

South Wisconsin District
LWML Retreat
Oshkosh, Wisconsin
September 20 – 21, 2002

DECISION MAKING COMPATIBLE
WITH THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

INTRODUCTION

We are living in times of great stress and among those stresses are not only the external threats of terrorism, possible war and a struggling economy, but also the stress that comes from what we may be able to do with the very building blocks of human life through genetic manipulation, reproductive technologies, and decisions made at the end of life to avoid suffering and postpone death. Such possibilities are a mixture of blessing and curse. If our faith did not rest in God the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier, and if, instead, we believed that our lives are ours to do anything with that we wish, the blessings would become a curse. That curse would find its beginnings in our willingness to sacrifice some human lives for the so-called betterment of the lives of others. But as followers of our Lord, we are called to live not only with what we are capable of doing, but also with whether, in some things, it ought to be done at all, and, if it is to be done, how we might do it with moral integrity.

There is a phrase popularized in recent years known as, "the tyranny of the possible." The Tyranny of the Possible means that moral people are constantly under pressure from science, the media, and the general population to do, without moral consideration, whatever is possible. We ask, "Why should we do everything we can do?" And they answer, "Because we can!" This pressure in biotechnology is becoming the "tyranny of the possible." Every new possibility seems to be but a stone's throw away from becoming a reality. Our inability as a society to say "No!" before reaching the end of a thing has become a tyrant among us. And yet, there is hope. There is no tyranny, that Christ has not overcome in us, "For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . nor principalities nor powers, . . . nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 38 - 39) Our calling to live faithfully will enable us to

resist the simplistic appeal of the “tyranny of the possible,” where it is no longer compatible with the Christian life.

Before we continue to pursue the topics before us, there are some ground rules that we must acknowledge that call us, at times, to live across the grain of society, and therefore more faithfully. If we as Christians simply allow our thinking and decision-making to be guided by the norms of our culture our faith will mean little in the matters before us. It is crucial that we learn to see the issues and solutions to bioethical dilemmas with the eyes of faith, centered on our relationship with the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. This uniqueness of our vision is founded, not on our moral rightness (for we too will be wrong at times), but on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that transforms us to see things the way our Lord sees them. That Gospel is the grace of the forgiveness of our sins when we choose wrongly and it is the transforming power of that forgiveness to change our lives in faithful response to the things before us.

We are a people who follow the Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier; God who gives blessing, but also warns of the abuse of these blessings; abuse also called SIN. Sin at work in us will take us aside and tell us it is our life to do with as we wish. Sin will keep up with the times, redefining the appeal to sin. For example, you’ve heard the age old saying, “The end justifies the means?” Although this attitude is alive and well in the field of biotechnology, we are at least aware that the end does not always justify the means. But the new, more postmodern or personal version of this saying is, “The *motive* justify the means.” This subtle shift takes the ruthlessness of the old saying, and replaces it with an ethic based on personal motives. The new saying says, “If I mean well, if my motives are sincere, then all I do is well and good.” But, terrible things have been done with the best of motives. Parents look back at how they raised their children with the best of motives only to wish they could have done things differently that might have led to a better outcome.

In the face of our failure to know and do the right and good, we ask, “What does the Bible say?” This is the source of our help for it is not tied to our personal biases or cultural norms. The Word of God is the Christian’s only hope. But, there are different ways of looking for answers in the Bible. One way might be to approach the Bible in search of a verse or two to justify that which we wish to do. But, as Shakespeare reminds us, “Even the devil can quote Scripture for this own purposes.”

Another way to search the Bible for answers is to think of the Bible as a book of rules for living rightly. But the Bible was not intended as a guide for living, a collection of moralistic rules to follow; it was intended rather as a proclamation of the new life in Christ that is at work in us through the Holy Spirit by means of baptism and in the Body and Blood of our Lord given us in the Sacrament. The Bible was given for proclamation of our justification and our sanctification ---- remembering that justification and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit and not of human beings. It is the proclamation of the Gospel that transforms our lives.

With this in mind, I am going to suggest a way to read the Word of God in addressing the bioethical issues that neither Abraham nor St. Paul had to address in their own time. I suggest that we need to read the Bible according to the themes God has chosen in order to reveal the meaning of those things that are now being proposed to us in the making, redesigning, and ending of life. For example, discussion of some of the issues raised by genetic manipulations might begin with an understanding of what it means when the Bible says that God made man in the Image of God. Another example: discussion of issues raised by the possibilities of reproductive technologies might begin with an understanding of what the Bible means when it says God established marriage as a One Flesh union of husband and wife. Another example: understanding of some of the issues in end-of-life-decision-making might begin with the Bible's primary theme known as the *theology of the cross*. The "theology of the cross" as a phrase was used by Martin Luther to describe not only justification, but also our sanctification. This theme of the "theology of the cross" addresses the meaning of our sufferings and our dying.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Let us begin then with the subject of the new medicine: genetic intervention, and its implications for the Christian life. The following passages address the theme: Image of God. (At this point I want to give credit to Dr. Nathan Jastram, CUW who has done a scholarly study of this theme soon to be published.) Passages referencing the Image of God are following: (we shall focus on three of them)

Genesis 1: 26-28

Genesis 5: 1-3 (Adam's children were "in his image, after his likeness.")

Genesis 9:6

Romans 5: 12-17

James 3:9 (“People who are made in the likeness
of God.)

