

Surrogacy: What Are the Pro-Life Concerns?

What is Surrogacy?

Surrogacy is a practice in which a woman (called the “surrogate” or “surrogate mother”) agrees to carry and give birth to a child that she will give to another parent or parents. She may or may not be related to the child, depending on the type of surrogacy.

There are two kinds of surrogacy: gestational and traditional.

For gestational surrogacy, the surrogate carries a child not genetically related to her. This means she did not provide her own eggs to create the embryo. The eggs may be from the “parent” (the person who will take the child as her and/or his own after birth) or from a donor (another woman). Some have considered this “renting her womb and body for the pregnancy” (2). This is the most common type of surrogacy. If one of the parents is related to the child (either as the egg donor or the sperm donor) then there are fewer legal complications. (4)

The second type of surrogacy is traditional surrogacy. In this case the woman carrying the pregnancy is the biological mother. Her eggs were used to create the embryo, and she carries and gives birth to the baby. Obviously, this requires the biological mother to give up parental rights to the intended parent(s). This type of surrogacy is illegal in many states and has many legal complications. (4)

Why Do People Seek Out Surrogacy, Why Do Women Do This?

Those seeking to have a child via surrogacy may be infertile, may be single, or may be a gay couple. Serious medical or mental issues are also cited as reasons (4).

Women may agree to be surrogates out of altruism, though it seems significant financial reward is a large component (1).

How is Surrogacy Procured? What is the Process?

The procedure involved in surrogacy is in vitro fertilization (IVF). The details of the IVF procedure are not the topic of this paper. It can be briefly explained as using multiple eggs from the donor woman and the sperm from the donor man to create multiple embryos in a laboratory setting. Several embryos are then transferred to the uterus of the surrogate woman, who have been given hormonal medications to make her uterus ready for a pregnancy. The hope is one embryo will attach to the uterine wall. It is not unusual for more than one to attach to the wall, which may result in abortion of all but one fetus. Any additional embryos that have been created may be stored in freezers potentially forever, or even discarded as “biomedical waste” (1).

In addition to the medical procedures, legal contracts must be drafted, agreed upon and signed. Aside from the obvious agreement that the birth mother (surrogate) must give up the child, some of the other topics included in the agreement often are the surrogate’s responsibilities to maintain a healthy lifestyle, the details of the compensation, and stipulations around miscarriage and abortion (4). The laws vary by state.

What Are the Costs?

For someone wanting a child through surrogacy, it can be a pretty costly undertaking. After taking into account legal fees, medical expenses, agency fees, compensation for the surrogate mother, and other miscellaneous expenses, it can cost at least \$50,000 and up to \$150,000 or more. What is even more disheartening is that the procedure may not work the first time and may have to be repeated (4).

What is Catholic Teaching on the Issue?

Pope Francis spoke about the evils of surrogacy. “The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother’s womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking.” He went on to emphasize, “A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally.” (2)

Pope Francis referred to surrogacy as “trafficking”. It is clear the child has become an object or commodity, ordered and paid for by the parents. The rights of the child are not considered and, therefore, this is a type of exploitation (2). If the surrogate mother is acting out under coercion, as can happen, she also becomes a victim (2).

What Are the Issues that Threaten Life?

Surrogacy is important to the pro-life community not only from the “trafficking” issue as identified by Pope Francis. Human life is threatened by the IVF process itself, which includes embryo selection, meaning certain of these laboratory-created embryos are selected for implantation into the uterus of the surrogate mother, and the remaining are either killed by intent or neglect and discarded as medical waste, or those individuals are literally frozen indefinitely. And remember, the IVF procedure may not work the first time so it may need to be repeated, meaning even more individual human beings, in the forms of embryos will be created in a laboratory and either killed or frozen.

Further, if there are more than one embryo that has implanted into the uterus, creating twins or triplets, often there is pressure on the surrogate mother to abort all but one embryo. Abortion may also be “required” by contract if the baby is thought to have malformations or other potential health issues. (2)

Doesn’t Surrogacy Ultimately Bring a Greater Good to Those Who Want Children?

Surrogacy is most frequently considered an altruistic act, allowing couples who would otherwise not be able to have children to finally start a family. However, as explained previously, there is considerable loss of human life in the form of embryos, so this loss cannot justify any good intentions that might be involved. (3)

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk stated it well: “When you examine it more deeply, however, surrogacy offers only the veneer of a selfless act. It relies on evil means to achieve a good end. It tends to

be driven by the selfish slant of ‘entitlement thinking.’ It often involves a coercive financial angle, as wealthy individuals offer significant remuneration to secure poor women as ‘volunteers.’ ” (3)

The (Predictable) Problems with Surrogacy

There is a recent article published by LiveAction.org that shares a number of stories of abandonment of children brought into being by the surrogacy process.

One of the reasons surrogate children may no longer be wanted is because the child may have a disability. As reported by Liveaction.org:

Baby Gammy and his twin sister, Pipah, were born to Pattaramon Chanbua, a Thai surrogate hired by an Australian couple, David John Farnell and Wenyu Wendy Li. At seven months, the couple found out she was carrying twins, and that one of the twins — Gammy — had Down syndrome. The couple told the surrogate to have an abortion, but she refused, so after the children were born, they left Thailand with Pipah, but abandoned Gammy (5).

