

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

Donor Sperm and Parenthood: A Crisis in the Making

With the rise of reproductive and genetic technologies, the world has increased the number of options people have when it comes to having children. Technology has enhanced the power of choice. What technology has not done is enable culture to live with the consequences. This last point is perhaps most acute in the area of the use of donor sperm. Let me explain.

- First of all, there is the problem of using the same donor sperm for multiple conceptions. Further, in using the same donor sperm in this manner, the donor is always anonymous and the children conceived using this sperm do not know who their father is. Hence, our culture now faces the sociological phenomenon known as half-siblings; in this case referring to multiple children conceived using the same donor sperm. Using a web-based registry, it is now possible to track children conceived using the same donor sperm. One woman, living in a lesbian relationship and who had a child seven years ago using donor sperm, has tracked the number of half-siblings related to her son. That number is now a staggering 150 half-siblings related to her son! Half-sibling groups are now forming and they chat online, interact on Facebook and even get together in large groups to get to know one another. But there are growing concerns about using the same donor sperm to father so many children. Medical specialists are concerned about the potential of spreading the genes of rare diseases more widely through the population. In recent years, sperm with a host of serious diseases and disorders has been sold to hundreds of women, according to medical journals and other published reports. Further, it is quite conceivable that children of the same father (via donor sperm) could fall in love and get married. Such a union, unbeknownst to the man and woman, could actually be an incestuous union, with all the resulting biological consequences for the children of such a union. For these reasons, many are calling for more intense scrutiny and regulation of the fertility clinics that promote the use of donor sperm. [Among the industrialized nations on earth, the US does not have any regulation of this industry.] This is a very lucrative business and in the US there are really more regulatory rules for buying a used car than buying donor sperm. Should there be greater insistence on accurate information provided to the mother and eventually to the children conceived using the same sperm? Should there be an imposed limit on the number of children that can be conceived using the same donor sperm? For the most part, this is an unregulated industry and we are beginning to see the unintended consequences of this reproductive option. The stunning reality is that no one knows how many children are conceived each year in the US using donor sperm. Most estimates range from 30,000 to 60,000; but no one really knows. Mothers of donor children are asked to report the birth of their donor child but only between 20 to 40% do so each year. In the 1980s the United Kingdom commissioned a report to analyze and give counsel on all issues dealing with the use of donor sperm. Called the

Warnock Report, the report proposed regulation of human sperm and embryos use and sale and proposed strict limits on the number of children a donor could father (10 per donor). The UK adopted many of the suggestions from the Warnock Report. With the growing reality that fertility clinics are, in effect, permitting hundreds of children to be fathered by the same donor sperm and that unintended incest is a real possibility, regulation of this industry seems wise and necessary. There is one further unintended consequence of the use of the same donor sperm to father so many children: When children realize that they may have dozens or perhaps even a hundred half-siblings, many will want to make connections with their half-brothers and –sisters. Are they then a family? What are the psychological and emotional consequences for such children? We have never faced anything like this in the history of humanity. We are truly in uncharted waters as a civilization. It certainly illustrates the unintended consequences of empowering human beings to take almost complete control of reproduction. Is such manipulation of the reproductive process a positive development? My intuition tells me this is not necessarily a positive advance for the human race.

- Second, to deal with the huge costs of using donor sperm at a fertility clinic (often \$2,000 per donor sperm injection), couples and single individuals are using free sperm donor search engines to contact men who are willing to give their sperm free to prospective mothers. [In the US, for example, a college student can make \$12,000 per year from American sperm banks for twice weekly anonymous sperm donations.] Typically, this option of using free sperm permits careful vetting by the mother, including using questionnaires, doing interviews, reference checks and STD checks. But this market for free sperm raises other important questions: What if the donor sues for custody? What if he lies about an STD or other medical condition? What is the real motive of someone who donates sperm freely? Only altruism? This we know: There is now a growing population—gay, straight, single and married—using this option. These non-clinic options now available include six Yahoo groups, three Google sites and about a dozen fee-based websites dedicated to providing free or inexpensive donor sperm. Most of them are in the UK, Canada and Australia, and have developed because of the tight regulations now present in these nations. In the US, the Food and Drug Administration is only now beginning to express interest in overseeing and regulating this growing practice.

