

# Kinship, Infertility and New Reproductive Technologies

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*<sup>1</sup>This is the genealogy<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:*

*<sup>2</sup>Abraham was the father of Isaac,*

*Isaac the father of Jacob,*

*Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,*

*<sup>3</sup>Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,*

*Perez the father of Hezron,*

*Hezron the father of Ram,*

*<sup>4</sup>Ram the father of Amminadab,*

*Amminadab the father of Nahshon,*

*Nahshon the father of Salmon,*

*<sup>5</sup>Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,*

*Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,*

*Obed the father of Jesse,*

*<sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of King David.*

*David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,*

*<sup>7</sup>Solomon the father of Rehoboam,*

*Rehoboam the father of Abijah,*

*Abijah the father of Asa,*

*<sup>8</sup>Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,*

*Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,*

*Jehoram the father of Uzziah,*

*<sup>9</sup>Uzziah the father of Jotham,*

*Jotham the father of Ahaz,*

*Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,*

*<sup>10</sup>Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,*

*Manasseh the father of Amon,*

*Amon the father of Josiah,*

*<sup>11</sup>and Josiah the father of Jeconiah<sup>[a]</sup> and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

*<sup>12</sup>After the exile to Babylon:*

*Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,*

*Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,*

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<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

<sup>14</sup> Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

<sup>15</sup> Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

<sup>16</sup> and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Jesus's genealogy, perhaps at first glance, looks like a straightforward bloodline, going back fourteen generations, yet upon closer inspection, it is full of unusual inclusions, strange conceptions, and miraculous interventions. It begins with Isaac, Sarah's long hoped-for son, conceived once Sarah was well past child-bearing years. There is Judah, son of Leah, who was not loved by her husband, but valued by God, and so he 'opens her womb in consolation'. Later on in the genealogy is Ruth, the Moabite, who did not ethnically belong to God's chosen people, but chose to align herself with her mother in law and the God of the Israelites, leading to an adoption of kinds. David steals another man's wife, has sexual relations with her possibly against her will, and yet it is his son, conceived with this woman, Bathsheba, who becomes heir to the throne.

Jesus's genealogy is messy, unusually includes women, and the links from name to name are far from simple. Many of the spaces between each name indicate a mess, a familial brokenness, a miracle, or a near miss. So what does the Bible really have to say about blood ties?

## Introduction

New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) - also referred to as Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) - encompass a variety of treatments that have been developed to support those who are unable to conceive naturally. This group includes those with fertility and related health issues, same-sex couples, and individuals who wish to have children but do not have a partner. NRTs refer to an increasing range of medical interventions including, but not limited to: fertility medication; hormone treatment; cryopreservation of eggs, sperm, and embryos; and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. In this essay, I will outline a number of questions that these technologies raise for Christians and explore some biblical principles that might guide Christians in answering these questions. Due to constraints of space, I have chosen to focus here on gamete donation and surrogacy. These two NRTs raise similar issues of kinship and the ideal nature of families and have recently seen increased attention from a number of Christian organisations.<sup>2</sup>

Gamete donation is the donation of either sperm or eggs to those who wish to conceive a child but are unable to provide either one or both gametes, or are at high risk of passing on an inherited disease. In the UK, most donations take place through clinics licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). So long as sperm or egg donations take place through such clinics, the donor will not be the legal parent of any child born and will have no parental rights or responsibilities

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<sup>2</sup> For example, recent work by the CMDA, discussed later.

for them.<sup>3</sup> The donor will be anonymous at the point of donation, but any children born from them will be able to contact the donor upon reaching the age of 18.

Surrogacy involves the use of another woman's womb to carry a child. In the UK, both gestational surrogacy and genetic (or traditional) surrogacy are legal. Gestational surrogacy involves the surrogate carrying an embryo conceived without any of her genetic material, whilst genetic surrogacy involves the surrogate providing both the egg and gestation. Although surrogacy is legal in the UK, surrogacy agreements cannot be enforced by law. The surrogate will be the child's legal mother at birth, even if using a donated egg.<sup>4</sup> If the surrogate mother is married, or in a civil partnership, the partner will be the child's second parent at birth.<sup>5</sup> Legal parenthood<sup>6</sup> can be transferred by parental order or adoption after the child is born, but any agreement made between the surrogate and the couple or individual who has engaged their services does not have the power to confer legal parenthood. Both donors and surrogates are only allowed to be compensated for reasonable expenses in the UK. This essay will not discuss certain problematic aspects of commercial surrogacy, particularly in places like India and the US, where there is great potential for the exploitation of women in poverty.