This story is further complicated by the fact that the father, David Farnell, was a registered sex offender. The Australian government decided to allow Pipah to remain in the home with the father, though the child was never to be allowed with her father. She was provided a book explaining why. David Farnell passed away in 2020 and the surrogate was provided for financially to continue to care for the abandoned disabled child (5).

In another story, a prematurely born child, Bridget, was abandoned due to the potential for disabilities throughout her life. Bridget was born to a Ukrainian surrogate for American parents. Her sibling died at birth. At 25 weeks, Bridget was struggling to survive. The parents wanted her removed from life support at 5 months old because of the potential for her disabilities. Eventually they agreed she could be put up for adoption, but never filed papers for US citizenship, leaving her stateless (5). Eventually Bridget was adopted, but her story emphasizes the treatment of children born via surrogacy as commodities and not human beings.

This is emphasized in another story reported by Liveaction.org. A gay couple wanted a child and Brittney Pearson agreed to be the surrogate. In the second trimester of pregnancy, she discovered she had metastatic breast cancer and would need chemotherapy. This would mean the baby would need to be born prematurely. However, the couple was concerned about permanent health issues for the baby and ultimately wanted the pregnancy terminated. Pearson refused, and carried the baby until labor was induced at 25 weeks. The couple did not want her or anyone else to care for or adopt the child as they did not want “their DNA out there”. The little boy died soon after birth since the couple refused him any medical treatment (5).

There is also the story about Sherri Shepherd who was a celebrity host on “The View”. Sherri and her husband filed for divorce in the middle of the surrogate pregnancy. That was when Sherri decided she no longer wanted a child. Reportedly, since she was not the biological mother, she did not want anything to do with the child including any financial responsibility (5).

In another story, a surrogate mother in New York was carrying triplets, twin boys and a girl. The biological parents did not want the girl and demanded that the surrogate abort the baby girl. The surrogate mother refused. The parents are refusing to pay the surrogate mother until she follows through with the abortion (6).

Finally, Sami Parker, who has a podcast entitled “Conceiving Crime”, in Episode 003 details the con regarding the surrogacy business that was named the “Baby-Selling Ring” (7). Briefly, a well-known reproductive and family planning lawyer in California teamed up with two others to operate the Ring. To avoid the lengthy process of adoption (years) the con used surrogate women so it would look like the women were pregnant when they decided to give their baby up for adoption. In this way, only medical expenses could be paid for, and the surrogate mothers could not be paid, otherwise it would be considered human trafficking. The women were sent to Ukraine to be impregnated via IVF, avoiding some of the needed paperwork and signatures required for the procedure to be done in the US. And although the surrogate mothers were told there were intending parents who had already signed paperwork prior to their trip to the Ukraine, this was not true. In order to ensure the pregnancy would be carried, the Ring perpetrators did not look for intending parents until the 2nd trimester. Then, these intending parents were told the original intending parents backed out (which wasn’t true since they didn’t exist in the first place), and they could obtain the child through a surrogacy agreement within weeks or months rather than via adoption which would take years. So intending parents who wanted children so desperately would pay \$100,00 to \$180,000 (twice the costs of adoption). Further, paperwork was filed with the State to pay for the medical care, so the State was being defrauded also. Before the FBI could close down the Ring and arrest those involved, it had operated for 6 years and conned at least a dozen couples, to say nothing of what the surrogate mothers went through.

Conclusion

As already indicated, the process of surrogacy reduces human life to nothing more than a commodity. Parents who initially wanted a child and initiate the expensive and complicated process may decide they only want a healthy child and if that does not happen the child by contract should be aborted, or may be abandoned by the parents. The process itself, using IVF, produces several embryos that may be abandoned and forced to spend their existence in a freezer, may be discarded like trash, or may end up not surviving because of miscarriage if the embryo does not implant into the uterine wall. In all these cases, these are human beings, created by an artificial means to satisfy someone’s ideal of when they want to start a family, based on their definition of a family. I agree with Rev Tadeusz Pacholczyk in his calling surrogacy “entitlement thinking”, and that today couples consider having children a “right”, if they want them. His following statements summarize this well:

“The use of the term “deplorable” by the Pope is not excessive, but spot-on when it comes to describing these offensive aspects of surrogacy. His observations help refocus our attention on the runaway train that IVF and surrogacy have become, and invite us to push back against the problematic-but-widely-endorsed approach that seeks to satisfy adult desires for children while largely ignoring the consequences to the kids.” (3)

Sami Parker questioned whether people are "...entitled to get the family they want, by any means necessary. The less natural a process becomes, the more important the morality of the act has to be carefully considered." (7)

In this culture of acceptance of defining one's own reality, defining one's own morality necessarily follows. It does not take much introspection to identify who gets hurt and what gets lost as the outcome.

1. Column 136: The Multiple Moral Problems of Surrogacy
2. Gestational Surrogacy as Exploitation
3. Column #216 : Surrogacy and Child Trafficking
4. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/23186-gestational-surrogacy>
5. <https://www.liveaction.org/news/surrogacy-pitfalls-heartbreaking-stories-child-abandonment/>
6. <https://www.liveaction.org/news/second-surrogate-mother-says-she-is-being-pressured-to-abort/>
7. Sami Parker, Conceiving Crime, Episode 003, "The Baby Farm";
<https://www.conceivingcrimepodcast.com/episode-3-the-baby-farm>