

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



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 thiUJ25Pnes IN5WJ25

**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 throughn tA53nn.r 8 0a8c -486 T I

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

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** (Hebrew, 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 Fl

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 e On098 (porary )Tj e comse43nd/3229.93887 partners for nflj-



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

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  $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$  ( $\mu\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ ), 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

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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 fertili

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 labor

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.

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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.

## **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 cente



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. we will loc65.6017

case one covets that which is found outside the marriage because it is lacking within the marriage. Neither spousal consent nor well-intentioned

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



## **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



1 Corinthians 15: 1- 26

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

## **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 term

## 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 desire for a Living Will is that a person can ask 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 d



*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.*

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September 2002