

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Franklin Payne's article on Birth Control [Spring, 1992] was a good attempt to survey this subject which has only recently become of interest to Protestant ethicists. When one examines his article, however, one notices that it breaks itself in two. The first section traces a Pro-natalist position from the Scripture; the second section jumps into a stewardship-centered Pro-birth control direction. I would suggest that a number of Payne's points do not follow from his premises. Let me give some examples:

1. At one point Payne rightly argues that there is "no Biblical justification to choose to be childless." Yet a paragraph later he suggests that birth control is "neither endorsed nor prohibited by Scripture." You can't have it both ways (which is just what modern couples want). Since we don't know the future, the day to day, month to month, year to year, birth control practices of young couples for the first 5 (7, 10, 15 ???) years of marriage offer a de facto choice for childlessness.

2. Though I agree with Payne's view that Scripture is for large families, it seems that a family size of 3 is pulled out of the thin air in order to be a kind of compromise between Pro-natalist and Pro-birth Control positions.

3. Payne also mis-uses Scripture at one point. He argues that "A child too early in one's marriage may not be wise" and then cites Deut. 24:5 which implies the very opposite. "If a man is recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married." Knowing human nature, that happiness would certainly include conjugal bliss; and by the end of a year at home it is highly probable that one child, or possibly 2, might be conceived.

I appreciate his attempt to come to grips with this difficult topic. But I think the cultural ramifications of the

Bible are at odds with our habitual views of "control" on this issue.

Yours in Christ,

James L. Sauer
Director of Library
Eastern College, St. David's, PA

Dr. Payne replies:

I find Mr. Sauer's letter distressing -- not because he differs with me, but because he criticizes without offering alternatives. My goal in the article was to offer practical guidelines within Biblical principles.

I challenge him to come to real solutions to the dilemma that he creates for modern couples who choose to pursue higher education. Would he have them not consider marriage until they have finished their education (somehow controlling the raging hormones within)? Would he have them engaged (i.e., moderate their passion for each other) until years of education are finished? Would he have them use no birth control and still continue their education with children and all the accompanying problems of working parents, child-rearing, studying, etc.? Would he have every couple bear as many children as possible, i.e., 10 - 20 over a possible 30 years of fertility? If so, he is placing a Pharisaical load (Matthew 23:4) on modern couples.

Contrary to his conclusion that my argument "breaks itself in two," I believe that it offers a wholistic solution (not "compromise") to the modern problems of higher education and sexual license within God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply. I have condemned voluntary childlessness. I have mandated "more than two children." Therefore, a couple cannot continue birth control for "5, 7, 15???" years as Mr. Sauer has speciously stated. And -- I have allowed for the Biblical fulfillment of sexual desires about which he has chosen to be silent.

I did not "pull out of thin air" a family size of three. Mr. Sauer chose to ignore the context and my actual words. I said "more than 2 children" which may be three or ten. Also, I gave that goal in the context of "multiplying" the earth's population.

As to Deuteronomy 24:5, Mr. Sauer has a good point to which I yield. However, the clear intent of the verse is the "happiness to the wife." The child that may be conceived is just one dimension of this happiness.

If Mr. Sauer and others are interested in a more complete development of my argument about birth control than I have been able to present here, I have written it in my book, Making Biblical Decisions.

Franklin E. Payne, Jr., M.D.

Dear Editors,

I have just recently become familiar with your journal. In reading the Winter, 1992, issue, I was very impressed with Dr. Andrew White's attempt at honing a definition of the imago Dei and applying it in a practical way to the issue of abortion ("The Corporeal Aspect and Procreative Function of the imago Dei and Abortion.")

I have become increasingly convinced through prayerful study that the proper understanding and application of the imago Dei is one of the central core principles in biomedical ethics. However, I do question how his definition of the image gives inherent value to the unborn fetus. Rather, he seems to imply an inherent value in the act of procreation and the process of childbirth. He does state that a fetus has inherent value in that adults "must provide sustenance and [protection of the fetus] from man and beasts" in their procreative quest to fill the earth. But this seems to stem from their value as potential procreators and not from their value as human beings in and of themselves.

He also states that a fetus has inherent value before birth because it "is by nature the image of God," but he does not define this nature or how it would give inherent

value to the fetus. He states only that the fetus is "corporeal," but so is the woman who carries the child. Thus, the crux of the issue seems to be, "how can a full understanding of the nature of the imago Dei (as Corporeality and spirituality) give inherent value to an unborn baby and thus support a pro-life position?"

Sincerely,

Doug Duffee, M.Div.

4th year medical student, East Tennessee State University

Dr. White replies:

I was delighted that Mr. Duffee responded to my letter. An author is always happy when he discovers that at least one person, other than his mother, has read something that has taken him untold hours to research, reflect upon and finally write. Besides this rather egocentric pleasure the author is also pleased that Mr. Duffee has independently become convinced of the importance of the concept of the imago Dei to biblical medical ethics.

I am, however, disappointed that Mr. Duffee failed to note in my article how much weight I place on the inherent value of the fetus from the moment of conception. While it was not the purpose of my paper to give a full understanding of the nature of the image of God (see the title of my paper), I did try to define one aspect -- the nature of the image as corporeal -- and to show how that aspect would give the fetus inherent value from the moment of conception. I do not state or imply in my paper that the fetus has inherent value in his/her potential for procreation. Here Mr. Duffee is confusing my arguments regarding the nature of the image (where we do find clear evidence for the inherent value of the fetus) with my arguments for the function of the image (where I am not arguing for the inherent value of the fetus but do find clear evidence for God-like adult behavior in procreation). I attribute Mr. Duffee's oversight and confusion to my poor literary skills and will try to clarify my position now.

My main point in discussing the nature of the image of

God is to include corporeality as an integral aspect of the image, not to exclude other aspects, e.g., spirituality (although I do find far less support for this aspect in the Genesis passages themselves.). Unfortunately, many evangelical theologians have neglected the corporeal aspect of the image, and it is this neglect that I am addressing (see page 20 in my article). The significance of recognizing corporeality as an integral aspect of man is seen to be integral to our understanding of the nature of the image then human beings clearly have inherent value from the moment they become corporeal, i.e., conception. The zygote does not simply have the potential to develop God-like attributes. From the moment of conception it is the image of God and is worthy of the protection afforded the image in Genesis 9 (see pages 22 - 23 in my article).

My main point in discussing the function of the image of God is that procreation, as well as representative rule, is a way of acting that is God-like in some respects (see pages 20 - 22 in my paper). If procreation is recognized as an important function of the image, then abortion is an obvious rejection of our God-like role. Instead of filling the earth with divine likenesses through procreation we destroy the image of God through abortion and in so doing devalue the God in whose image we are created (see page 23 in my paper).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Andrew A. White, M.D., M.A.T.S.