1 Cor.11:7 (“a man is made in the image and glory
of God.”)

Genesis 1:26 – 28

1. We are created in the Image of God, that is, “in his likeness.” What does it mean to be “like God”? There have been many definitions of the Image of God down through the centuries because there are so many ways in which people are like God. In other words, there is no one definition of what it means to be made in the Image of God, but many, all of them biblical. This doesn’t water down the meaning of the Image of God however, rather it enriches it.
2. Because Luther and the Confessions were mainly concerned with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ alone, they stressed that the most important component of the Image of God was to be like God in righteousness. To be righteous means to be holy as God is holy, a prerequisite for life with God. Adam and Eve were made perfect in righteousness, but they lost it, and in them we also lost it, and we now receive righteousness as a gift of God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ restores in us, as believers, this aspect of the righteousness of God, the Image of God. This is said well in **Romans 5: 12 – 17 (refer audience to text and read)**. This is the Luther’s emphasis and contribution to the most important understanding of the meaning of the Image of God.
3. But what about those who do not have faith in Christ and have not received the gift of righteousness to live in God’s presence? Are they not created in the Image of God? Listen to **Genesis 9:6 (refer audience to text and read)** It describes man, even after the fall, as still retaining something of the Image of God. It is because of this that murder is a sin: it is an offense against God for that person was made in the Image of God. All human beings retain the Image of God, at least in part, but not the crucial part, namely the righteousness required to live with God. Although Lutherans have traditionally stressed **righteousness** as what it means to be made in the Image of

God, we also acknowledge that the Image of God can be used in a wider sense to include certain characteristics of God that man also has received from God, such as: **will** (exercised as the freedom of choice); **reason** (exercised as the use of intellect and wisdom); **righteousness** (exercised as faith & love toward God); **soul** (exercised as the spiritual life); **dignity** (exercised as the value we place on self-worth); **relationships** (exercised as our sonship with God, or marriage as a sign of Christ and the church); **procreation** (exercised in the love-making of husband and wife); and **dominion** (exercised through legislation and the carrying out of justice); etc.. So, it is possible to say that a non-believer still possesses at least some traits of the Image of God, but not the most necessary trait, that of the righteousness of God that comes in Christ.

4. It is also clear from the passage in Genesis that human beings are made in the Image of God, but animals are not. So, as we shall see, we Christians speak of a difference between the genetic interventions or cloning practiced on animals and the same practiced on human beings. In spite of the animal rights activist's desire to obliterate the distinction, there is an inherent distinction God made between humans and animals. Professor Jastram writes, "If it ever became possible to produce a hybrid human-animal being [through genetic engineering or cloning], that would cause profound theological problems, since it would appear to erase the distinction between human and animal life." If the distinction between human and animal life is preserved, then it becomes possible to support the cloning of animals without supporting the cloning of humans. The reason being that God granted man dominion over the animals of the world (**Gn 1:26, 28**), and that dominion extends even to the point of killing them for food (**Gn 9:3**.)
5. Well, if animals are not created in the Image of God, what about women? Are both men and women made in the Image of God? The answer is, yes! But it is better for us to come to this conclusion on the basis of the Word of God than as an accomplishment of the feminist movement and mere political correctness in saying so. Look again at Genesis 1:26-28. In these verses, as Dr. Jastram again writes, "[there is] a greater appreciation of the plurality and unity . . . of God and man. . . . To say that *God created* man in his image shows that God is a unity [God is one]. Yet, the preceding verse shows that God is also a plurality, 'Let **us** make man in our image, in **our** likeness.' Here God

speaks of himself in the plural form. So, we can at least say that God is a unity of one, but within that oneness God is also a plurality. If this sounds confusing remember that it took the Church several centuries through the Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds to clarify this. This text in Genesis is an early revelation of what we have come to recognize as the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Athanasian Creed which most of us only speak once a year on Trinity Sunday, says,

“...we worship one God in three persons, and three persons in one God . . . for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one; the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.”

Dr. Jastram continues: “When God takes counsel with himself about the crown of his creation, he plans to make a unity called **man** (singular). Yet he speaks of letting **them** (plural) rule (v.26). Then as the text describes the fulfillment of God's plans, it says that God created **man** (singular), but proceeds to explain that the one **man** (him) comes as a plurality of **male and female** (them).” The point here is that as God is both a unity and a plurality, so man is a unity and a plurality. Adam is one, but with Eve there is a plurality man's creation by God. This unity and plurality is best observed in marriage where the two become one flesh. We shall address that later in the conference when we discuss reproductive technologies.

ONE FLESH

Genesis 2: 18-25

Genesis 1: 26 – 28 introduces us to the reality that we, male and female, are made in the image of God. Verse 28 says, “And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” God's Story as it unfolds in Genesis 2 describes the nature of the relationship between male and female in marriage. Marriage is a **unity** and a **plurality** in which a man and woman (the plurality) become One Flesh (a unity). This one-of-a-kind

experience in human relationships, called marriage, created by God, is portrayed in Genesis 2 as the wholesome desire (both sexual and more than sexual), where the man and woman look upon the other as if the other were his or her missing half. In marriage the two become one and find fulfillment in the oneness as only marriage makes that possible. This is why divorce or the death of a spouse is so painful; it is more than the loss of a person. It is the brokenness or loss of the One Flesh union that holds the promise of our fulfillment in this life. (I will not address the lack of fulfillment some may feel or experience in a marriage that is not a good marriage, even though it is a marriage nevertheless and the One Flesh union is a God-given union with or without our pleasure in it.)

This *One Flesh* union of the two usually expresses itself in the procreation of children. Out of the love of husband and wife for each other, children are given by God. Children are begotten, not made. That is, they are of the same flesh as their parents and are begotten by God, “in his image, after his likeness.” They are not made by an act of human will, even if we tend to think so. The most sophisticated attempts to produce a child through reproductive technologies does not guarantee that a pregnancy will result by the actions of our will upon the human body. The failure rates for attempts at pregnancy through in vitro fertilization are 75% to 85%. Let me put it another way that perhaps more of us can relate to. We may hope to have children when we make love to our spouse, but there is nothing we can do to assure that will happen. We can make love, but we cannot make children come of it, not always. Sometimes a pregnancy occurs and sometimes it doesn't, always reminding us that children are not things we make, but a gift that God gives. Abraham and Sarah knew the pain of childlessness not only for the love of a child, but also for the seeming failure of a promise given by God. And so, they took matters into their own hands. Sarah gave Abraham her servant Hagar and Hagar conceived a child by Abraham, and named him Ishmael. But Sarah later conceived and bore the child of God's promise, Isaac. The outcome of Abraham and Sarah's taking matters into their own hands has not yet been resolved even in our times, as we can see in the conflict between the descendents of Ishmael, the Arabs, and Isaac, the Jews. In today's world of reproductive technologies that make use of donor sperm or egg it remains to be seen what long-term effects there are on a world where parentage and identity are always confused and uncertain.

