When the Procreator Is Left out of Creation

Post Date: 09/30/1998
Author: Agneta M. Sutton
Issues:
Human Dignity
Reproductive Ethics

PDF Version: Sutton

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Volume 4, Number 2, Fall 1998 issue of Dignity, the Center's quarterly publication. Subscriptions to Dignitas are available to CBHD Members. To learn more about the benefits of becoming a member click here.

Stripped of our spiritual dimension, we are reduced to marketable material that may be put together in different ways from alienable bits and pieces provided by different people, some of whom see themselves as no more than providers of material components from which to make a child. The new technologies have the power to dehumanize us. To treat a woman as a mere source of gametes or as a baby-gestator, or a man as a mere provider of fertilizing sperm, or a child as mere product, is to treat the woman, the man or the child as mere matter.

It should be added that this impoverished view also entails moral relativism, a denial of objective values, a denial of real right and wrong in terms of what is in keeping with the will of God. Fostering an impoverished understanding of the human person, the involvement of money and anonymity together with the new technologies, separating sexual union in the flesh from procreation, create opportunities for abuse—though this abuse may not readily be seen as such from a secular point of view. With the practices of financial reward, anonymity and a technological separation of sexual union from procreation, the satisfaction of parental desire and the manipulative-cum-medical success become the measures of good and evil. All is right and good, so it is thought, if the medical manipulations are successful and the parents-to-be get the child they want. On this understanding, parental wills or desire, not the will of God, decide what is
right and wrong; and so what is right and wrong will vary with human wills.

Ignored is the Judeo-Christian understanding of the child as a gift from God or the understanding of ourselves--all of us--created in the image and likeness of God. Nor can the moral relativist have any notion of humility before the Creator. The new techniques promote an exaggerated understanding of our own powers, at the same time as (paradoxically) they reduce the human body to bits and pieces. Thus they encourage a false view of ourselves as masters rather than as guardians and keepers. In particular, they tend to make us forget that the child is one of us, another human being and our equal in dignity, because he or she is created in the image of God and for union with God. The new techniques encourage a parental consumer attitude towards the child.

This attitude is especially dangerous if it is coupled with an exaggerated idea of individual rights and emphasis on autonomy to the exclusion of a proper appreciation of social responsibility, including familial responsibility for the good of the child. It leads to parental claims for a right to have a child by any means, including donated gametes or a rented womb.

But nobody has a right to a child, though this is obvious only on the understanding of the child as a gift. A gift is not the sort of thing to which anybody has a right. Nobody can truly own a child, though this is not self-evident unless the child is seen as an equal in dignity. And what grounds are there for considering the child an equal in dignity other than belief that children, like each one of us, are created in the image of God? On a Christian understanding, it is not up to us to choose to have children in any manner we like. But if the concepts of the *imago Dei* and of life as gift from God are not accepted as moral yard-sticks, then there is nothing to hold back moral relativism, with all of its arbitrariness and tyrannies.