But our culture no longer has an ethical foundation for evaluating these practices. For example, is it ethically valid to permit a widespread industry—via fertility clinics and the “free” options—where sperm are donated by men who must use masturbation, often accompanied by pornography to maximize the “sexual” experience? Is it ethically valid to permit widespread use of artificial insemination using donor sperm for women who desire children? Is it ethically valid for single mothers to use this process? Is it ethically valid for lesbian couples to use this process? Is it ethically valid for married couples to use this process? As a culture, we have never had this ethical discussion. Instead, our culture has gone full speed ahead into the ethical morass of reproductive and genetic technologies. In this area of technology, there is no ethical compass guiding our civilization. Instead, we have bought the pragmatic approach that if we can do something we must do it. We are now facing the consequences. Ethical questions are now catching up with technology—and it may be too late to frame the ethical guidelines to prevent further tragedy and destructive consequences.

See Tony Dokoupil in *Newsweek* (4 October 2011) and Jacqueline Mroz in the *New York Times* (6 September 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

The Tragedy of Karl Marx

One of the most important thinkers of the modern era was Karl Marx, one of the key founders of ideological socialism and communism. His *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* influenced the formation of the USSR, the Peoples Republic of China, Cuba, North Korea and many other smaller experiments (e.g., socialist Western European nations) in constructing a socialist/communist utopia. Except perhaps in American universities, there are few remaining advocates of ideological communism. It is arguably one of the greatest failures of human history.

Recently, I have been reading several books and essays on Marx and his ideas. In this *Perspective*, I seek to investigate the character and temperament of communism's primary ideologue. Marx was born in 1818 in Prussia, descending from a distinguished line of Jewish scholars. His father was an attorney and, when a Prussian decree prohibited Jews from serving in such positions, he converted to Lutheranism. Marx was therefore baptized as a Lutheran in 1824. He earned a doctorate in philosophy and then got involved in the revolutionary politics of Europe. Although he had stints at journalism as a reporter, he spent most of his adult life studying in the British Museum. Two passions defined his life: His wife Jenny, whom he married in 1824, and the destruction of the world. The theme of the coming apocalyptic conflict occupied his thinking throughout his life. He envisioned the end of history when the proletariat will rise up and destroy the capitalist world. He wrote of human destiny: "History is the judge, its executioner the proletariat." He loathed religion. He wrote that "religion is the opiate of the people;" "Religion is only the illusionary sun around which man revolves, until he begins to revolve around himself." A close acquaintance of Marx once observed that "Marx does not believe in God, but he believes much in himself and makes everyone serve himself. His heart is not full of love but of bitterness and he has little sympathy for the human race." His lifestyle was abhorrent: He smoked and drank heavily. He seldom bathed or washed. He was totally incompetent at handling money. He never seriously tried to get a job but lived off loans from family and friends that were never repaid. Without his patron Friedrich Engels, he and his family would have starved. The family's silver service was often in the pawn shop, as were their clothes. At one point only Marx had enough clothing to leave the house, and he was down to his last pair of pants. His family life was a complete tragedy: One of his daughters died of an opium overdose and another of a suicide pact. When Franzisca, aged 1, died, they lacked the money to buy a coffin. His son, Edgar, got gastro-enteritis due to the squalid conditions of the home and died in 1855. The family employed a servant, Helen Demuth, from 1845-1890, calling her "Lenchen." She never received a cent in wages from Marx, only room and board. She was Marx's mistress, who fathered a son, Freddy, by her. Freddy was permitted to visit his mother only by coming in the back door. Marx only met his illegitimate son once. When Jenny discovered his infidelity, she was devastated. One can only reach one conclusion about Marx: He was a man of immense selfishness and self-indulgence. He never personally knew any

working class members and the one he had as his family servant he did not pay and he used her as his mistress.