When children are not forthcoming due to infertility on the part of one or both partners in marriage, this does not equate to a loss of the *One Flesh*

union of marriage. Children are a gift of God, but the gift is not given to all. This may be a hard truth to accept, but it implies no lack of God's love and favor for the childless couple. The *One Flesh* significance continues to be expressed in the relationship of marriage itself, in the unique intimacy and companionship that no other human relationship can provide. And, as marriage, it participates in and bears witness to a deeper reality, as we shall learn in a few minutes.

Because marriage was made for oneness that also takes the form of a unique companionship, it is not appropriate, contrary to the contemporary value placed on independence, for husband and wife to think of themselves as autonomous persons contracting for equal rights. Autonomous, meaning self-sufficient, not needing each other, finding fulfillment in self. We can see autonomy at work in the law that protects a woman's right to abortion where a husband has no legal right to prevent his wife from aborting his child if she so chooses. This elevation of autonomy above the One Flesh union of marriage is destructive of marriage ---- even where there may be consent by both partners for the one choosing to exercise it. Further, if, as is the case in our culture, individual freedom or autonomy is the primary justification for unlimited use of reproductive technologies, then it can only be concluded that marriage and the bearing of children will increasingly little to do with one another anymore. That is, if each person is free to engage in the use of any and all reproductive technologies available for producing a child, such as through the making of embryos in a laboratory by means of donor sperm or egg, and the implantation of those embryos in any woman, married or not, then we have, as a society, severed the tie between marriage and procreation. The physical biological production of children becomes separated from the One Flesh relational intimacy of marriage, and marriage loses the significance intended by God.

It is unfortunately possible, in a fallen world, to think of ourselves as being in charge of human life *without limitation*, bringing children into existence by our own will, when and how we please. However, having the freedom to produce children in a laboratory by any means, and having the 'right' to abort children at any time for any reason, destroys the significance of marriage as a One Flesh union of husband and wife and children as a gift from God.

Some might call to our attention that Genesis 28, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." This would seem to say that

having children is the highest good by any means and that subduing the earth means gaining mastery over reproduction. Indeed, there is some truth in God's giving us the authority to gain some mastery over the things of this earth, but just as mastery dare not include abuse, so our mastery over childbearing dare not violate the One Flesh of marriage. We, as Christians, can only do faithfully that which is compatible with the Christian faith and life.

Let us turn to the New Testament where we find the fulfillment of the One Flesh union of marriage clarified for us by St. Paul. Here Paul ties marriage to something even deeper than marriage itself.

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5: (15)21-33

Listen again to verse 32. After all the talk of marriage in this passage, Paul seems to throw us off balance by saying, "What I am really talking about is Christ and the Church." What's going on here? Is Paul talking about marriage or is he talking about the Church? Paul argues that the significance of marriage and the Church are inseparable --- not the Church as a building or as an administrative entity, but the Church as all believers in Christ. To understand marriage we have to understand the relationship between Christ and the Church, but to understand the relationship between Christ and the Church God has given us marriage. Marriage is a one-of-a-kind relationship in this life, given us by God so that we might learn to understand better the relationship between Christ and us, collectively his Church. We, who are the Church, are one with Christ and marriage is a mysterious sign of that oneness for all the world to see. She who has eyes to see, let her see it.

Again, in summary: The One Flesh union of marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and his people, the Body of Christ, the Church. Ephesians 5 speaks of marriage as something more than it appears to be on the surface. On the surface, marriage may appear to be merely a sociological arrangement by societal consensus. Recent campaigns to redefining marriage so as to bless same-sex unions is evidence of this belief that marriage is whatever we choose to make it. But God has given marriage as the union of a man and woman for a reason, not the least of which reasons is the mystery of marriage given as a portrayal of the relationship between

the believer and Christ. Marriage is part of the Gospel mystery of God's revealing himself to us in this world. There is a mystery to marriage even beyond the promise of lifelong union between husband and wife.

The word *mystery* in the New Testament, is the Greek word *μυστήριον*, but translated in the later Latin texts of the early Church as *sacramentum* from which we get our word sacrament. Luther called marriage a sacrament at one point. Luther said,

“[marriage] is a sacrament. A sacrament is a sacred sign of something spiritual, holy, heavenly, and eternal . . . [marriage] is an outward and spiritual sign of the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed . . . the union of the divine and human natures in Christ . . . Paul says that as man and wife . . . are one flesh, so God and man are united in the one person of Christ, and so Christ and Christendom are one body.” (LW Vol. 44, p.10)

The meaning of the word mystery or sacrament suggests a visual *sign* of an unseen reality hiding beneath the surface of a thing. Marriage is such a mystery or sacrament, a *sign* of the nature of our relationship with God. Just as a Microsoft icon can open a window, so marriage as an icon opens the window or reveals the hidden presence of a deeper reality, a reality that shows the meaning of our relationship with God.

Marriage reveals that the wholesome submission of a wife to her husband is a *sign* for the world to see as the way of God's people's submission to Christ. And the husband's unconditional love for his wife is the paradigm of Christ's unconditional love that leads him to give himself on the cross for the salvation of all. Marriage, for the Christian, in its unconditional love and faithful devotion, has become the earthly enactment of the relationship between God and his holy people. There is in marriage, as St. Paul says, “a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the Church.”

THE GOSPEL IN MARRIAGE

The Gospel message in marriage is that God has revealed a living parable of his own plan of salvation there. As God makes himself “one” with his people through the giving of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross for the Sin of the world, so in marriage, the husband and wife become “One Flesh”

through a mutual submission and self-giving to one another in love. As in the loving embrace on the cross God gives us the new birth of eternal life, so in the loving embrace of marriage a child is given life.

