

Tentatio April 2002 - Amoral Times

It is not uncommon for parishioners to come to a pastor after discovering that what they are about to do has some moral implications. A couple, considering the use of reproductive technologies comes to the pastor because someone has said to them that having a child by means of in vitro fertilization is morally unacceptable. This couple is genuinely concerned with doing the right thing and admits to the pastor somewhat defensively that they had not thought of the procedure as a morally questionable one. The pastor, likewise, is uncertain as to whether what they are asking about is morally acceptable or not, and in fact, it all depends on what we ARE talking about.

We live in times jaded by the past thirty years emphasis on valueless choice. Generations of young people have now become middle-aged adults who are hardly able to think in terms of making moral judgments about new possibilities offered by biotechnology. It seemed enough in the past to simply weigh the risks against the benefits in deciding what to do. But in recent years the underlying moral conscience in all of us has begun to stir. Hardly a controversial issue makes the headlines before moral questions are raised, most recently for example, the moral issue of human embryonic stem cell research and human cloning. Even President George W. Bush has made it clear from the beginning that moral issues are at stake.

To be amoral is to be without the ability to distinguish morally acceptable behavior from morally unacceptable behavior. Through conditioning we can lose the moral skills for even recognizing a moral issue when it confronts us. Discerning moral questions and their answers requires the skills of careful, unbiased thinking and honest, self-disciplined reflection. For several generations young people have been encouraged, through techniques in “values clarification,” to set aside objective moral standards and create their own. But all that may be changing. Human nature will always center the universe on self, but the events of September 11th have caused many to question the too-easy way, perhaps naïve way we have dealt with matters of right and wrong in the recent past. There is no question but that the terrorism, which destroyed so many lives, is morally wrong and those behind it need to be brought to justice. The same realization of right and wrong may be in the wind for other issues we have lived with for too long such as abortion at least as a means of contraception, the atrocity of elective partial birth abortion, the practice of physician assisted suicide in Oregon, and some methods of reproductive technology.

The times may be changing in the right direction. Deeply buried moral sensitivities are beginning to rise to the surface for examination. It is no longer possible for the intimidating voices of the politically correct to justify their bashing of those who raise moral questions. It is a time for an intelligent and civil voice from Christians, who speak both Law and Gospel, to be heard. Speaking Law as what we must not do is easy, but speaking Gospel as that which God has done in the midst of moral chaos is not. What needs to be heard is not just the limits of God’s Law, but also the action of God in Christ in giving us more than moral principles to live by. God has given us Christ’s very life, alive in us, to free us from the need or desire to seek immoral solutions of our own. All of us need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of terror, as well as peace, for the enemy is demonic in nature and only God can cure the human soul.