### How is the family understood?

The UK policy regulating NRTs that I have outlined above reflects our own culturally and historically specific understandings of family. Current Euro-American conceptions of kinship stress the biogenetic tie as the basis of family relations,<sup>7</sup> with the norm for the family unit consisting of a heterosexual couple living together with children produced as a result of their sexual union. The biologically related nuclear family is not only considered the norm, but also deemed to be the basis for 'real' family ties and the best kind of family unit,<sup>8</sup> both for the flourishing of individuals and the stability of broader society.

The development of NRTs does not pose the first or only challenge to these kinship norms: with increased rates of divorce and remarriage, many family units do not mirror the nuclear family model but consist instead of step-parents and step-siblings, not related by blood. Same-sex couples with children, whether through adoption or conception using donated gametes, also conflict with the heterosexual parent unit which traditionally heads the nuclear family. Indeed, adoption itself, a practice possibly as old as the human race, does not conform to these Euro-American kinship norms. Current academic orthodoxy in the area of kinship studies dictates that kinship is as much socially constructed as it is genealogically entailed.<sup>9</sup> This stems from extensive ethnographic research across

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<sup>3</sup> Someone who donates eggs or sperm through an unlicensed clinic, however, is the legal parent of any child born from your donation under UK law. GOV.UK. (n.d.). *Legal rights for egg and sperm donors*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/legal-rights-for-egg-and-sperm-donors>.

<sup>4</sup> GOV.UK. (n.d.). *Surrogacy: legal rights of parents and surrogates*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/legal-rights-when-using-surrogates-and-donors>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> All mothers and most fathers automatically have parental responsibility from birth. These legal rights and responsibilities involve providing a home for the child, protecting and maintaining the child, disciplining the child, choosing and providing for education, agreeing to the child's medical treatment, naming the child and agreeing to any change of name, and looking after the child's property. Government Digital Service (2011). Parental rights and responsibilities. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities/who-has-parental-responsibility>.

<sup>7</sup> Logan, J. (2013). Contemporary adoptive kinship: a contribution to new kinship studies. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18(1), p39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p39.

<sup>9</sup> Sahlins, M. (2011). What kinship is (part one). *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17(1), p3.

time periods and cultures, furnishing us with the knowledge that many people groups do not consider blood ties to be the 'natural' and 'irrevocable' bonds of kinship.<sup>10</sup> Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins notes that the Kamea of New Guinea 'know of no such connection between children and those who conceived them' and that 'natal bonds have virtually no determining force in Iñupiat kinship'.<sup>11</sup>

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic theologian, demonstrates the various different Christian attitudes to family that have evolved over the centuries, arguing that the modern nuclear family dates only from the Victorian era and stands in great contrast to early Christian approaches to the family.<sup>12</sup> Within the ancient Greek, Roman, and Jewish contexts in which the Bible was written, there was no concept of the nuclear family unit as would understand it, and indeed no word for it in these languages. There was 'oikos', meaning household, and referring to a residential and productive unit which did not only consist of those related by blood or marriage but would have included slaves and other non-kin.<sup>13</sup>

Even accepting that our normative ideas about family may be culturally and historically specific, it does not necessarily follow that they are not, in fact, God's best design for human flourishing. Indeed, many Christians believe that the nuclear family, modelled on a man and woman united by marriage, cohabiting with offspring that are the direct result of their sexual union, is the version of the family that God intends for us to live within. These beliefs then guide Christian responses to NRTs, and other non-conforming kinds of family that may threaten the integrity of the institution.

### **Christian perspectives**

The Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA), a US-based organisation, has published a position paper on NRTs, with the intention of protecting and preserving the integrity of the family in the form that it believes the Christian faith mandates. Although not representative of all Christian views surrounding family and reproduction, I would suggest that its response to these new technologies helps to outline some of the key tensions that Christians may face when considering assisted reproduction.

