



Humanum

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FEATURE ARTICLE

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Life As A Lab Specimen

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I found my way to Catholicism because it is the only major organization that is getting the conversation on new reproductive technologies *right*. I hope my testimonial will give others the courage to defend Catholic teaching—indeed to defend humanity itself.

On the 28th of June 1978, a little more than a month before he died Pope Paul VI said, ‘You will thank God and me for Humanae Vitae.’ Now after 46 years, we see what has happened to the institution of marriage and we realize how prophetic that document truly was. Losing the unbreakable bond between conjugal sexuality and procreation, which denies the core teaching of Humanae Vitae, has paved the way for its reverse, that is, separating procreation from conjugal sexuality: from sex without babies to babies without sex. We have lost sight of the fact that human procreation is rooted in conjugal love, and have gradually constructed an ideology according to which anyone can have a child: single men or women, homosexuals often using surrogate mothers. In this way we have passed from an attitude that waited upon a child as a gift to an attitude that plans or programs a child as if that child were a right. One thinks of the recent court ruling in Milan that affirmed the ‘right’ to parenthood, that is, it affirmed the right of one human person to possess another!

—Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, Archbishop of Bologna

I want to empower you to proclaim that every person deserves to be conceived in an act of love, with their married mother and father—not forcefully separated from their natural families and cultural heritage, often, where money is involved, as objects, accessories, or prizes.

I remember the first time I struggled to understand the ethics of a case involving reproductive technologies. I was five years old, folding clothes in my bedroom with my mom. She told me that my dad was not my biological father. My biological father was an anonymous sperm donor about whom we knew nothing and whom we could not locate. I was told I was very loved and wanted, and that this is just simply what infertile couples must do. We were different, but we never did anything “wrong,” so to speak.

A few years later my mom divorced that “dad” and I never saw him again. She remarried, and so I was quickly and suddenly given a new “dad.” But neither the first nor the second man ever made me feel safe in my own home. I grew up thinking that there was just something inherently evil and suspicious about men. I truly thought they were either all incapable of love, or that there was something disordered with *me*; I was simply not worthy of love.

I got older and started spending more time with friends and seeing how their dads treated them. I realized that there are actually great dads out there. But the number one predictor of child abuse is a child living with a non-genetically-related guardian, especially a non-genetically-related male. I have an older sister who was adopted. I also have a younger half-brother who was conceived naturally with my mom’s second husband. This unique vantage point taught me the importance biology plays in a parent-child relationship.

Children are fifty times more likely to die in the care of a non-genetically-related guardian. This phenomenon is called the “Cinderella Effect,” and is verified again and again and in country after country through social science research. Discovering this, I realized I had to speak out against third party reproduction. Especially because, unlike in adoption, there are absolutely no home studies or merit barriers filtering intended parents.

If a biological connection matters for the safety of children, why is there a multi-billion dollar industry with fertility industry agents *promoting* and profiting from children being separated from at least one half, and, often enough, both natural parents?

There are many consequences of the use of third party reproduction, but safety was the issue that prompted me to get up and do something.

At 23, I started reaching out to the media. But sharing my story was very difficult. Any media success I’ve had has often been followed by very difficult phone calls home. For donor-conceived people who want to speak out against the practice, being honest may lead to being orphaned—or at least to a lot of unwanted conflict. That’s why I started the *Anonymous Us Project*.

The *Anonymous Us Project* is an online story-collective that publishes insights and narratives from donor-conceived people, sperm and egg donors, intended parents and anyone else involved in the fertility industry or adoption. Our tagline is “*anonymity in donor-conception hides the truth, but anonymity in storytelling helps reveal it.*” We have hundreds of stories now and have published a book through University of Chicago Press.

The *Anonymous Us Project* has taught me this: We are seriously underestimating what kinds of consequences this will have on society. Growing up, donor-conception was sold to me as normal, even worth celebrating. The *unintended* lessons that accompanied that concept are alarming and worth noting. There was a time before my activism where I was enthusiastically in favor of commercial reproduction. After all I wouldn’t exist without it. At 20, I sold my own eggs. And research has shown that donor-conceived people are 20 times more likely to sell their own sperm or eggs.[i]

But that’s not the full story. Around the same time that I sold my eggs, I was also volunteering at NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League) —fighting for the legality of partial birth abortion. After all, if it’s okay to force a child into existence because it’s so *wanted* then why is it not okay to force a child out of existence because it is *unwanted*? This was the circle of logic I couldn’t help but live by. This was my values endowment.

This isn’t just a conversation about the merit of choice in conception. If it’s okay to buy and sell

sperm, eggs, and wombs, then why is it *not* okay to sell other human tissues or organs? If it's okay to sell one's reproductive parts, why is it not okay to sell one's *sexual* parts, as in prostitution? If it's okay to pre-sell and pre-order children via third party reproduction, what is so wrong with buying and selling children who are already born or conceived? It's naïve to assume decent people won't be very confused by analogy.

