

# From Infertility to Spiritual Abundance

**I**nfertility is defined as failure to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse. About 10 percent of couples will experience it, or about 6.1 million couples of reproductive age. The condition can be likened to a chronic illness where the cause is often unclear and the outcome is sometimes unpredictable. Medical science has determined that roughly one third of cases are due to male biological factors and about an equal number to female biological factors. The remaining cases are either a combination of male and female factors or, for about 20 percent, simply unexplainable.<sup>1</sup>

Emotionally, infertility is a major life crisis for both men and women. However, the two sexes seem to respond to infertility differently. Although some women sail through unscathed, perhaps choosing to remain childless, more often than not this is a traumatic experience for women. Traditionally, women have been more identified with fertility and parenthood. Thus it is deeply disorienting when a woman realizes she will not be experiencing what all along she took for granted, pregnancy and childbirth.

Women may be aware of feelings of deep grief, helplessness, irritability, lack of energy, sorrow, and a range of other emotions they may acknowledge but not know how to deal with. In fact, it is asserted that “women with fertility problems suffer as much distress as women

with heart disease or cancer.”<sup>2</sup> Men, on the other hand, may not express these feelings since traditionally men have often been less willing to talk about the problem. Instead, they may show anger (a more acceptable male response) rather than sadness, and may find outlets for confirming feelings of self worth through work, sports and other activities. Nevertheless, they suffer as well. William Petok says that:

“The notion of continuing a genetic line has strong emotional connections for many men, particularly those who are only sons. Infertility can mean not only the inability to pass along the family name but also the family genes. One result may be a man’s retreat into silence about his infertility. This might be a gender specific response to stress, not necessarily a lack of feeling about the situation. In some cultures where masculinity or machismo is very important it is common to find the female partner taking public responsibility for the infertility as a way of protecting the man from the perceived shame of being the cause.”<sup>3</sup>

No matter how they express it, both men and women may feel infertility as an assault on their sexual identity and have deep feelings of failure, shame and/or loss. Dealing with the emotional impact of infertility is often as time-consuming and difficult as dealing with the medical aspects.<sup>4</sup>

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*This publication is one in a series of educational resource materials. The views are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the member groups of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.*

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Not all cases of infertility are permanent, of course. Some couples will go on to conceive without medical intervention and some will use reproductive technology that results in conception. But some will have to deal with infertility as a last word on biological reproduction. Although each of these scenarios is different, the emotional and spiritual toll of all of them can be profound. According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine: "Infertility often creates one of the most distressing life crises that a couple has ever experienced together."<sup>5</sup>

But, in addition, infertility can also become the first real *spiritual* crisis that many people experience.<sup>6</sup> For infertility has the potential to call into question one's relationship with God, one's faith, and one's deepest values.<sup>7</sup> As we will see later, however, an experience of infertility can also be used as a turning point that positively re-orient one's spirituality and life in the world.

Before we can appreciate the unexpected benefits that can happen when infertility is allowed to promote spiritual growth, the crisis must first be acknowledged. Therefore, let me chronicle some of the reasons that infertility—hard enough just biologically and emotionally—can be made harder spiritually as well by society, church, and inadequate theology.

### **The Stress on the Biological Family**

For religious people, procreating is more than simply a normal human expectation. In the view of Christianity, it is often presented as an especially valued thing. The Bible seems to promote this in many ways: Adam and Eve are told to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), people are identified through their family genealogies (for example, 1 Chronicles chapters 1-8; Luke 3:23-38), and God is often portrayed as blessing people by giving them children (for example, 1 Samuel 1:17-20; Luke 1:13-14). If childbearing is such a good thing, a couple may wonder, why is it being denied to them?

When couples desire to conceive but do not, many feel defective, marked, or embarrassed that such a seemingly natural accomplishment evades them. They may wonder if God is punishing them for some reason. They may think God has determined they would not be good parents and so prevents conception. They may fear that some deep-seated sin, some ineradicable selfishness, has somehow caused this plight. Sometimes other people approach the couple with similarly

unhelpful theology. Some may tell them, for instance, to "just have more faith," implying that some spiritual lack stands in the way of their goal. Others might ask, "What is God trying to tell you?" implying that God has sent this experience as a lesson. All of this just adds more doubts to the couple's own.

