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 faith, we are recomposed to God, to union with God. Thenew techniques have the power to dehumanize us. To treat a woman as a mere source of gametes or as a baby-gestation, 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 maidservants.

It should be added that this impoverished view also entails moral relativism, a denial of objective values, a denial of 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—through this abuse may not readily be seen as such from a secular point of view. With the practices of financial reward, anonymity, and the technological separation of sexual union from procreation, the satisfaction of parental desire and the manipulative-cum-medical success become the measure 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 will 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 autonomy at the expense of 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 distinguishing the child in any 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 a child or not. But if the concepts of the image Dei and of life as gift from God are not accepted as moral yardsticks, then there is nothing to hold back moral relativism, with all of its arbitrariness and tyrannies.

Meet Members of the Advisory Board

Luke Gormally, LcP. PhC.
He has worked in the field of bioethics for the past 22 years. After studies in philosophy, theology and sociology, he joined the staff of The Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics at its foundation in 1977. The Centre was established to provide Catholic Christians in Great Britain and Ireland with a center of expertise in bioethics. Luke Gormally became Director of the Centre in 1988. In that capacity, he has been a member of the Joint Committee on Bioethics of the Catholic Bishops of England & Wales, of Scotland, and of Ireland since 1983, has chaired a number of working parties, and served on a number of other bodies including a Government Committee.

Cleretta Y. Dupree, Ph.D.
She is Assistant Professor of Nursing and Ethics at North Park University. She is Honorary Adjunct Professor of Bioethics and Nursing at Trinity International University, and Administrative Officer at the Naval Hospital Great Lakes 1113 reserve unit, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences, Memphis in 1975, her Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Texas Health Science Center, Houston in 1985, and her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with emphases in nursing and philosophy. She has professional memberships in Sigma Theta Tau, Inc., International Honor Society of Nursing, Oncology Nurses Society Association for Practice and Professional Ethics, and the National Naval Officers Nursing Association. She has served as Clinical Instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and in numerous administrative and educational positions with the United States Navy and the Navy Reserve. She has given a number of presentations focusing on the Patient Self-Determination Act and patient self-care, as well as participated in numerous conferences. She has done extensive research on how African-Americans view end-of-life treatment decisions.

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"The Drive To Have A Child "Like Me"

Giri Melkonian, Professor, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut

"Agneta Sjöwall, Lecturer, the Center for Bioethics and Public Policy, London, England

Stripped of our spiritual dimension, we are reduced to marketable material that may be put together in different ways from available 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-gestation, 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 maidservants.

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