Most people I speak to have not given one moment's thought to the ethical merit of third party reproduction. We're all busy people; that's understandable. We throw peripheral concepts into binary piles of good, and bad, sometimes neutral. We've accepted adoption as a good. And adoption *can often* be good in that it is an institution that finds parents for helpless children that desperately need a decent home. But at some point our concept of adoption slid—and many people now think of it primarily as a way to get kids. We know that adoption means a severing of the relationship between biological parent and child. So if adoption is good, then the severing of that relationship must at least be neutral.

But it's not neutral, it's actually very sad.

So now I hear all the time: “Well, what's the problem with sperm and egg donation? Isn't it just like adoption?” And it's true, it has become like adoption in two ways. If adoption is seen more as a way of “getting” kids, then so too is sperm donation, etc. Secondly, third party reproduction severs the biological parent-child relationship.

But adoption is only ethical as an institution that provides caretakers for *existing* children who need competent parents. Sperm and egg donation and surrogacy are inherently unethical because they set up a *market* to manufacture children for adults that want them—practically *any* adult that wants them.

In an effort to assuage the suffering of infertile adults we've created a legal and explicit marketplace in children—the loophole being that if you sign the contracts and exchange the money before a specific child exists, then it's technically not baby-selling. We've allowed this for heterosexual couples who are clinically infertile, and, because it is a for profit industry eager to increase profits, we have now expanded the pool of clientele, even if a commissioning parent's only claim to infertility is that they have neither the interest nor ability to cooperate with a member of the opposite sex on a personal level.

We're now in a place where motherhood itself is being radically attacked. Women are reduced to “gestational carriers,” denied the dignity of the word “mother.” And people work hard at promoting and creating deliberately motherless children because they've discovered how much money they can generate.

This is where the culture is taking a big wrong turn:

When men and women cooperate, and we all step up to the plate to fulfill our obligations as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, no one gets paid.

...Directly that is. The economic benefits of stable families are, in fact, huge.

For those that know and embrace this truth, the question remains—what do we do about real infertility? We all know someone whose life has been impacted by it.

The sperm count globally has decreased 50% in the last 50 years.[ii] The percentage of mammals being born *intersex* is increasing. Synthetic estrogens from plastics, pesticides and hormonal contraceptives have had a dramatic impact on our health by sabotaging the balance

of hormones in a woman's womb, causing a variety of health problems for her baby, including improper sexual and reproductive development.

These chemicals affect both sexes, but, nowadays, women struggle in unique ways due to advanced maternal age and delayed childbearing, and also due to the fact that at least 25% of female factor infertility cases can be linked directly to an sexually-transmitted infection.

Infertility is thus caused by our toxic environment as well as our toxic behavior. To solve this crisis, we do not need a marketplace in children. What we need to do is clean up our toxic environment, and clean up our toxic behavior.

Much suffering would resolve if we would consume less and reserve our erotic orifices for our spouses.

I shouldn't oversimplify, but the solution does require a range of genius. Doctors, environmental scientists, social scientists, clergy and others all need to help us solve and prevent causes of infertility—whether due to our bodies or our behavior. We need to be taught how to love others properly and manage our relationships so that childbearing is possible within women's natural fertility window, and how to create a culture where women will have the support of their children's fathers, and not just via child support checks.

But we also need to learn how to grieve, and remind people we can't infringe upon others' rights when we attempt to alleviate our own suffering.

One round of IVF can cost \$8-10,000. One surrogate + egg donor pregnancy can cost up to \$300,000. We have the resources, the will and the intelligence to *actually* cure or prevent many forms of infertility. But we have to reject treating people like products.

I participated in a documentary where I engaged in a conversation with a gay man who had hired a surrogate to gestate twins, conceived with his little sister's eggs. I asked him what he and his partner would do if they discovered the twins had Down syndrome. The surrogate was 4.5 months pregnant at the time. He said, "We've talked about this and we would go ahead and abort."

On a forum I was reading several years ago there was a single mom by choice who had given birth to a son with severe learning disabilities. She asked, "Does anyone know if I can get a refund?"

Even though these processes create new life, please understand that they are not *pro* life.

Even though you hear again and again that these processes work to "make people happy", please understand that they do not in fact make people happy. They only delay or transfer pain.

I recently received a story on *AnonymousUs.org*—the author describes how she doesn't want to meet her father because:

Anyone who willingly degrades women to sexual objectification in pornography, willingly disowns the children he doesn't personally want, willingly impregnates multiple strangers, has these people raise his biological children, and never once in his life checks in to see if his kids are healthy, happy, alive, is not worth my time looking for.

And with that I want to end with a quote from a friend of mine, Mark Oshinskie:[iii]

Reproductive Technologies are like building one's dream home in Yosemite Valley: it pleases the consumer and their family and friends, but it costs the culture something far more precious and universal, namely the notion that life is sacred. Don't expect a world in which the will of the sovereign consumer trumps all else to resemble the one in which your parents grew up, or to be a very good place to raise kids.

[i] http://americanvalues.org/catalog/pdfs/Donor_FINAL...

[ii] <http://www.desireerover.nl/wp-content/uploads/OUR-...>

[iii] http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/osh/osh_10onethi...

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