

Reproductive Ethics: A Summary

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We need to distinguish the critique of reproductive technologies from a criticism of people we may know who have made use of them. This information is offered to Christian couples to assist them in thinking about the possible use of reproductive technologies. In critiquing reproductive technologies we are not critiquing a couple's motives. We are critiquing the industry of reproductive technologies. We are talking about the meaning of what it is we, as a society, do through reproductive technologies.

It must first be said that there is a difference between what society calls "reproduction" and what Christians call "procreation." The word reproduction comes from the metaphor of an industrial society and the making of products. Technologies involve offers of artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, and/or surrogate motherhood. These forms and many variations may be offered to married couples or single women. Reproductive technologies fall into two classes: Those which **assist** husband and wife in conceiving a child. [Example: the use of a hormone supplement to stimulate ovulation or artificially transporting sperm to the uterus], and those which **replace** the traditional means of conceiving a child [Example: the use of donor sperm or egg or both and/or carrying an embryo to term in the uterus of another woman as surrogate.] In some ways it is helpful to think well of assisting what is natural, while questioning replacing that which God has given as natural. Question: How might a metaphor such as reproduction change the way we look at what we do?

Procreation, on the other hand, is a biblical concept expressed in the meaning of the old English word "beget." This word implies a committed relationship between husband and wife in marriage. In procreation the focus is not on making children but on making love. Procreation refers to the result of love-making between husband and wife, and the gift of a child from God. Sometimes that gift is not given.

Objections to Some Reproductive Technologies:

The One Flesh meaning of marriage as "the two shall become one" is violated by the use of some technologies [Example: The entry of a third party into conception through the use of donors and surrogates changes the biblical meaning of procreation]. When the One Flesh biblical meaning of marriage changes we also lose the understanding of marriage as an expression of the nature of God's relationship to the Church in Ephesians 5. Consequently, marriage no longer serves as a reflection of the Good News of the oneness between God and his people in Christ. The use of third parties to conceive or bear a child is adulterous in the sense that the person(s) desiring a child have gone outside the marriage to have their will be done. Children are a gift of God's

grace. Not all couples are given this gift, yet their One Flesh of marriage and with God is fulfilled.

For further reading, see Leon Kass: *The Ethics of Reproductive Technology*, Kenneth Alpern ed. 4, "The Meaning of Life in the Laboratory," 1992.