Considering the ethical implications of NRTs inevitably generates questions regarding the status and destruction of embryos: however, given the scope of this research project, I will not be addressing these issues here and will instead be focusing on the consequences of NRTs for the family unit. Given this, the main points of interest from the CMDA's position paper are that it considers the introduction of a third party in *any* form, including gestational surrogacy and gamete donation, to be morally problematic for Christians as it threatens the integrity of the marriage bond<sup>14</sup> while it considers traditional or genetic surrogacy to be absolutely inconsistent with God's design.<sup>15</sup> However, the CMDA approves ovulation inducing drugs and hormonal fertility treatments, in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and artificial insemination so long as the sperm, egg, and womb in question are *only* those of the husband and wife. Interestingly, the CMDA approves of adoption, including embryo adoption, on the basis of this emulating 'God's adoption of us as spiritual children'.<sup>16</sup> This suggests that its concern lies not so much in a lack of biogenetic connection between parents and children, but rather in the asymmetry

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>12</sup> Radford, R. (2001). *Christianity and the making of the modern family*. Editorial: London: Scm Press, p12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p13.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Medical & Dental Associations. (n.d.). *Position Statements*. [online] Available at: <https://cmda.org/policy-issues-home/position-statements/> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

created by the varying levels of involvement of each spouse's body and genetic material in the process of reproduction.

There is one direct biblical example of such a situation, with Mary and the conception of Jesus. Here, Jesus' biogenetic and gestational link with Mary and his presumed *lack* of relatedness to Joseph, neither apparently threaten the integrity of the married couple nor Joseph's ability to act as an earthly father to Jesus throughout his childhood. Of course, this particular story is exceptional in many respects, and a theology of kinship and a Christian approach to NRTs cannot therefore be drawn from this example.

There are also further issues raised for Christianx by NRTs beyond those concerning the integrity of the married couple: namely, the welfare of the child. The bonding that takes place between mother and child begins while the child is still in the womb. A child can hear its mother's voice from within the womb, and strong physiological links are forged between the two, as many substances are exchanged through the umbilical cord. It is partly as a result of our better understanding of these processes that breastfeeding by the mother is now widely recognised as the best source of nutrition for infants, with many accompanying health benefits. Kenneth Magnuson, Professor of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, expresses a number of concerns about surrogacy on just such grounds – that the surrogate will have to deliberately distance themselves emotionally from their pregnancy, and that, after birth, the child is often removed immediately from the mother, depriving the infant both of its best source of nutrition and severing the attachment bond which has already begun to form during pregnancy.<sup>17</sup> Uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact between mother and infant immediately after birth is regular practice in most hospitals and there is medical evidence to suggest that new-borns who have this skin-to-skin contact transition from the foetal to the new-born stage with greater respiratory, temperature, and glucose stability, as well as significantly less crying, indicating decreased stress.<sup>18</sup>

The sense that we have of there being a very strong bond between a woman and the child that she carries is reflected in UK policy regulating surrogacy, since it is the surrogate who is the automatic legal parent of the child at birth, and parenthood must be officially transferred or adoption take place before those who commissioned the surrogate can claim the child as theirs. Ruptures to the attachment bonds that all children develop with their primary caregivers, beginning from within the womb, have negative consequences for the development of the child, but it should also be noted that being genetically related to the child, or having carried the child to term in pregnancy, does not automatically ensure a healthy nor beneficial caregiving relationship. This fact is often accepted without question when it comes to adoption, as children have been voluntarily given up by parents who are unable or unwilling to care for them. The best outcome for a child is therefore not necessarily to be raised and cared for by its genetic parents, or even the woman who gestated the child: this is accepted as part of what it means to live in a fallen world.

### **Biblical material**

What does the Bible have to say about family, kinship, reproduction and adoption? The story of Moses is a good place to begin to explore the idea of adoption and the partial severance of ties between infant and birth mother. Moses's mother gives him up, without knowledge of who may come to care

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Magnuson, Think Biblically - Biola University Blogs. (n.d.). *Surrogate Motherhood and Infertility*. [online] Available at: <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/think-biblically/2019/surrogate-motherhood-and-infertility> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2021].

<sup>18</sup> Medscape. (2013). *Uninterrupted Skin-to-Skin Contact Immediately After Birth*. [online] Available at: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/806325>.

for him – or indeed whether he will be well cared for at all – on the basis of her own certainty that she herself cannot ensure his survival. Although Moses’s birth mother manages to secure a position as his wet nurse, she has no foreknowledge of this at the point at which she chooses to surrender her child to a stranger. Her actions are not seen as invalidating her motherhood of Moses but, on the contrary, as affirming it, since she ensures the survival of her child.