These theological speculations are not only unproductive; they are unwarranted. We will see this later when we take a wider view of who God is and who we are. But first we must ask why these reactions are so common. I contend that many of our initial spiritual speculations are provoked not just by inadequate theology, but also by societal issues out of our control. Consider, first, our contemporary situation. We live in a highly mobile, bureaucratic, anonymous and transient world. People move frequently, don't know their neighbors well, live far from their birthplaces, and have no permanent group to rely on. It is no wonder that today many people feel alienated and alone.<sup>8</sup>

Many of us long for community and for people who are a reliable presence in our day-to-day lives. This is a normal human need, which has been met in a variety of ways in different eras.<sup>9</sup> These arrangements include such things as the monastic community, kin groupings, the utopian society (such as the Shakers<sup>10</sup>) and the extended family. It is the extended family, however, that people often compare with our contemporary world. Indeed, our families are quite minimalist by comparison. For where once people could nurture long-lasting relationships through multiple roles—as daughter, aunt, cousin, sibling—today we have many fewer options.

Today so many people are lonely that it seems logical that we look to the nuclear family with its parent-child bond as perhaps one of the main places to experience deep and abiding intimacy. While some of this longing for the idealized family may be a romanticizing of the past,<sup>11</sup> the need for intimacy is real. So today, even though many of us look first for intimacy from an adult partner, the prevalence of separation and divorce makes even that feel somewhat unreliable.<sup>12</sup> With a child, on the other hand, many expect to have a more enduring relationship, at least until the child reaches adulthood. This desire for intimacy and for the parent-child bond is good, but it heightens the pain of infertility. We all need to find a variety of ways to address our relational needs.

The church would be a likely place to look for such connections. However, over the past few centuries Protestantism in particular has shifted its attention from Christian community to the Christian family.<sup>13</sup> And while the church is aware and worried about our contemporary situation, it has often responded more reactively than creatively. For as churches look at this world of high divorce rates and out-of-wedlock, single, and alternative family groupings, many believe they are confronting the “breakdown of the family.”<sup>14</sup> In reaction, they have tended to emphasize the biological family even more and to elevate “family values.” Although it is good that churches want to support families, the church’s efforts can add to feelings of shame and isolation for infertile couples.

Many couples struggling with infertility also just feel left out.<sup>15</sup> Church programs often center on some aspect of the standard family unit: religious education for children, groups for parents, events for young adults who seek to partner, support for widowed persons who have lost partners. In the midst of this activity, the unique needs of those who are infertile—as well as of divorced persons, single parents, and those disinclined or unable to marry—are left out, relegating these persons to a marginalized status. However, as we will see later, this is a less-than-biblical understanding of Christian community.

To understand the higher calling of Christians and church, we need to explore several theological themes that relate to infertility and can lead to spiritual renewal, deeper relationships, and the abundant life we are promised in Scripture.

## Humans and God

Christian theology spends much time considering what it means to be human. Humans are part of the created order, but we are also unique because we have a dual status. We are part of the earth and as such are finite biological beings, limited, mortal, bound in time and place. With other created beings we share certain characteristics: the drive to survive, to reproduce, to be social, and to seek affiliation. As creatures of the earth, we are affected by our environment, and subject to disease, infirmity, aging and death.

But the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures teach that we are also made in the image of God. This *Imago Dei* gives us the ability to dream, plan, envision, transcend and transform

our circumstances. We can hope for more than is simply in front of us, our desires can go beyond mere survival and avoidance of pain. We can creatively transform our situations in unexpected ways. Thus humans are caught in the tension between these two states, finitude and freedom. We can either respond to this dual state destructively or creatively. God’s grace, which surrounds us on all sides, gives us the ability to respond creatively.

Thus for humans the impulse to survive, reproduce, and affiliate can move beyond the biological level and assume spiritual proportions. It can help us become God’s emissaries, those who announce and model Scripture’s goal, the ultimate reign of God and the kinship of all peoples. The drive to reproduce can open out into a wider hospitality. Ideally, as we will see later, the family unit should not surround itself with rigid boundaries, delineating who is in and who is out. Rather, a more spiritual understanding of family sees it as a unit with distinctive yet permeable boundaries, one that makes room at the table for those not of our “blood.” Oddly enough it is the very experience and pain of infertility—coupled with our normal need to affiliate—which can motivate us to go beyond the nuclear family and form spiritual community. And our group survival impulse can lead us to treat all of creation as our home and family.