With all this in mind, we now turn to the issues of reproductive technology, asking what, if any of it, is compatible with the Biblical theme of the One Flesh union called marriage and what is not.

ONE FLESH

Genesis 2: 18-25

Genesis 1: 26 – 28 introduces us to the reality that we, male and female, are made in the image of God. Verse 28 says, “And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” God's Story as it unfolds in Genesis 2 describes the nature of the relationship between male and female in marriage. Marriage is a **unity** and a **plurality** in which a man and woman (the plurality) become One Flesh (a unity). This one-of-a-kind experience in human relationships, called marriage, created by God, is portrayed in Genesis 2 as the wholesome desire (both sexual and more than sexual), where the man and woman look upon the other as if the other were his or her missing half. In marriage the two become one and find fulfillment in the oneness as only marriage makes that possible. This is why divorce or the death of a spouse is so painful; it is more than the loss of a person. It is the brokenness or loss of the One Flesh union that holds the promise of our fulfillment in this life. (I will not address the lack of fulfillment some may feel or experience in a marriage that is not a good marriage, even though it is a marriage nevertheless and the One Flesh union is a God-given union with or without our pleasure in it.)

This *One Flesh* union of the two usually expresses itself in the procreation of children. Out of the love of husband and wife for each other, children are given by God. Children are begotten, not made. That is, they are of the same flesh as their parents and are begotten by God, “in his image, after his likeness.” They are not made by an act of human will, even if we tend to think so. The most sophisticated attempts to produce a child through reproductive technologies does not guarantee that a pregnancy will result by the actions of our will upon the human body. The failure rates for attempts

at pregnancy through in vitro fertilization are 75% to 85%. Let me put it another way that perhaps more of us can relate to. We may hope to have children when we make love to our spouse, but there is nothing we can do to assure that will happen. We can make love, but we cannot make children come of it, not always. Sometimes a pregnancy occurs and sometimes it doesn't, always reminding us that children are not things we make, but a gift that God gives. Abraham and Sarah knew the pain of childlessness not only for the love of a child, but also for the seeming failure of a promise given by God. And so, they took matters into their own hands. Sarah gave Abraham her servant Hagar and Hagar conceived a child by Abraham, and named him Ishmael. But Sarah later conceived and bore the child of God's promise, Isaac. The outcome of Abraham and Sarah's taking matters into their own hands has not yet been resolved even in our times, as we can see in the conflict between the descendents of Ishmael, the Arabs, and Isaac, the Jews. In today's world of reproductive technologies that make use of donor sperm or egg it remains to be seen what long-term effects there are on a world where parentage and identity are always confused and uncertain.

When children are not forthcoming due to infertility on the part of one or both partners in marriage, this does not equate to a loss of the *One Flesh* union of marriage. Children are a gift of God, but the gift is not given to all. This may be a hard truth to accept, but it implies no lack of God's love and favor for the childless couple. The *One Flesh* significance continues to be expressed in the relationship of marriage itself, in the unique intimacy and companionship that no other human relationship can provide. And, as marriage, it participates in and bears witness to a deeper reality, as we shall learn in a few minutes.

Because marriage was made for oneness that also takes the form of a unique companionship, it is not appropriate, contrary to the contemporary value placed on independence, for husband and wife to think of themselves as autonomous persons contracting for equal rights. Autonomous, meaning self-sufficient, not needing each other, finding fulfillment in self. We can see autonomy at work in the law that protects a woman's right to abortion where a husband has no legal right to prevent his wife from aborting his child if she so chooses. This elevation of autonomy above the One Flesh union of marriage is destructive of marriage ---- even where there may be consent by both partners for the one choosing to exercise it. Further, if, as is the case in our culture, individual freedom or autonomy is the primary justification for unlimited use of reproductive technologies, then it can only

be concluded that marriage and the bearing of children will increasingly little to do with one another anymore. That is, if each person is free to engage in the use of any and all reproductive technologies available for producing a child, such as through the making of embryos in a laboratory by means of donor sperm or egg, and the implantation of those embryos in any woman, married or not, then we have, as a society, severed the tie between marriage and procreation. The physical biological production of children becomes separated from the One Flesh relational intimacy of marriage, and marriage loses the significance intended by God.

It is unfortunately possible, in a fallen world, to think of ourselves as being in charge of human life *without limitation*, bringing children into existence by our own will, when and how we please. However, having the freedom to produce children in a laboratory by any means, and having the 'right' to abort children at any time for any reason, destroys the significance of marriage as a One Flesh union of husband and wife and children as a gift from God.

Some might call to our attention that Genesis 28, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." This would seem to say that having children is the highest good by any means and that subduing the earth means gaining mastery over reproduction. Indeed, there is some truth in God's giving us the authority to gain some mastery over the things of this earth, but just as mastery dare not include abuse, so our mastery over childbearing dare not violate the One Flesh of marriage. We, as Christians, can only do faithfully that which is compatible with the Christian faith and life.

Let us turn to the New Testament where we find the fulfillment of the One Flesh union of marriage clarified for us by St. Paul. Here Paul ties marriage to something even deeper than marriage itself.

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5: (15)21-33

Listen again to verse 32. After all the talk of marriage in this passage, Paul seems to throw us off balance by saying, "What I am really talking about is Christ and the Church." What's going on here? Is Paul talking about marriage or is he talking about the Church? Paul argues that the

significance of marriage and the Church are inseparable --- not the Church as a building or as an administrative entity, but the Church as all believers in Christ. To understand marriage we have to understand the relationship between Christ and the Church, but to understand the relationship between Christ and the Church God has given us marriage. Marriage is a one-of-a-kind relationship in this life, given us by God so that we might learn to understand better the relationship between Christ and us, collectively his Church. We, who are the Church, are one with Christ and marriage is a mysterious sign of that oneness for all the world to see. She who has eyes to see, let her see it.

