

SERVICE TO RELIEVE THE PAIN OF BARRENNESS
Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

Sometime back I wrote an article on the immorality of women offering service as surrogate mothers producing children for some couples for money. My article appeared in a family magazine DOOT run by Jesuits for Gujarati Christians. A number of Catholic women had become surrogate mothers at Anand and Nadiad cities. Some Christians like nurses are associated with invitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood and promoting them. So I was not surprised that among those who wrote letters of appreciation there were also voices of protest.

A Catholic nurse from Nadiad was vehement in her protest. “Fr. Varghese, you are wrong in writing against invitro fertilization and surrogate mothers. You do not know anything. We are doing a great service to the poor people. Through surrogate mothers their poor family gets to eat, they are able to marry their daughters or send their children for higher education. We are doing a service also to barren couples helping them to have their own children.”

I understand the sufferings of childless couples and the pain of barrenness of men or women. They are often taunted and ridiculed for no fault of theirs! The Bible has portrayed such people and their agony. In the book of Genesis Abraham complains to God bitterly. “Sovereign Lord, what good will your reward do me, since I have no children? My only heir is Eliezer of Damascus. You have given me no children, and one of my slaves will inherit my property” (Gen 15, 2-3). In the same book of Genesis Rachel in her suffering of childlessness wants to die. “But Rachel had not borne Jacob any children, and so she became jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or I will die’” (Gen 30,1).

The response of Rachel’s husband to her threat to kill herself in her pain of childlessness, is to the point. “I cannot take the place of God. He is the one who keeps you from having children” (Gen 30, 2). Here the Bible tells us clearly that God is the only giver of all lives. He is the source of all lives. He is the life-giver.

The Christian religion teaches that a human life begins its existence in the body of a woman. A human life should come into existence only within the body of a woman. A moral conception of a child happens in the body of a woman, a wife when the sperm of her husband meets her egg in her body.

The Christian religion holds that in order to improve the chances of conception, eggs of a woman or the sperms of a man may be extracted and medically treated and they may be planted in the body of the wife and the fecundation or the conception should take place within the body of the woman.

Christian religion has moral and ethical objections to extracting eggs and sperms of woman and man, even if they are husband and wife, and fertilizing the egg with the sperms in test tube. Christian religion objects to such invitro fertilization as immoral and unethical because the technology of invitro fertilization separates the marital intercourse from its unitive and procreative dimension. Marital union envisages the possibility of the couple being the co-creative partners of God in brining a new life into existence.

In bringing life into existence through modern technology of invitro fertilization there is no marital union. There is no experience of intimate relation of husband and wife. There is no human dignity in invitro fertilization.

For these and similar reasons the Christian religion also objects to the practice of surrogate motherhood. Getting child through a surrogate mother is unethical and immoral because the couple desiring to have their own child uses a third person, another woman. People invent and use machines to reduce work and make production easy. In invitro fertilization a couple uses a woman like machine as a means of producing their child. Then in test tube fecundation only the most healthy fertilized egg is implanted in the womb of a woman. In the process all other fertilized eggs are destroyed. Here we see the destruction of helpless human beings existing in fertilized eggs!

Some people say that the Christian religion has no sympathy for or understanding of the pain and suffering of the childless couples or barren people because the Church objects to surrogate motherhood and invitro fertilization. This is not a question of sympathy and understandings. It is a question of a child. It is a question of human existence. A child is not the property of its parents. A child is not a thing to be bought and sold. A child is a precious gift of God, the Creator to its parents. Here we may recall the words of Khalil Gibran:

“Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.”

The parents have no right over their children as they are the unique gift of God to them. But the children have their rights. They have the right for the love and protection of their parents. They have the right to respect as a human being from the moment of their conception in the wombs of their mothers. They live their own existence and have their own identity.

In a marriage if the woman or the man is barren the couple need not consider the barrenness as a curse or a crime. Christian religion teaches that in the such situation of childlessness the couple should unite themselves to the Cross of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says, “The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses will still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord’s Cross, the Source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding service for others.” (contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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