But none of this makes sense unless we first understand the character of God. This is crucial because problematic theological ideas about God can cause special pain to those experiencing infertility. It is helpful to review some basic Christian beliefs about God. Christian theology teaches that God’s character is made most evident in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Here we see a God that seeks us as fervently as a lover, who yearns for us to respond, and who is willing to go to great lengths to free us from the constraints that prevent us returning the divine love. Since God has created us, the divine Parent is well aware of our limitations and our weaknesses. God is also aware that we are subject to the presence of disease, biological infirmities, and other external factors that theologians call “non-moral evil.” This includes those painful or harmful things for which humans are not directly responsible (tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, influenza, or infertility, for example).

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Yet God has created us good and wants for us to be whole in every way, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Reconsidering infertility in this light makes us realize that it is antithetical to the character of God to assume that infertility is “sent” as a lesson, punishment or curse by God. Nor is infertility God’s judgment on our selfishness. God knows that *everyone* is selfish in some way. Scripture tells us that “*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” [Romans 3:23]

Sin can aptly be described as “being turned in upon yourself.” This common understanding, used by Martin Luther among others, can be defined as a kind of narcissism where we become our main concern and frame of reference. We spend our time “looking out for number one” rather than moving outside ourselves towards the pain and needs of others. Not only is God not surprised at this problem, but God’s grace is specifically directed at freeing us from it, not punishing us for it. And what better way to move beyond this than the sacrificial love required of a parent. Why would God deny us something that would very likely make us less self-centered?

Nor is it helpful to assume God wants us to be alone so we can pray more or be more devoted to God’s will. Although God does want our love, God does not deny us the intimacy of the parent-child bond like some narcissistic lover who wants us all for him or herself. Instead, God is supremely relational, which is what Christian theology means when it says that God is triune, a Trinity. God thus affirms relationship as good. Not only does God long for relationship with us, but God understands our need for human relationship. God knows it is not good for us to be alone. Indeed, when people long for intimacy they are reflecting God’s very nature. So God understands, promotes, and supports the desire for deep intimacy that is often the basis of our longing for a child.

God is also supremely creative. God can take the problems of our lives and turn them into unexpected resources. But God will only do that with our consent since God has given us the ability to respond or turn away from divine grace, just so that we can come to God freely. Therefore, how we respond to a crisis has much to do with the ultimate outcome. It is up to us to turn toward divine grace, to be willing to accept it, and to respond to normal human anxiety with creativity rather than destructiveness.

By realizing God’s desire and love for us, we become more open to allowing God’s grace to flow in and through the spiritual crisis of infertility, such that a problem instead becomes a catalyst for a positive change in persons, the church and even society. It is amazing how God can use the crises that befall us to bring about unexpected spiritual riches, if only we open our eyes to the grace that surrounds us. The gospel message does not simply reserve abundance for the after-life, but promises that it is available now. Thus relationship, intimacy, peace and joy are all components of a grace-filled life in the here-and-now.

### **From Reproduction to Radical Hospitality**

Infertility, while not sent or chosen by God, can nevertheless become something that divine creativity can use for good. There is a way that infertility can open us up to a more radical hospitality than we have ever known. It helps to realize that biological reproduction does not hold supreme value in the Bible. Instead, we are called to a deeper and wider bond. While Scripture recognizes that children and family are a good thing, it points us to a greater calling. We are commanded, in fact, to be radically open to those not of our “blood.”<sup>16</sup>

The Bible repeatedly calls believers to welcome the marginalized and the stranger. In Jeremiah, for example, the people are admonished to “Do justice and righteousness... do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow.” (Jer 22:3) In the New Testament, believers are told they should “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Heb 13:2) Indeed, Jesus wanted his disciples to see his own face in the face of the stranger, and receive them as family. He tells his listeners to feed the hungry, visit the sick and do other acts of kindness for “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matt 25:34-46)

Therefore, while it is a natural part of love to want to share it—such as in birthing children—it is also possible to use the desire to reproduce in ways that open us to new forms of hospitality. Even the pain of infertility, when God’s grace is allowed to infuse it, can become a catalyst towards spiritual growth. As infertile couples become conscious of the ways they feel excluded from church activities and other child-centered events, they can begin to sense

the pain of other excluded persons, such as gays, lesbians, the disabled, and the immigrant. An awareness and empathy for others whom our society marginalizes can be one important spiritual gain from the crisis of infertility.

