The Drive to Have a Child "Like Me"

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Christians do not underestimate the sheer human significance of biological ties. We understand the deep desire to have children. But we must also constantly remind ourselves that children are not our possession; they are gifts of God. They exist not simply to fulfill us but as the sign that, by God's continued blessing, self-giving love is creative and fruitful. And what if the Lord does not 'remember' us as he remembered Hannah? That is reason for sadness, but it is not reason to take up the 'project' of making a child. The couple who cannot have children may adopt children who need a home and parents, or they may find other ways in which their union can, as a union, turn outward and be fruitful.

Artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization very often involve sperm and egg from anonymous donors, and there is an irony here that we should not ignore. If what infertile couples want is a child 'of their own' in the genetic or biological sense, techniques using donated gametes will not provide it. They are, in a sense, deceiving themselves. In the name of having a child of their own, they fail, in fact, to honor the importance of biological connection, of kinship and descent.

Imagine a case in which a married couple seeks donor insemination because of the husband's infertility. Someone might say, of course, that the child whom they produce is, at least, genetically related to the mother--it is her own, even if not also his own in the same sense. And for Christians that is exactly the cause for worry. The child is to be theirs, not hers or his. The
deliberate and willed asymmetry of relation--so unlike the mutual asymmetry that exists in adoption--is precisely the problem. This child is no longer the fruit of their one flesh union. Its genetic connection to the mother, or the opportunity it provides for her to experience pregnancy and childbirth, are her individual projects. Even if her husband also desires that connection and wants her to have the experience, he shares this project only in thought, not in the body. The child cannot be the fruit of an embrace in which husband and wife step outside themselves, their aims and projects, and receive a child as a gift, a sign that the Lord has remembered them.

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