Again, in summary: The One Flesh union of marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and his people, the Body of Christ, the Church. Ephesians 5 speaks of marriage as something more than it appears to be on the surface. On the surface, marriage may appear to be merely a sociological arrangement by societal consensus. Recent campaigns to redefining marriage so as to bless same-sex unions is evidence of this belief that marriage is whatever we choose to make it. But God has given marriage as the union of a man and woman for a reason, not the least of which reasons is the mystery of marriage given as a portrayal of the relationship between the believer and Christ. Marriage is part of the Gospel mystery of God's revealing himself to us in this world. There is a mystery to marriage even beyond the promise of lifelong union between husband and wife.

The word *mystery* in the New Testament, is the Greek word *μυστήριον*, but translated in the later Latin texts of the early Church as *sacramentum* from which we get our word sacrament. Luther called marriage a sacrament at one point. Luther said,

“[marriage] is a sacrament. A sacrament is a sacred sign of something spiritual, holy, heavenly, and eternal . . . [marriage] is an outward and spiritual sign of the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed . . . the union of the divine and human natures in Christ . . . Paul says that as man and wife . . . are one flesh, so God and man are united in the one person of Christ, and so Christ and Christendom are one body.” (LW Vol. 44, p.10)

The meaning of the word mystery or sacrament suggests a visual *sign* of an unseen reality hiding beneath the surface of a thing. Marriage is such a mystery or sacrament, a *sign* of the nature of our relationship with God. Just

as a Microsoft icon can open a window, so marriage as an icon opens the window or reveals the hidden presence of a deeper reality, a reality that shows the meaning of our relationship with God.

Marriage reveals that the wholesome submission of a wife to her husband is a *sign* for the world to see as the way of God's people's submission to Christ. And the husband's unconditional love for his wife is the paradigm of Christ's unconditional love that leads him to give himself on the cross for the salvation of all. Marriage, for the Christian, in its unconditional love and faithful devotion, has become the earthly enactment of the relationship between God and his holy people. There is in marriage, as St. Paul says, "a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the Church."

THE GOSPEL IN MARRIAGE

The Gospel message in marriage is that God has revealed a living parable of his own plan of salvation there. As God makes himself "one" with his people through the giving of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross for the Sin of the world, so in marriage, the husband and wife become "One Flesh" through a mutual submission and self-giving to one another in love. As in the loving embrace on the cross God gives us the new birth of eternal life, so in the loving embrace of marriage a child is given life.

With all this in mind, we now turn to the issues of reproductive technology, asking what, if any of it, is compatible with the Biblical theme of the One Flesh union called marriage and what is not.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION, IN VITRO FERTILIZATION, AND SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

When a couple is childless due to infertility and decides not to adopt, they might say something like, "We want *to have* a child of *our own*." Let us look at the meaning of this statement: what does "**to have**," mean here? Does "to have" mean to "possess" as in the "haves and the have nots?" Does "to have," mean to *have oneself to pass on* to future generations through our children? Is "to have" part of our understanding of personal fulfillment, as if to "not have" would make us inferior or unfulfilled? If so, all of these desires "to have" are centered on the self, not on the child for its own sake.

And, what is meant, in this statement about having a child of, "**our own**?" Is "our own" a way of bringing about the *one flesh* in marriage? No, the One Flesh of marriage is already a reality in marriage with or without children. Those who are infertile are still One Flesh in marriage. Clearly "our own" does not mean *mine*, but *ours* which at least moves us beyond the self.. And yet, in the use of *donor sperm* with AI the child conceived is no longer "*our own*," but rather, "*my own*" referring to the mother," since the donor is not part of the "one flesh" union of this marriage. "Having a child of our own" through artificial insemination with donor sperm requires a third participant in actual conception of a child which violates the design of God that the two (meaning husband and wife) shall become one.

What then does AI with donor sperm mean for the "one flesh" of marriage as God designed it when the two who have committed themselves to become one, go outside that oneness? The entrance of a third party donor into the process of conceiving a child may well be thought of as adulterous, since attention turns from that which our spouse cannot provide to someone else outside the marriage who can. This is clearly a violation of fidelity to the *one flesh* commitment of marriage? The desire to "have a child of our own" ought not be placed above the promise of fidelity to each other in marriage.

To use egg and sperm of the married couple for artificial insemination is no violation of the one flesh of marriage per se even when done artificially, but to make use of a donor sperm (or egg) is a violation of the meaning of marriage and conception as given by God. The same might be

said of "embryo transfer" or "surrogate for gestation," where a child is conceived outside the one flesh union of marriage.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

Infertility is growing in this country over the past twenty years or so, due in part to women waiting longer to have children, the increase in sexually transmitted disease through promiscuity, and a stressful lifestyle. It is now estimated that somewhere between 15 to 20% of married couples are infertile. It is important to note that in many cases it is the husband as well as the wife that are infertile. Infertility is defined today as one year of unprotected intercourse that does not result in a pregnancy. Infertility can be due to many things, but the one that we will look at today is caused by the inability of sperm to reach the egg naturally. This may be due to disease or some other physical dysfunction. In artificial insemination, sperm is mechanically introduced into the uterus where conception can take place. Insemination may involve the use of donor sperm.

1. AI and the Intimacy of Procreation

Although such a procedure diminishes the intimacy associated with conception, it may allow for limited intimacy. Sperm may be collected at home by means of a condom during intercourse and brought to the clinical setting where it can be introduced into the wife's uterus. If collected otherwise intimacy is lost. If the sperm and egg in AI are from the same married couple, the One Flesh union of marriage is preserved.

2. *AI and the Unmarried Woman*

It is incompatible with the biblical meaning of marriage and conception for a single woman to seek pregnancy through artificial insemination. There is no sign of the Gospel mystery of marriage to justify the child's conception. Even the use of donor sperm, where no other physical or relational contact takes place, this antiseptic approach to AI does not justify its use by unmarried women.

3. AI and Conception with Donor Sperm or Egg.

In the One Flesh understanding, two become one. With the introduction of a third party (donor sperm or egg or surrogate mother) the oneness is violated. Such violation may be called adulterous for in such a

case one covets that which is found outside the marriage because it is lacking within the marriage. Neither spousal consent nor well-intentioned motives change the reality of what is taking place in the use of donors.