This new awareness does not end the pain of infertility. However, it can set it into a larger framework. The command to be fruitful and multiply can take a different form and extend beyond procreation.<sup>17</sup> Of course, procreation is a normal desire, but it is no longer a necessity in a world that is becoming increasingly overpopulated. While the urge to leave a piece of ourselves behind is understandable, even commendable, there is more than one way to accomplish this task. It is hard to give up the dream of a little person who has our eyes, our partner's laugh, the family body type. But there is more than just one way to transcend and share ourselves.

When it is a child that you want and cannot have, sometimes the initial sorrow, pain, emptiness, and grief—as well as feelings of anger, shame, envy, and/or bitterness—are hard to control.<sup>18</sup> These feelings can prevent us from seeing other ways to achieve our goals. Yet God's grace can always find ways to seep into the tightest box of despair. Our responsibility is to use our anxiety over infertility creatively rather than destructively, following the pinpricks of light that God uses to guide us beyond our distress.<sup>19</sup>

When the church lives out a larger vision of its role, it can help forge more creative and grace-filled ways to conceive family and community. The church is meant to be a form of community that provides non-biological connection, which includes an element of covenant. While alternative relationships will not take the place of children, we may nevertheless grow into deeper relationships with each other than we might have had otherwise.

None of this is meant to minimize the importance of the nuclear family, for it also has the potential for practicing radical hospitality. Christians have often believed that the family is like a little church, a very small Christian community. But it should be a community with permeable, rather than rigid, boundaries. Everyone should have a place in this family. When families take the opportunity to welcome the stranger into their midst, church community is facilitated. This is preferable to a family so inward looking that it excludes others

who are not “blood.” It is not just individuals who can be “turned in upon themselves,” but also groups.

### **Adoption as Metaphor and as Reality**

Adoption is a perfect metaphor for the church community. While everyone is part of God's creation, those who turn towards God intentionally are welcomed as sons and daughters; we are adopted and become no longer “slaves” but heirs and partners. (Galatians 2:4-7) Romans says: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”<sup>20</sup> In effect, the whole church is an adopted family.

Through our connection with God and Jesus, we become siblings to each other. As scholar S. Scott Bartchy says: “Jesus...redefined the basis and limits of family life, rejecting blood ties in favor of the faith-based sibling-like bond he created among his followers. Persons who do God's will have become Jesus' siblings with God alone as their parent.”<sup>21</sup>

Taking the model of church as an adopted family, we should be finding ways to include everyone. Newcomers and those without deep connections can be incorporated into particular families—such as for holiday celebrations, joint projects, errand sharing, meal-times or weekend outings. Older adults can become surrogate grandparents to children without grandparents. Single people can become honorary aunts and uncles. Networks of friends can act as extended family to each other, especially when sickness and crises occur, but also in times of happiness and celebration. Intentional bonds can be forged so that no one has to feel continually alone, isolated and un-included. When couples let the experience of infertility heighten their awareness of those who lack family ties or proximity, they have a new perspective even as they continue to seek ways to build their own nuclear family. And when they do achieve their goal, hopefully they will continue to model the openness they have learned.

Here, then, is a great area for spiritual transformation, both personally and societally. Those who experience infertility have both the need and the unique opportunity to practice a more radical openness than is common in

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our world. This can be accomplished in many ways, but one of the most obvious is through the actual adoption of a child. While the bond with an adopted child is often just as strong as any biological bond, it can be different in surprising, positive ways. For one thing, there are no genetic or biological markers to guide the parents, no bodily similarities, no personality quirks that they can attribute to a family tendency. Without these touchstones, an adoptive parent must be ready for anything and prepared to embrace someone from entirely different “stock.”<sup>22</sup> This is good practice for learning to accept others as they are without forcing them into our own mold.

It is helpful to realize that Scripture shows God blessing people who find creative ways to form bonds. For instance, the Book of Ruth shows two women, Ruth and Naomi, who are not blood-relatives, but mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When they unfortunately lose all their biological kin—and logically should separate for purposes of survival—Naomi instead fully commits herself to Ruth. They endure hardships together, help each other out and eventually enjoy God’s blessing of renewed life.

