

Unconventional Conception

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April 18, 2015



Today I read an announcement, within an e-newsletter to which I'm subscribed, about a blessed couple who were offering to donate their embryos to a couple in need. Despite the lack of details provided, it appears as if this couple already have two children and, having harvested some embryos a few years ago through IVF, have made the decision to donate them to a couple struggling with their fertility. This is a noble gesture, an act of kindness consistent with the principle of living for the sake of others. But red flags are being raised in my mind and I feel caution is required.

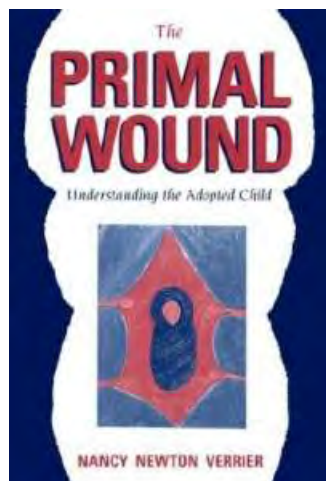
To begin with, I think it's important to clarify what is being offered for donation: these embryos are the result of a fertilised egg and sperm from the donor parents. Their entire genetic material will come from the donor parents; were any of these embryos to grow into a human being, it would be a genetic sibling to the 2 children of the donor couple. In order for these embryos to grow into a baby, they need to be incubated in a womb. I foresee three possible options for gestation: the donor mother implants the egg into her own uterus (assuming she is able to) and carries the pregnancy herself; the recipient mother acts as a surrogate and incubates the fetus within her own uterus; or, if the recipient mother is unable to gestate a fetus, a separate surrogate could offer to carry the pregnancy and subsequently hand over the baby to the adoptive mother once the baby is born.



In all three instances, there are various dynamics that need to be considered. The fetus gestated within the uterus of the adoptive mother will already in the womb form an emotional connection to the host, and so when that baby is born it will merely continue to build on the existing emotional and spiritual relationship cultivated in utero. However, in the cases of the donor mother or a separate surrogate carrying the pregnancy, the fetus will form a primal bond to the host mother which, after the newborn baby is handed over to the adoptive mother, will be broken. This will inevitably lead to some trauma which could be described as an attachment disorder.

In *The Primal Wound*, a book by Nancy Newton Verrier about adoption, explores the primal wound that most adopted children would experience, a wound that any adoptive parent needs to be aware of. I would highly recommend that adopted people, adoptive

families, donor birth parents and adoption professionals read this book as it deals with the separation anxiety that can be buried deep in the foundational psychology of an adopted child and may affect them for life. The good news is that, while there may be a wound caused by the initial detachment, it can be healed and covered over by a strong attachment to the adoptive parents, especially the adoptive mother in the first moments of the baby's life.



Unificationists have a tradition of offering children to childless couples; I know many individuals who were adopted by childless couples, conceived with the purpose of being offered by their biological parents. My anecdotal observations inform me that some of these individuals have formed healthy emotional bonds within their adoptive families, while some of them have not. An area worthy of research, in my opinion. I could post a separate entry on the topic of adoption more generally – I personally do not know of any Unificationists who have adopted a child from an orphanage or from similar circumstances, for example, whether they were infertile or not – but for now I feel compelled to share my opinion with those couples who have offered, are considering to offer, have received or are considering to receive a child:

It is vitally important to make very conscientious efforts to forge an emotional attachment between the adopted child and the adoptive parents, especially with the adoptive mother initially. The offering parents, I feel, should remain in good contact with the adoptive family and provide strong emotional support, as extended family, like an uncle and aunty. Especially where the adoptive parents have never been parents before, they will need guidance and support in learning how to become the best parents possible to their adopted child. I'm not saying that the child should be spoilt – far from it, as the child grows it needs to be loved in ways that reflect the developing maturity of the child. Nevertheless, especially in the first 3 years of life that child needs to bond deeply with its mother; subsequent with the father can begin at any stage, but becomes more important a year or two after the baby has developed.



This advice, of course, is true for any parent, but for adoptive parents I feel it is important to be aware of the potential for a separation wound created in handing over the baby from the gestational mother (be it the biological or surrogate mother) to the adoptive mother. This wound needs to be healed and ignoring it could lead to emotional, psychological and even spiritual problems later as the child grapples with his or her own identity and status within society and the world.

I would add one further opinion which is that I would recommend and encourage any adoptive parents to consider adopting more than one child, to ensure that their adopted child does not remain as an only child. Children benefit from having siblings with whom to grow up, learning the dynamics of the second realm of heart in the safe context of the family. I could elaborate further in another entry, but for now I feel it is enough simply to state my position and continue reflecting another time.

Image Credits

<http://www.nhs.uk/news/2015/01/january/pages/nordic-ivf-outcomes-improving-is-same-true-for-uk.aspx>

<http://angelmeditations.net/blog/spiritual-pregnancy/>

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Primal-Wound-Understanding-Adopted/dp/0963648004>

<http://www.qgifts.co.uk/Willow-Tree-Our-Gift-26181>