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION

The first case of in vitro fertilization took place successfully in 1978 in England. In vitro fertilization is used when conception cannot take place inside the body and is brought about outside the body in a laboratory where egg and sperm are brought together in a petri dish and embryos are formed. Usually two or three embryos are implanted, leaving the remaining embryos. This has given rise to tens of thousands of embryos unwanted and left over in clinics across the country. It has been suggested that these embryos be used for research by removing their stem cells, which destroys the embryo. Recently President Bush has backed the adoption of such embryos, but although this preserves the life of the embryo, it creates other problems, which we do not have time to discuss here. It should be noted that in vitro could also be used with donor sperm or egg and with surrogate motherhood.

1. IVF and the Child as Gift in Procreation rather than the Product of Reproduction

Objectionable reproductive methods treat a child as a commodity to be produced, possibly rejected, and perhaps sold. There is a similarity between selling the use of one's body for conception and selling the use of one's body as a prostitute. Motives as crass as merely "wanting the experience of pregnancy" without the obligation of parenting or as generous as desiring to help a childless couple are all incompatible with the biblical meanings of marriage and conception because they fail to grasp the meaning of what God is doing through procreation. Children are not to be thought of as possessions or products for our use, they are gifts of God given in the context of marriage.

2. IVF and the Separation of the Relational from the Biological

The greatest fault with reproductive technologies is the separation of the relational from the biological in the conception of a child. Conception is no longer something that may or may not happen as a result of our love-making, but something we take charge of apart from it. Apart from our subjective feelings that it is out of "our love for each other," objectively,

with the separation of the *relational* from the *biological* we move from procreation to reproduction. In *reproduction* we set out to “make” a child as we do a commodity, a “thing.” By contrast, in *procreation*, we may or may not receive a child from God but if it happens it is surely a gift resulting from of our lovemaking.

3. IVF and the Embryo as Possession at our Disposal

With in-vitro, embryos are created and only a few are implanted, leaving the remaining embryos to be stored as our “possessions” until needed or where, in time, they die or are destroyed, or used for research, . . . all of which leads us further away from understanding children as a gift from God to be received rather than a product we own.

4. IVF Donor Sperm or Egg and Lineage and Identity?

The Bible uses the word "begotten" to describe the conception of a child. The word "begotten" implies that a child has something of his parents in him. He is of their substance. He is not something entirely new. In carrying on the line and identity of our parents we come to know who and whose we are. Even in the case of adoption, we do not lose this, but take on additional identity from our adoptive parents. Each of us conceived in sin has lost his identity as a child of God, but in baptism that identity is given as God adopts his children by faith in Jesus Christ.

The difference between adoption and making children with donor parts in a lab is that the former are not intentionally created and are in need of our help or they will die, but in the latter the making of children intentionally obscures lineage and identity.

SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

When a woman cannot carry a child to term, surrogate motherhood involves the use of another woman’s uterus to bear a child for another person or couple. The embryo carried may be the result of the contracting husband and wife’s sperm and egg, or the child may be the result of any combination of donors, and may have been fertilized in vitro or in utero. The bond, which normally exists between a mother and her baby in conception, is destroyed in surrogate motherhood for the surrogate conceives and/or carries the child with the intent of giving the child away. This

diminishing of the mother-child relationship violates motherhood as created by God.

We ought not confuse surrogate motherhood with the adoption of a newborn. It is not the same situation. We practice adoption in our society because there are abandoned children who need a home. We do sanction creating them for the purpose of giving them away. Surrogate motherhood encourages the commercialization of childbearing. The fact that our culture plays down prohibitions against adultery, incest, divorce, homosexuality and family as traditionally defined does not legitimize the infidelity of producing children in order to sell or give them away, even when it is done by a friend or family member with the best of motives. Motive does not justify the means.

1. SM and the Bond between Mother and Child

A child carried by a woman in pregnancy is to be received by her as a gift from God to be nurtured, and loved, but in surrogacy the child has become a commodity conceived solely *for the purpose of giving it away*. Most often the child is “given away” for money, making this the selling of children; treating the child as a commodity is similar to the practice of treating some as non-persons in the colonial era of slavery in America.

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The issues of end of life decision-making usually are about *allowing*, versus *causing*, death. Allowing the death of an irretrievably dying patient is acceptable. Causing the death of a non-dying patient is not morally acceptable from the perspective of the Christian faith. Causing death may take the most overt form of Assisted Suicide or Euthanasia, but it may also take subtler forms in which it is not clear to the observer that this is taking place. Much of it has to do with the intent of our actions toward the patient. Actions that aim at death often reflect a lack faith and an unwillingness to face suffering, suffering in which God reveals his presence for those with the eyes of faith to see it.

Intentionally causing death in the case of innocent, helpless, suffering clearly violates the Law of God as the Commandment says, “Thou shalt not kill!” There is no way to justify what is sometimes called “mercy killing.” Mercy may be our motive, but God's word is clear, innocent lives are not ours to take. Physician assisted suicide and euthanasia invite us to set God aside and take matters into our own hands, eliminating suffering by eliminating the sufferer. It is an act of misguided motive and faithlessness which bears witness to a resistance to learning to see God on his own terms, in the midst of our own or another’s suffering. But everything I have said is the hard message from God, the Law of God. The healing message of God in the midst of suffering is the Gospel which proclaims what God himself has accomplished through his suffering and death, and what God continues to do in and through our suffering and dying. This is called, *the theology of the cross!*

THE MEANING OF DEATH

Genesis 2: 16 - 17

“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

Romans 6: 23

There are two things we learn in these and other Scriptural passages: First, that death is *unnatural* in the world God created and as given to Adam

and Eve. Second, spiritually, death is an *enemy* to each of us, not a friend. It is clear from the account in Genesis that God created life, not death. Death was never part of the design of God for us human beings. If it were not for the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, death would never have entered our world. So, we can say that from a physical point of view death seems natural, but from a spiritual point of view it is unnatural. Death is alien to God and the world he created.