Hopefully, this kind of openness and hospitality—whether through actual adoption or seeing the church as an adopted family—will become a habit. Hopefully, it will extend beyond the walls of the church as well. Learning to see fellow congregants—people who, just like family members, one does not always choose and may not feel affinity towards—is excellent practice for treating the human community in the same way. All children are, in a way, *our* children for they are our future. *All* the elderly are our ancestors and deserve our respect and care. As we learn to see those in our spiritual community as family, we should begin to realize that our lives are bound up with so many others even if they are not “of our blood.” Through learning openness to caring for non-family members, we may begin to see our whole interdependent world as God’s family and our own.

There is no denying that infertility is a profound crisis with many different facets. But, as with the many other shocks and unexpected hurts in life, it can become the impetus for spiritual growth, a new perspective on life, and a personal transformation that God can use to help our troubled world.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control (1995 U.S statistics) 6.1 million women ages 15-44 had an impaired ability to have children; 9.3 million women used infertility services; 2.1 million married couples were diagnosed as infertile. From *Fertility, Family Planning, and Women’s Health: New Data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth*; CDC Division of Reproductive Health, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From the National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD 20782, (301) 458-4000.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for instance, “A New Fertility Factor” in *Newsweek*, p.72-74, Sept. 27, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> William D. Petok, Ph.D., “Male Infertility” from *Family Building Magazine* [no date or pages given, cited by 1998-2004 RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association] [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org). Petok adds that “Sexual problems can surface with a diagnosis of male factor infertility. Erectile dysfunction and loss of desire can occur. If he feels that his masculinity is compromised a man may worry so much about his ability to function as a ‘man’ that he finds himself unable to achieve or maintain an erection. Or, the same feelings can rob him of desire for sex. Treatment, which tends to remove the privacy of sex because diagnostic procedures can require ‘sex on demand,’ further exacerbate these problems, even when a couple is being sexual for other than procreative reasons. The fun and intimacy can leave the process due to worry and frustration. Some may feel that making love is pointless because it can’t result in a pregnancy.”

<sup>4</sup> For in-depth information on the emotional aspects of infertility consult RESOLVE's Fact Sheet #18a. This can be ordered from their website [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org). See also "Therapies for the Emotional Issues of Infertility" by Barbara Blitzer, MSW, [www.inciid.org](http://www.inciid.org) [InterNational Council on Infertility Information Dissemination, Inc.]

<sup>5</sup> "The long term inability to conceive a child can evoke significant feelings of loss. Coping with the multitude of medical decisions and the uncertainties that infertility brings can create great emotional upheaval for most couples. If you find yourself feeling anxious, depressed, out of control, or isolated, you are not alone." 2000-2004 American Society for Reproductive Medicine (formerly The American Fertility Society). Listed on Infertility Resources, developed and hosted by Internet Health Resources, [www.ihr.com](http://www.ihr.com).

<sup>6</sup> "Rev. Laura Taylor, assistant pastor at Ellisville United Methodist Church in Missouri, gives an annual sermon on infertility and includes her own story of struggling with infertility, adopting two girls and finally having a biological son. She says some people's first spiritual crisis is linked to infertility. Not being able to have children is the first time they realize they are not in total control of their lives. Often infertile people turn against God and strongly question their faith as they go through the grief cycle of shock, anger and blame. But, after questioning what is meant for them in life, she says some people's relationship with God strengthens, as they find their path as adoptive parents or accept their childlessness." *The Osgood File (CBS Radio Network)*: 8/1/03

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, "Integrated Therapies for the Emotional Issues of Infertility" By Barbara Blitzer, MSW. She says, "Since infertility can be difficult, it also can challenge spiritual beliefs. I've prayed and my prayers have not been answered. I'm mad at God. Maybe I think I'm being punished for my past mistakes. Maybe, because something is wrong with me, God doesn't want me to have a child. Mindbody techniques and emotional healing can bring us closer to our hearts and our own, very personal answers, regardless of what belief system we identify with." [www.inciid.org](http://www.inciid.org)

<sup>8</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) shows how these aspects of modern culture affect the self, making us hungry for notice, connection, and recognition.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief history of the religious and political aspirations for community, see Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *The Ethics of Community* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed example from a theological perspective, see Linda Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine and God: The Shakers and Contemporary Theology* (Abingdon, 1990)

<sup>11</sup> "Like most visions of a 'golden age,' the 'traditional family'...evaporates on closer examination. It is an ahistorical amalgam of structures, values, and behaviors that never coexisted in the same time and place. The notion that traditional families fostered intense intimacy between husbands and wives while creating mothers who were totally available to their children, for example, is an idea that combines some characteristics of the white, middle-class family in the mid-nineteenth century and some of a rival family ideal first articulated in the 1920s. The first family revolved emotionally around the mother-child axis, leaving the husband-wife relationship stilted and formal. The second focused on an eroticized couple relationship, demanding that mothers curb emotional 'overinvestment' in their children. The hybrid idea that a woman can be fully absorbed with her youngsters while simultaneously maintaining passionate sexual excitement with her husband was a 1950s invention that drove thousands of women to therapists, tranquilizers, or alcohol when they actually tried to live up to it." Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* [New York: Basic Books, 1992] p.9.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do About It* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003].

