embryos left in cryogenic limbo, the potential sale and trafficking of human embryos, embryo selection, and children conceived, born and raised outside of the context of family and the marriage covenant.

Does the end of giving a child to the childless justify the medical means to get there? Do the biblical principles of the sanctity of human life and the inviolability of the one-flesh union preclude the intervention of medical technology in the procreative process? As Lutherans, we believe that science and technology are First Article gifts of God that can be received and used with thanksgiving. We believe in the power of God to heal. We pray for the sick and anoint them with oil. But we still go to our doctors and take our prescription medicines. Can artificial reproductive technologies be viewed in the same way? Can we retain the sacred mystery of life as a gift of God and the mystery of the one-flesh union of man and woman while at the same time treating procreation as a mechanical process subject to our technology? Is reproductive technology a First Article gift of God, or is it man's attempt to be like God and usurp God's dominion?

It is neither great faith to shun medical science nor great unbelief to utilize it. Just because we can intervene medically doesn't mean that we must. We say this at the end of life; we must also say it at the beginning of life.

Human life as sacred mystery and gift of God must not be compromised or diminished no matter how laudable our desired outcomes. We are stewards and priests of God's creation who have been granted dominion to do good. If we lose our sense of sacredness and mystery on account of our science and technology, we risk losing our very humanity.

Finally, we need to remember that our identity as Christians is not shaped by our vocation nor by our being husband or wife, father or mother. Our identity is in Christ alone, into whom we have been baptized. ☞

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