This is a different perspective from the one now accepted by many in our American culture. In the late 1960's and early 1970's Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist, published several books on the subject of death, her first called, "Death and Dying" and a sequel called, "Death, The Final Stage of Growth." The message of her books is that death is a natural part of life and should not be feared. She then introduced us to the physiological dynamics of dying and the stages of emotional upheaval most people experience before coming to *acceptance* of death as natural and therefore acceptable. During the twenty years of hospital chaplaincy that I served during the appearance of her books, I never met a patient who was comforted by this reassurance. What Kubler-Ross believes to be *affirmation* of death, turns out to be *resignation* in the face of death's assault. From K-R's point of view, death is little more than a meaningless experience, apart of life. The continuation of this way of thinking of death has, in recent years, taken the new age form of death as a mystical transformation of life here to a new life in another dimension that is indefinable. The postmodern version of life after death was portrayed some years ago in the film starring Robin Williams titled, "What Dreams May Come." In this film, there is a heaven and a hell of sorts, but there is no God in heaven and the inhabitants of heaven can rescue those in hell. Much warm-sticky sentimentality about death has replaced the visible shroud that once symbolized the curse that death is, and that came upon this world because of man's disobedience to and fall from God.

The story of this world told by God as it begins with Genesis and leads us to the cross and victory over death in Christ tells it as it is: death is the result of sin and rebellion against God. It is God's warning to Eve that to separate ourselves from God and go our own way leads to death, for death is ultimately eternal separation from God by our own choosing. This Word from God does not sell in a culture that promotes taking charge of your own life, grasping both life and death from the hands of God to do with as we wish . . . only to end in despair and hopelessness.

1 Corinthians 15: 1- 26

We might well be saying to ourselves, “But I am a Christian and I believe in the resurrection!” So we should proclaim from the housetops, but not too quickly and not too easily. We should and do tremble in the face of death, not for lack of faith, but because by faith we know what death really is even if others do not.

¹ “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Death is no friend that removes suffering; for some it increases suffering of an eternal kind. Death is an enemy that destroys and damns, if it can! Christians are confident that death has no such power over them because of the victory Jesus won on the cross. Good Friday is that day of victory and Easter is the great victory celebration that begins here and continues hereafter. Faith applies this promise as hope for a person’s life in the face of illness and dying.

But even as faithful Christians, we are still in this sinful world and our own sinful flesh still bears the marks of death’s curse. We still have to die, and even we may fear death. We fear it and fight against it in ourselves, not necessarily because we lack faith in God, but because, like Jesus, we know what death really is. And this is also why we Christians are a prolife people. We do not take death lightly. We do not see death as the solution to our problems. We do not use death as a tool toward embryonic research or assisted suicide as a way to relieve suffering.

The Bible teaches that death is not a natural part of life, not a friend to be welcomed, but an enemy to be feared. Jesus conquered death and so it is a conquered enemy for us, but still an enemy. Christians, eager to be in heaven, may be tempted to seek death through these means, but it is sin for the Word of

¹ Let me tell you about the two ways of thinking of death: one way was held by Socrates, that good pagan of ancient Greece who lived 400 years before Christ, and the other held by Jesus. Socrates died in prison, innocently condemned because of his criticism against the many gods of Greece. He died by drinking hemlock, a poison that kills slowly and painlessly. As he was dying, he met with his disciples and talked about death, telling them that it was a good and natural thing, scolding them for their tears and stoically dying without fear or struggle. Jesus talked with his disciples about his coming death as well. In the many times that he did so, they refused to hear him, arguing with him that they would never allow such a thing to happen. In the Garden, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed while his disciples slept, that he might not have to die. He sweat blood over the prospect of death, but in the end submitted to it as the will of his Father for him. How could Socrates face death with such calm resignation while Jesus wrestled in agony and bloody sweat? The answer is that Jesus knew what death meant and Socrates did not. Jesus knew death was God’s curse that destroyed any in its path. He knew that his death was a battle with the enemy, death. And he knew it was only a battle won by his faithfulness in suffering and dying as he had been sent into this world to experience.

God asks, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is within you . . . you are not your own, you were bought with a price.” 1 Cor. 6: 19

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Isaiah 45:15

God works through suffering and in our dying. This is the theology of the cross. God’s working through these things takes place both in Jesus’ suffering and dying and in ours, but with different ends in mind. God’s work through Jesus’ suffering a dying won our salvation. God’s work through our suffering and dying assures us of his presence and care in the midst of it.

But seeing God at work in the midst of suffering is not possible. We walk by faith, not by sight. Isaiah says, “Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God an Savior of Israel.”

1 Corinthians 1: 18 – 31

In these verses, as well as throughout Scripture, God makes it clear that he does not show his hand when he chooses to hide himself in sufferings. Listen to how Luther describes it: “God can be found only in suffering and the cross.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “...in the suffering of the righteous God’s help is always there, because he is suffering with God. God is always present with him. The righteous person knows that God allows him to suffer so, in order that he may learn to love God for God’s own sake. In suffering, the righteous person finds God. That is his deliverance. Find God in your separation and you will find deliverance.” Tegel Prison, June 8, 1944

In these verses in the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul is not merely showing humility when he gives credit to God for his ministry. Through Paul, God is revealing a truth: namely that God is at work in suffering to reveal himself as a Saving God, a God who cares and comforts his suffering people if they learn to place themselves in his hands where peace is found. This is in contrast to the urging we hear from the secular world to “take charge of your life, your suffering, and your dying.” This “*theology of the cross*” can be contrasted with the “*theology of glory*.” The theology of

glory does not look for God in suffering, but in the healing that removes suffering. Healing is a gift of God, but we must all die whereas the theology of glory (the hope of immortality through medicine) wants healing and not God as he comes to us in suffering.

END OF LIFE DECISION MAKING

I will not spend much time on the topics of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia since neither allows for any acceptance among Christians and assisted suicide is only legal in Oregon, euthanasia nowhere in the USA. I define each in the following way: *Physician Assisted Suicide* is when the patient takes his own life by himself himself, but involves the assistance of a physician or other person to provide the means.

