A Creative Option: Embryo Adoption

Linda Bevington, M.A.

An increasing number of couples today are facing the pain and frustration associated with infertility. As a result, many are turning to reproductive technologies to assist them in fulfilling their desire for a child. The physical and financial costs of assisted reproduction are often high, and the costs to the couple are often greatly outweighed by the physical and emotional risks of treatment. For example, many in vitro fertilization clinics routinely create more embryos than a couple wishes to have implanted. Such "surplus" embryos are then either immediately discarded, frozen, and kept in storage, or donated to research (in which case, their ultimate end will be destruction). It is estimated that there are currently over 100,000 frozen embryos stored across the United States alone. Though freezing would seem to be a better fate than immediate destruction or donation to research, the very fact that so many embryos are in storage reduces the likelihood that all of the embryos will eventually be implanted and carried to term. Accordingly, those who advocate research on stem cells obtained by destroying human embryos argue: "Because there are so many embryos in storage which will likely never be implanted, it is morally acceptable to destroy such embryos if medical benefit might result." Furthermore, it is the policy of some clinics to automatically destroy embryos after they have been in storage for a specified number of years—robbing them of the chance to be born.

An innovative and constructive response to this troubling state of affairs is the relatively new option of embryo adoption. For couples plagued with infertility, embryo adoption presents a new means of having children without the high costs of assisted reproduction. In addition, a woman adopting an embryo will also be able to experience the joys of pregnancy and childbirth that she would wish if she were to become pregnant through assisted reproduction. Ultimately, however, she will prevent a human being from being subjected to destruction at the hands of fertility clinics or medical researchers.

Many babies have already been born in the United States to women who have adopted embryos. Although there are legal questions to be addressed, adoption agencies are beginning to treat embryo adoption in the same way they would regard more traditional adoption. A fully-developed embryo adoption program has been established by Christian Adoption & Family Services of Brea, California. For more information on the program, entitled Snowflakes, see their website at www.snowflakes.org, call (714) 529-2949 or e-mail INFO@snowflakes.org. Information on the legal issues in embryo adoption may be obtained by accessing the National Association for the Advancement of Foster Children’s website at www.naasc.org.

ORDER FORM

Order via toll-free phone (866.246.3844), fax (947.317.8153), web site (www.bioethics.org) or mail to: CBHD, 3065 Half Day Road, Bannockburn, IL 60015 USA. Contact CBHD for a catalog of all Center resources.

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