

PROCREATION ETHICS SERIES

A Joint Project of the ALC, LCA,
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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Foreword Paul T. Nelson

[1] The archaic word 'procreation' refers to the process of begetting or generating offspring, and to those so begotten. It will come as no surprise to any reader of this pamphlet that in recent decades this process has become an arena for exquisite scientific research and mind-boggling technological innovation. In light of these developments, and in accordance with the rational- scientific- technological-orientation of our culture, it might seem that a more appropriate title for this series of pamphlets would be "Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction." Yet the term 'procreation' serves to remind us that our increasing capacity for rational-technological control of reproduction involves profound questions concerning the meaning, value, dignity, and limits of human life.

[2] For example, artificial insemination with donor sperm, *in vitro* fertilization, and surrogate motherhood allow the traditional conceptual connections between the bodily expression of committed sexual love, and biological and social parenting to be severed. To be sure, in the past these conceptual connections have often been strained by loveless intercourse and broken relationships, or attenuated by infertility, illness, and death. However, in the judgment of some observers the new procreative practices put asunder, in principle and by intention, the procreative and unitive (or communal) 'goods' of marriage. At least it may be said they impel us to think about marriage, intercourse, having children, and parenting in new ways which may not cohere with our older concepts and traditional Christian convictions.

[3] In 1941 the eminent biblical scholar and theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, declared that "it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles" So today it may be asked whether it is possible for a would-be parent to have a donated ovum and sperm united in a petri dish, implanted in a surrogate uterus, and in nine months have delivered to one's home or office a baby designed to specifications, while still thinking of him-or herself as a finite human *creature* existing under the benevolent dispensation of a divine creator. Does our delegated dominion over nature authorize us to alter so radically the meaning and practice of procreation?

[4] Where our new capacities do not seem to mesh with our traditional ways of thinking and speaking, some within the Christian community say the latter must give way. Others insist that there now are or may soon be things we *can* do which we ought *not* do, either because they are intrinsically wrong or because they grossly

disfigure the ways in which we have thought about ourselves and our relations to spouses, children, society, those who may come after us, and to God, before whose face the generations rise and pass away. The resulting debates conducted in both religious and secular languages are widespread and unlikely to be resolved. Discussions of these issues in the media, academic settings, and religious communities will continue and proliferate, keeping pace with developments in science, medicine, and technology.

[5] In response to many formal and informal requests for information and ethical guidance, the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the Lutheran Church in America in 1983 launched a cooperative study of "beginning of life" issues. Dr. Edward D. Schneider, who was then of the ALC's Office of Church in Society, and I, at that time Research Associate in the LCA's Department for Church in Society, served as co-directors of the project. We were assisted by three consultants who gave generously of their time and talents: the Reverend William Adix, an ALC hospital chaplain in Portland, Oregon; Joan W Bennett, Ph.D., Professor of Biology at Tulane University in New Orleans; and Christine Brelje, M.D., a member of the AELC who practices obstetrics and gynecology in Lakewood, Colorado.

[6] Seven authors were engaged to address topics identified by the directors and consultants. Their instructions were to write a brief, readable, but informative and ethically substantive essay which would not only stimulate reflection by casual readers, but might also be of use in parish and clinical pastoral counseling. We are pleased to share the fruit of their work in this series of pamphlets.

[7] In addition, the authors were asked to produce a longer, more academic paper on the topic which would contribute to the discussion of these issues throughout the three churches and their educational institutions and among the interested public. These papers have been collected in a volume entitled *Questions About the Beginning of Life*, edited by Edward D. Schneider, which was published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1985.

[8] The contributors to this series were encouraged to analyze the issues as they saw fit. No attempt was made to shape or constrain the positions taken. Thus the views expressed in this pamphlet are those of its author alone, and ought not be construed as the official position of any of the three churches or their church-in-society units, or as the views of the project's directors or consultants. If, in reading this or the other pamphlets, you are moved to consider these issues, formulate your own position and perhaps to disagree, then our efforts will be rewarded.