

Tentatio September 2001 - What have we done to our Children

Time will tell when it comes to assessing the damage done to children constructed in a laboratory by "any means necessary" as in the case of using donors of sperm or egg, surrogate mothers, or geneticists for human cloning. It seems uppermost at the moment to wrestle with the ethics of these things, but such wrestling ought to include the question, "When did we begin to think of children as *things* to be constructed for our needs rather than as human lives to be received for their own sake?" Children may teach us how we need them, but that is not the same as constructing them for our needs.

Children have always been desirable in meeting our needs for help on the farm or as companions for lonely mothers or as a vicarious substitute for a father who wished he had accomplished things but never did. Children conceived as an attempt to rescue a failing marriage or to prove either a man's virility or a woman's femininity may bear the burden of lifelong attempts to recapture their own self-worth. The newest version of how children can meet our needs is being talked about in terms of *designer children*. It is suggested that children can be made genetically superior in health, physical abilities, intellect and beauty. In an age of moral bankruptcy it is even hard to imagine why one would not want to do such things when they become options. But the child's meeting of our need for these things may not leave much room for the needs the child has for his own development. It may be that we are beginning to see these results with children whose needs for unconditional love have gone unmet, witness the increasing violence perpetrated by children against children in school shootings. Children are starved for love from their parents, hungry for meaningful communication, and dying for effective guidance in their lives, all of which requires time and attentiveness from us as parents.

The new biotechnologies raise old questions about the meaning of children in our lives. Are they ours to make and shape at will? Are children pets, like seeing eye dogs, to be trained to meet our needs? Do they belong to us as possessions? As new as the questions may sound when applied to biotechnology, they are the same old questions of what it means to be given the care of a child by God. And the old answers continue to fit the new form of the old questions. We are stewards of each child's fragile life, given into our care until they are old enough to bear responsibility for their own lives. God gives children for their own sake, to be given the love and attentiveness they need in order to grow up to be people capable of "giving themselves" to the next generation. A child is not to be sacrificed for our needs, but we are to sacrifice our own needs for our children. That is the fulfillment of parenting. We learn it from God who gave his own life for us in Jesus Christ that we might have Abundant Life.

THE URGENCY OF STEM CELL RESEARCH

The discussion about stem cell research has moved out of the scientific into the political arena as it inevitably must do. Unfortunately, neither researchers nor politicians are unbiased and it is difficult to assess the arguments since both have at stake, not only the benefit to patients, but the benefit to politicians seeking reelection and researchers seeking research grants. One thing is clear from politicians and researchers alike. Both present their case in the name of suffering peoples with the sense of urgency that asks approval for whatever it takes to heal diseases targeted by stem cell research. Although one can understand the hardship suffered by the disabled, the chronically ill and the dying, research done today will hardly benefit many alive among us. Research takes time. The transition from laboratory success to bedside therapy takes time. Protocols need to be developed. Failures and set backs are sure to be experienced.

The current sense of urgency is not unlike the urgency pressed upon family members in the Intensive Care Lounge where decisions are called for immediately not because the situation is life-threatening but because the physician is leaving for vacation, or the nursing shift is about to change, or the hospital needs the bed for a newly admitted patient. Most dilemmas do not present a situation requiring a decision immediately, in fact, sometimes delay itself resolves the issue. The urgency pressed upon us by politicians and researchers is worth at least as much in gain for them as it is for patients who will probably never benefit from stem cell research (if anyone does) in their lifetime. All caring for sick people considered, the issues presented by embryonic stem cell research invites us to take our time and think clearly about the decisions we are about to make as a society. There are grave moral issues at stake that we seem too willing to sweep aside in the name of expediency. The truth is we have lived and died with illness before the current urgency of stem cell research was forced upon us and we will live and die after it (if it) becomes possible. More important than therapies that offer physical healing is the matter of what makes a life worth living whether physically healthy or unhealthy? And, what really takes away **the sting of death** that stem cell research promises to accomplish. Answers to these questions are found in theology, not in science or politics. Perhaps proposals for research ought to begin with theology first followed by science second. It won't, but perhaps in a perfect world it should.

BIOETHICS AS PROCLAMATION OF GOSPEL

The uniqueness of the Concordia Center for Bioethics is that it does not concern itself ultimately with ethics or morality for its own sake, but with the proclamation of Gospel in the midst of the suffering which prompts such discussions. There are many who speak for bioethics, but the CCB attempts to offer a Word that speaks to the deeper things behind the dilemmas posed by the questions. Although we are concerned with morality, we are ultimately concerned with the Truth, Jesus Christ. We do not have answers for all the questions asked of us, indeed, some are the wrong questions to be asking. And yet, I believe we have better answers than some. Most importantly, we speak Truth with that name which is above all names, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father, the Alpha and the Omega in whom all our questions must begin and end.

In June of this past summer we sent out 6000 brochures introducing the Concordia Center for Bioethics (CCB). In July, 18,000 copies of the first issue of Bioethics Bound were sent as a sampler of the new quarterly newsletter of the Institute. In August our new fifteen minute video introducing the Institute was completed and is now available as a statement of who we are. We are currently working on the first in a series of videos on the various bioethical issues for use in a one hour congregational class setting. The first of these will be available in January 2002. All of this is to say that your interest in and support for the CCB has been extremely gratifying. Many of you have sent in contributions, but our expenses have already exceeded our income. This is not a complaint but merely highlights the great opportunity we have to address your needs and requests. We are doing this on faith that God will provide the means to accomplish it. I am asking you therefore to consider making regular contributions to this venture. If you are someone who is blest with greater financial resources than others, I ask you to make a generous donation for the work God has called us to do. After seeing the needs you have asked us to address I am confident that God will bless you and CCB in the coming years. Please send your gifts to Concordia Center for Bioethics, 12800 N. Lake Shore Dr., Mequon, WI. 53097-2402 or call our toll free number for more information: 1-866-559-0002.