

AUTONOMY AND COMMUNITY IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Scott Rae, Professor, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA, USA

How are we to evaluate the Western tradition of autonomy from the perspective of Scripture? What resources can the Christian theological tradition bring to help temper the corrosive effects of autonomy and individualism today?

In one sense, to speak of autonomy for the Christian is somewhat of an oxymoron, since the Christian lives all of life under God's sovereign direction. The Christian is constrained by the moral parameters of God's word and the activity of the Holy Spirit in guidance and direction. Though the Reformers liberated human beings from a static view of the world that characterized the Middle Ages, they were very clear about the believer's place under the sovereignty of God. From the perspective of Scripture, believers do not own themselves, but belong to God, having been purchased by the death of Christ (I Cor. 6:19-20). As a result, the believer is free not to do whatever he or she pleases, but rather, is free to do what is right. The New Testament is filled with admonitions to temper one's Christian freedom with love and responsibility to others and the community. The apostle Paul makes it clear that believers are not to abuse their freedom from the demands of the Law for salvation, but are to use that freedom in order to pursue love, not their own selfish desires (Galatians 5:13-14).

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One's freedom is not to be used as a pretext for doing evil, but rather believers are to live life as slaves, hardly an imagery that would promote unconstrained autonomy (I Peter 2:15-16). Numerous places in the New Testament call the believer to a life of servanthood, using the term for "bondservant" or "slave" which is figurative of the most constrained person in all the ancient world. Paul admonished the church to restrain even the exercise of legitimate Christian freedom in the moral gray areas out of regard for the brother or sister of weaker conscience (Romans 14:1-23; I Corinthians 8:9). Paul modeled this voluntary restraint of freedom in his own ministry when he gave up his right to earn his living from his preaching and church planting in order that the common good, the cause of the gospel, might be advanced (I Corinthians 9:14-18). He imposed numerous restraints on his freedom in order to more effectively serve the church and advance the gospel (I Corinthians 9:19). Individual believers were to follow this model, giving up their freedom in order to be subject to one another in the life of the church (Ephesians 5:21). Thus, it is safe to say that the Scripture has little praise for men and women uncommitted to a community of committed relationships. ■

HUMAN CLONING: REPRODUCTION OR PROCREATION?

John Kilner, Director of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity

Is it part of our God-given destiny to exercise complete control over our reproductive process? Richard Seed, in one of his first in-depth interviews after announcing his intentions to clone human beings commercially, made this very argument. U.S. President Bill Clinton offered the opposite view when he issued the ban on human cloning. Rather than seeing cloning as human destiny, he rejected it as "playing God." Is human cloning in line with God's purposes for us?

It is no accident that we call what we do when we have babies "procreation." "Pro" means "for" or "forth." To be sure, we do bring babies "forth." But the deeper meaning here is "for." We bring new human beings into the world "for" someone or something. To be specific, we continue the line of human beings for God—in accordance with God's mandate to humanity at the beginning to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). We also create for the people whom we help bring into being. We help give them life. They are the ones most affected by our actions—far more than the rest of society and even far more than we ourselves. What is particularly significant about this "procreation"—this "creation for"—is that it is a creation that is by its very nature subject to an outside agenda—to God's agenda primarily, and secondarily also with due respect to the needs of the child being created. In this sense, only God is Creator—the only one who creates

something out of nothing ("ex nihilo") and is subject to no outside agenda.

The human cloning mindset, then, is hugely problematic. With unmitigated pride it claims the right to create rather than procreate. It looks neither to God for the way that God has intended human beings to be procreated and raised by fathers and mothers who are the secondary—i.e., genetic—source of their life; nor does it look primarily to the needs of the one being procreated. It looks primarily to the cloner's own preferences or to those of society. People operating out of the human cloning mindset see themselves as Creator rather than procreator. This is aspiring to be God which God has consistently chastised people for, and for which God has ultimately wreaked havoc on many a society and civilization.

Today, as we lose sight of the Creator God, we increasingly orient more to the material world than to God. We are more impressed with the Gross Natural Product than with the original creation. So we more commonly talk in terms of reproduction rather than procreation. In the process, we associate people more closely with things—with products—than with the God of Creation. No wonder our respect for human life is deteriorating. We become more like that with which we associate. ■