

The Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee and the Question of Surrogate Motherhood

At its September 2016 meeting, the BRI Ethics Committee discussed a request for an opinion on surrogate motherhood that provides children to homosexual couples. The committee felt that before moving on to the question of whether Adventist women should provide children through surrogate motherhood to homosexual couples, something needed to be said about the issue of surrogacy. The following document and its two major parts reflect the opinion of the BRI Ethics Committee.

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SURROGATE MOTHERS PROVIDING CHILDREN FOR HOMOSEXUAL COUPLES

An Opinion of the Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee

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These days advances in biotechnology allow women to pursue surrogate motherhood. Surrogate mothers take the place of women who cannot or do not want to bear children. There are different approaches to impregnate a woman, one of them being in vitro fertilization. Heterosexual couples, homosexual couples, and single people pursue surrogacy for a variety of reasons. Surrogate mothers may desire to help childless relatives to have a child, while on the other end of the spectrum is commercial surrogacy.

The opinion in this document mainly deals with the commercial side of surrogacy, which in some settings has become a business enterprise for specialized clinics as well as surrogate mothers. This issue raises a number of important questions about women involved in surrogacy, children born under such circumstances, and the attitude of the recipients of these children. Surrogacy is an ethical issue that needs to be carefully evaluated.

I. The Issue of Surrogacy

While some women choose to be surrogate mothers as a means of financial survival, surrogacy is sometimes driven by reasons other than sheer survival.¹ The opportunity to make money by being a surrogate for a heterosexual couple, a homosexual couple, or single person is appealing to a number of women.

However, surrogacy has downsides such as health risks, moral issues, and exploitation. Oftentimes illiterate and poor women are taken advantage of by clients as well as by clinics that may make a greater profit than the birth mothers, who bear all the risks of pregnancy and delivery. Thus at times, surrogacy may be a form of exploitation of underprivileged women.

Each pregnancy poses health risks for the mother, especially when several embryos are implanted simultaneously to improve the chance of success. Risks include complications during pregnancy and delivery, the need for delivery by caesarean section, and—in the worst-case scenario—the loss of the mother's life. Additionally, there could also be long-term emotional and psychological problems from having to abandon a child that has grown and been nurtured in the birth mother's body.

The moral issues may be even more severe than the physical and emotional problems. The Bible establishes that a valid marriage is limited to a union between one male and one female human being. Out of such a union offspring may come forth. Biblically, children are clearly connected to their biological parents for as long as the parents are alive. Parents need to train, guide, and support their children, establishing a loving, lifelong relationship with them. The husband and wife with their children form a family, the building block of society.² This pattern is not at all found in surrogacy. In fact, surrogacy is far from the principle of human life presented in Scripture. The birth mother is typically not the genetic mother; she furnishes her body as a house for the child. Since she has to give up the child when it is born, the surrogate mother is expected to be emotionally unattached to the child growing in her. In some instances, it is possible that she only perceives the child as a "foreign" being. In the process of surrogacy, especially commercial surrogacy, the birth mother is reduced and diminished to a reproductive machine. But even

though she is “only” the surrogate mother, neither she nor the man involved are necessarily released from their moral duties toward the child.

The child resulting from biotechnical medicine and commercial surrogacy is the product of a market mentality—a process that tends to dehumanize children as it does women. Children become commodities, oftentimes dependent on egotistic wishes of adults. While child abuse unfortunately occurs in many settings, a child purchased with money and not born into a loving heterosexual relationship may even more easily be considered a mere product rather than a divine gift, made in the image of God and belonging to Him—a child whom parents, as stewards of God’s property, must treasure and nurture.³ As a result, in such a setting it is possible for love to fall short, especially if the child has a challenging temperament or has physical, mental, or emotional deficiencies.

If more than one baby is conceived or born, problems may arise regarding the extra babies that are not covered in the contract between the surrogate mother and the intended parents. The same is true when the unborn or newborn is defective in some way. Such unplanned scenarios could also open the possibility of considering an abortion or finding other means to deal with an unwanted baby (or babies) after birth—options which create an even greater moral dilemma from a biblical perspective.

II. Surrogacy to Accommodate the Needs of Homosexual Couples

The concerns and problems associated with surrogacy are intensified when the childless couple is homosexual. The Bible prohibits homosexual behavior and homosexual relationships. Therefore, they do not meet the criteria for a biblical marriage nor are they considered a marriage according to Scripture.

While heterosexual parents can—at least theoretically—procreate, a homosexual couple cannot. A heterosexual relationship provides a male and a female the opportunity to function as father and mother; a homosexual relationship consists only of two males or two females. The complementary nature of male and female, so important to a marriage, is crucial to the upbringing of children. Therefore, the biblical ideal for a parent-child relationship is not met within a homosexual or a single parent relationship.

Adventists do not support a homosexual lifestyle because it is opposed to Scripture.⁴ Therefore, they cannot assist homosexuals in having and nurturing children. To provide homosexual couples children through surrogacy would not only be problematic in light of what has been said about surrogacy, but doing so would also legitimize a homosexual lifestyle. The Church cannot sanction what God has not blessed.

Conclusion

We invite heterosexuals, homosexuals, single people, and those who have chosen lifestyles not in accordance with the Bible to accept the divine ideal for sexuality, family, and marriage. This includes opposing the commercialization of children through surrogate motherhood and the reduction of women to birth machines. We encourage women to seriously consider their involvement in surrogacy and look for other options to earn a living. We urge Adventist women not to provide children to homosexual couples through surrogacy because Scripture does not condone a homosexual lifestyle.

God will bless such decisions and fill those affected by these choices with His peace because He cares for all human beings, especially mothers and children who are dear to Him.

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrogacy_laws_by_country and <http://world.time.com/2013/02/15/why-people-are-angry-about-indias-new-surrogacy-laws/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

² See the Seventh-day Adventist Church statements “Marriage” and “Home and Family,” <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/marriage/30/> and <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/home-and-family/42/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

³ See the Seventh-day Adventist statement “Well-Being and Value of Children,” <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/well-being-and-value-of-children/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

⁴ See the Seventh-day Adventist statements “Same-Sex Unions” and “Homosexuality,” <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/same-sex-unions/6/> and <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/homosexuality/6/> (accessed October 6, 2016).

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