Euthanasia is when the physician with or without the consent or assistance of patient or family intentionally causes the death of a patient. But the issues that confront us more commonly are the withholding and withdrawal of life support, the use of medical directives and do-not-resuscitate orders, and when and whether to feed those who can no longer feed themselves by ordinary means.

WITHHOLDING AND WITHDRAWAL OF LIFE SUPPORT

What criteria should we use to decide whether or not to withhold or withdraw life support? We should ask ourselves first, "Is what we are doing aimed at the death of the patient?" We should also ask ourselves, "Is this treatment futile?" And finally, we should ask ourselves, "Has the patient said the treatment is unbearably burdensome?" We must be careful not to read our own sense of futility or burden bearing into the patient's life. Rather we ought to remember the Lord's invitation to, "Cast all your anxieties on the Lord, for he cares for you," and also the promise, "All things work together for good to those who love God."

The situation sometimes arises when a patient or family must decide whether life support technologies ought to be provided or not. *Is there a difference between withholding and withdrawing of treatment once it has begun?* Morally, what we do depends on what we are trying to do. If, in either case, we aim at the death of the patient, the Law of God is clear. We should not withhold or withdraw life support. But if we are aiming at life by withholding or withdrawing futile treatment, then we might morally choose to do so (futile is defined as that which does nothing to *support* as well as not *cure* the patient). If the patient has said to us that s/he can no longer bear the burden of treatment because the treatment has become more burdensome than the disease, then we might morally choose to withhold or withdraw such treatment. Only the patient can determine what is burdensome and what is not. The claim of futility or burdensomeness ought not be used as a means to aim at the death of the patient. Nor should a patient aim at his own death to lighten the burden of the family. The Lord's reminder is that "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" and God lives within you.

In what we do, does it matter whether the patient is dying or not? If a person has fought a long battle with terminal illness and there is no cure, or if the patient is irretrievably dying, then we are not obligated to provide life support except in so far as it provides comfort in the dying person. This is not the same as saying that we may withdraw life support to aim at hastening death, . . . although that may be the result. It is still true that we ought not aim at the death of the patient, although we need not provide further treatment if needs arise since the patient is near death already. The Gospel promise of heaven, rather than death-as-the-final-solution, ought to be the deliverance that is given.

MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

Definition: *Living Will:* a document in which a person indicates the treatment he/she wants or does not want under certain circumstances.

Definition: *Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care:* an agreement with another *person (agent)* to act in your behalf if you are unable to communicate your wishes in the circumstances and time of treatment.

The Living Will was introduced in the early 1970's by the Hemlock Society as the first step toward introducing Euthanasia in this country. It was a reaction, at the time, to the over-treatment of the 1970's when technology was new. A Living Will aims to provide the patient with a sense of "control" over his treatment when the patient is no longer able to speak for himself. It primarily appeals to one who fears helplessness and loss of control over one's life in times of illness. It promises to offer the comfort of being free of the need for decision making in the future.

Each of these reasons for a Living Will need to be addressed from a biblical perspective. The desire to avoid helplessness and loss of control over one's life is understandable, but for Christians such helplessness and absence of control are an opportunity for growing in faith as trust in God. The illusion that deciding now how to handle problems 6 months or 6 years from now is unrealistic. The living will has not proven itself an effective way to deal with these issues. Each state's Living Will varies. In Wisconsin, anyone can write a living will of his/her own, or use the state legislated version which protects the hospital or nursing home and the physician from lawsuits if action taken, based on your wishes, is later challenged.

The advantage of the Living Will is that it allows a person with no friends or relatives to state his or her wishes regarding treatment. A disadvantage of the Living Will is that you cannot anticipate future situations enough to appropriately address all possibilities. Another disadvantage of the Living Will is that decisions have to be made in writing, not in conversation with a human being as with the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. The Living Will could be used to deny you care when you should have it according to the interpretation of a health care provider, health care institution, or insurance company.

Unlike the Living Will, in the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care you assign an agent to make decisions for you in the event you are unable to make decisions concerning your care. The agent appointed by you may not be obligated to comply with *your* wishes, but is free to make judgments s/he believes is morally justifiable and in your best interests. You are entrusting care to someone you deem reliable. The advantage of the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care is that it allows decision-making to be carried out in conversation with a person rather than an ambiguous piece of paper such as the living will. The Durable Power of Attorney simply institutionalizes the traditional custom of the doctor discussing matters with a close friend or family member.

DENIAL OF FOOD AND WATER

Food and water by means of tube feeding has been defined by the Supreme Court as medical treatment. This can be requested in medical directives. Tube Feeding can be withdrawn in some states at the request of the patient or agent. This is most frequently considered in cases of coma or nursing home elderly. Guidelines for Christians in decision making about tube feedings follows the same criteria as the withholding and withdrawal of treatment.

But are food and water medical treatments? It is hard to see how food and water are medical treatments when all of us eat and drink every day and yet are not sick or dying. The fact that food and water is given through a plastic feeding tube does not make it less nourishing, beneficial or expendable. Tube feedings are only called medical treatment in the eyes of the court, not in the eyes of God. The Supreme Court declared food and water to be "medical treatment" in the case concerning Nancy Cruzan in 1990. Nancy died of starvation over Christmas and New Years in 1991. Before that, feeding those by any means possible who could no longer feed themselves had not been considered an option.

If morally acceptable, what criteria should be used to deny food and water? Such reasons may be that the person is already dying and food and water would be *no benefit*; or that it would cause the patient *harm* because the patient could not metabolize food. Other reasons might be the *refusal of a patient* to eat and drink as indicated in a *medical directive* or by a patient competent at the time. But these would not be moral reasons to refuse to feed a patient; they would be legal reasons with which we may not interfere.

Food and water are basic blessings sent by God to nourish his people; their refusal ought not be used as a means of aiming at the death of a patient.

Rev. Richard C. Eyer D.Min.
Concordia Bioethics Institute
September 2002