

What Child is This?

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The Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations in April released a new report on "Marriage, Family and Human Cloning." What follows is an edited and adapted version of that report. The complete 23-page text is available online at www.lcms.org/ctcr or may be ordered from Concordia Publishing House (order no. 09-2611) by calling (800) 325-3040. — Ed.

In 1997, the world was introduced to Dolly, a sheep whose genetic instructions came entirely from one other sheep rather than from a male and a female. That started a public debate over cloning that continues today—especially over the possibility that humans might be cloned.

In what follows, we take a close look at the proposal to clone human beings in light of what the Scriptures teach about marriage, family and procreation, and in light of God's redemptive purposes. 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 makes use of genetic science in ways that also raise ethical and moral questions about research and technology that manipulate cells that give rise to human life. The Commission will address these and other issues in subsequent studies.)

God's Word in Genesis 2 places 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.

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 available today?

Physically, the development 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. In the usual case, our mothers have contributed one complete set of genes and our fathers the other.

In cloning, the set of genetic instructions that directs the embryo's physical development comes not from two parents but from a set identical to that of the one "parent" from whom the clone is generated. The new individual will thus be a "time-delayed identical twin" of the individual who supplied the cell from which the cloned individual developed.

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What shall we think and say about this way of producing new humans?

God's Word teaches that every child of humanity is conceived of the flesh (see John 1:12–13 and 3:5–7). All human life is in a bondage brought about by sinful rebellion against, and separation from, God. 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).

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. But, 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.

Some 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 [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. No matter how a person's life begins, *anyone* 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 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. 3:23–24).

Marriage and family

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

This is where marriage and parenting take on a new dimension. 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 setting in which God desires to transform children of the flesh—parents and children—into children of God.

Thus, 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.

Marriage is a school for practicing how the children of God relate to God, themselves and one another.

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.

Given this understanding of God's plans for marriage and parenting, we can understand why Christians ought not pursue sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Every proposal to do so 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.

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, Gen. 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.

Two important insights

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.

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.

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:

Procreation, even in marriage, threatens constantly to provide opportunities for husband and/or wife to add one more selfish "project" to a list of accomplishments. Having and raising a child can become but one more occasion to engineer our own self-fulfillment rather than be an opportunity for love.

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. (One of the great dangers of cloning is that the cloned person may be brought about because 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. A second insight, then, is that childbearing 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."

Reproductive technologies

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

First, a basic premise: *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.*

So, *artificial insemination* with the husband's sperm is 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.

Artificial insemination by donor is therefore an inappropriate remedy for infertility.

Surrogacy—having a woman who is not intended to be the social mother of the child provide the womb in which the child develops—presents similar but also different problems. 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 donor. And carrying a child 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.

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.

The prospect of *cloning*, which would not necessarily mean importing gametes from outside the marriage, raises rather different questions.

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, 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 rising above mere self-fulfillment.

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.

As we struggle with these problems and questions, we 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, whether conceived in the procreative act of husband and wife or through extraordinary means, are born children of humanity, in the flesh and with a human will. God's Word teaches 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.

As we engage also in this task of assessing con-temporary technologies of reproduction, our fore-most 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 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).