Why is all of this important? Karl Marx gave birth to one of the great revolutionary movements of modern history. But, as its ideological founder, his life was filled with gross inconsistencies and a failure to live the very tenets he so vigorously triumphed and defended. He was hardly a model of virtue and hardly a worthy example of the utopia he envisioned. What did this morally bankrupt man produce? Among other things, his utopian ideals gave genesis to a totalitarian regime in the USSR that killed over 20 million people. His ideas also fostered the regime of Mao Tse-tung who killed over 60 million people in his rise to power. The Bible champions the moral and ethical character of leaders (e.g., Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus) and clearly infers that a nation or a church, or an institution is only as virtuous as its leader. Marx failed on all counts and contributed in no small way to the butchery of the 20th century. There is a connection between one's personal character and one's legacy. One would never use the term virtue to describe the life of Karl Marx. One would never use success to describe the legacy of Karl Marx either. Evil is the only fitting term for both his character and his legacy.

See Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*, pp. 71-81 and *Church History in One Year*, pp. 478-479.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

The Legacy of Steve Jobs

One of the key founders of the Apple brand and product line was Steve Jobs, who died recently as a result of his struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. His contribution to our technological society was truly revolutionary. In 2011, one cannot imagine the world without the iPhone, the iPod and the iPad. Each completely remade the technology available to each human being. His innovations made it possible to individualize everything—music, entertainment, information access, TV, and how we communicate. He was a technological revolutionary. Several observations about his legacy:

- As Andy Crouch recently observed, Jobs turned Eve's apple, the symbol of fallen humanity [with a bite out of the apple so evident], into a religious icon for true believers in technology. Perhaps intentionally, the Apple icon sought to reverse the fall and communicate powerfully that technology was the hope for the future. It was our new savior!
- Jobs championed the gospel of the secular age, an age which sees redemption and progress as an individual thing, fostered by facilitating a smorgasbord of choices that face each human. What is important is that you choose, not what you choose. Jobs sought to enhance the world of sovereign, personal choice—through technology. He therefore would provide the tools to do so. Jobs's world and vision were not based on revelation or on dogma. It was a free-floating individualism enhanced by superior technology. Crouch shares that Jobs was a "convert to Zen Buddhism [and] was convinced as anyone could be that this life is all there is. He hoped to put 'a ding in the universe' by his own genius and vision in this life alone—and who can deny that he did?"

- Jobs's view of progress was of course technological in its orientation. But for him, the world will get better only through technology. His religion of hope was rooted in technological solutions that are remarkably personal—elegantly so due to technology. For Jobs, a meaningful life and genuine hope were only to be found in the self actualizing its meaning and purpose through technology.
- The legacy of Steve Jobs is truly awesome. Few have left this world with such tangible contributions to human development and technology. Indeed, the world will continue to be marked by the ubiquitous Apple icon. But his legacy and his life beg this question: Is technology, at least the secular gospel Jobs represented through technology, sufficient to overcome the true need of the human race—that vacuum left in the vital center of every human by sin? As a Christian, I can only answer that no, it is not enough. Steve Jobs died—and the Bible helps understand why each one of us will also die. But the true “gospel” is the one Jesus Christ preached. Salvation is not technological but it is cosmic in its proportions and individual in its application. Each human has an opportunity to fill that vacuum through Jesus. My hope is that Steve Jobs did that before he drew his last breath. He changed the world (and mine through the Apple products I have bought). But his technological gospel is not sufficient for the human race to provide true hope in a hopeless world. May we see Steve Jobs and the technology he produced as a good gift from God—an example of God's common grace to humanity. May we not see Steve Jobs as a promoter of a gospel that solves the core problem of humanity. Only Jesus can do that!

See Andy Crouch in the *Wall Street Journal* (8-9 October 2011).