<sup>13</sup> One treatment of this development is Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 2002)

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., "A Crumbling Institution: How Social Revolutions Cracked the Pillars of Marriage," David P. Gushee, in *Christianity Today*, September 2004, Vol. 48, No. 9, p.42. Gushee says: "Both cathedrals and social institutions take a long time to build and are not easily brought down. Like a building damaged from all sides, marriage has weakened dramatically from cultural blows in ways that few anticipated." "Contemporary marriage involves the mixing and matching, mending and blending of human families into loosely tethered fragments. The statistics tell the tale. The combination of nonmarital childbearing, cohabitation, and divorce, among the other factors discussed here, has rocked the institution of marriage to its foundations. A nearly 50 percent divorce rate, 33 percent illegitimacy rate, and 50 percent of all couples cohabiting before marriage have made the married two-parent family with their own resident children an increasingly rare phenomenon in U.S. life."

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- <sup>15</sup> “While infertility is widespread, affecting 6 million Americans, ministering to infertile couples is not common. But an Assemblies of God church near Seattle has become a spiritual haven for people who can’t conceive. For the past 12 years, Pastor Joe Fuiten, of the Cedar Park Assembly of God Church in Othell, has asked infertile couples to come forward to be blessed on Presentation Sunday—the day Mary and Joseph first brought Jesus to the temple. The tradition began spontaneously, Pastor Fuiten says, and has since evolved into a major tradition with 20 local churches and people from across the U.S. participating. Last year 125 couples (and some singles) attended, including Buddhists, Catholics and Muslims.” *The Osgood File (CBS Radio Network)* 8/1/03
- <sup>16</sup> See Linda Mercadante, “Infertility and the Quest for Family,” in Nadine Pentz Frantz and Mary L. Stimming, eds. *Hope Deferred: Theological Perspectives on Reproductive Loss* [Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005]
- <sup>17</sup> This passage is easily misinterpreted, but even the conservative periodical *Christianity Today* recognizes that this phrase does not command every married couple to have children. As writer Raymond Van Leeuwen says: “God does not command humans to be fruitful. Rather, he himself will bless his creatures and see to it that they are fruitful. He has provided for this by making us male and female, by investing our humanness with sexual desire and love, and by ordaining marriage as the place for, among other things, joyful lovemaking.” *Christianity Today*, November 12, 2001
- <sup>18</sup> See the article by Mary Stimming in *Hope Deferred* [Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005]. See also article by Linda Mercadante in same volume.
- <sup>19</sup> On moving from feelings of victimization and helplessness towards God’s grace, see Linda Mercadante, “Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization,” in *The Anglican Theological Review*, Spring 2000, Vol. 82, No.2, pp.283-302.
- <sup>20</sup> Romans 8:15; see also Galatians 4:6. These passages distinguish between the dependent but lesser status of “slave” and the closer status of “son” or “child.”
- <sup>21</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, “Secret Siblings,” *Sojourners Magazine*, November 2004, pp.32-36. He asks readers to consider such passages as Mark 3:35, Matthew 12:50 and Luke 8:21.
- <sup>22</sup> There are many good books on adoption, two of which are Lois Ruskin Melina, *Raising Adopted Children: A Manual for Adoptive Parents* [New York: Harper & Row, 1986] and Holly van Gulden and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb, *Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting the Adopted Child* [New York: Crosswood, 1997].

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The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, founded in 1973 by people of faith, is the national organization dedicated to preserving reproductive choice on religious grounds. RCRC members are national groups from 15 denominations and faith traditions including the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalism and Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism and Catholics for a Free Choice and other independent religious organizations. A non-partisan, non-profit education and advocacy organization, the Coalition includes the Clergy for Choice Network, Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom chapters, The National Black Church Initiative, state affiliates throughout the nation, and individuals committed to reproductive and religious freedom.

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