Indeed, Christian support for adoption has a strong Biblical basis. Throughout the New Testament, the metaphor of adoption is used to describe the integration of the believer into the family of God. Some examples include Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5, Romans 8:15, 1 John 3:1 and Galatians 3:26. The believer is described as a child of God, able to address him as Father, and as being adopted into the spiritual family of believers, such that fellow believers are regarded as siblings in Christ. Ruether writes that the Gospels and Early Christianity sought to reimagine the family as a ‘redemptive form of covenanted community, engaged in processes of mutual love and service’.<sup>19</sup> Our ultimate loyalty is to God, and our identity as the children of God takes priority over kinship ties. This theme also runs throughout the Old Testament, where obedience to Yahweh was to come before family loyalty: wives or blood relatives could be disavowed (or even killed) to avoid the risk of being drawn into idolatry.<sup>20</sup> New Testament teachings present the community of believers as often marginal men or women who left their families and jobs to join this countercultural movement. The new spiritual family of believers transcends the natural family, a point which Jesus repeatedly made clear in his teachings (Luke 14:26, Matthew 8:21-22, Matthew 4:21-22, Mark 3:31-35). Paul’s writings draw on Roman adoption practices, which would have been familiar to his audience, in imagining a similar practice for believers in their relation to God, particularly for those who were not Jewish or traditionally seen as descendants of Abraham.<sup>21</sup> These early Christian communities would therefore have been seen as subversive to traditional family life as understood by both Jews and Romans, since their new identities as believers would have threatened faithfulness to the family or the household in many cases.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Christians are able to conceive of a close spiritual bond with God and fellow believers that transcends all earthly ties. Our families do not command our ultimate obedience or loyalty and, called as we are to model Christlike behaviour towards our neighbours, the practice of adopting those without kin or home into our family is one we can wholeheartedly affirm. However, affirming adoption from a position in which we believe the practice ‘redeems’ a broken situation and is a second best option to a family based on blood ties, will result in the stigmatising of adoptive parents and their children.<sup>23</sup>

However, while adopted children may not be genetically related to their adoptive family, anthropological kinship studies suggest that biogenetic ties alone are not enough to create kinship bonds and everyday practices, performed continuously over time, are a vital expression and basis of kinship ties.<sup>24</sup> Passing on one’s genetic material to a child, gestating and bearing a child to term, breastfeeding, raising a child through infancy and early stages of development – all of these are highly formative, life-creating and life-sustaining activities that give rise to kinship bonds. In many cases, all of these processes are carried out by the same caregiver(s), but in many other cases they are split between different individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> Radford, R. (2001). *Christianity and the making of the modern family*. Editorial: London: Scm Press, p12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p29-30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>23</sup> Logan, J. (2013). Contemporary adoptive kinship: a contribution to new kinship studies. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18(1), p39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p41.

NRTs highlight to us the fracturing of different kinship-forging activities which we assume should all be located in the *same* relational context: we may have one woman bearing the child and another raising it; one man passing on his genetic material to the child and subsequently not participating in its the rearing nor education. While the practice of adoption appears less problematic - as the fracturing of the 'ideal' family unit is seen as already having taken place and the adoptive parents stepping in to 'redeem' a broken situation – NRTs, on the contrary, can be viewed as deliberately and voluntarily opting to split these kinship ties between multiple individuals, and thus 'choosing' a kind of family that is further from the ideal.

However, where in the Bible can we find an example of this 'ideal'? God chooses to enact his redeeming purposes for humanity through a family with the Abrahamic covenant, and yet this family is impressively dysfunctional. Rife with jealousy, competition, unfaithful spouses, and husbands fathering children by multiple women, this family certainly does not conform to the ideal nuclear model. The purpose of these biblical narratives - which chart the origin of the nation of Israel through God's covenant with Abraham and his kin - is not to set out God's ideal for the family, but to tell the story of God's relationship with and faithfulness to this family through, *and in spite of*, its brokenness. God fulfils his promise to 'bless the nations' through Abraham's family whilst also respecting and allowing for the free choices made by individuals and humanity.

Yahweh promises Abraham and Sarah a child and, because of their wavering trust, they take matters into their own hands. In what we could call a biblical example of traditional genetic surrogacy, Abraham secures an heir through Hagar, Sarah's slave, and Ishmael is born. Sarah and Abraham stage an intervention and use another woman's womb to create the heir that they are longing for and to ensure the promised continuation of their lineage. There is an ambivalence in the text towards these actions – the Bible text neither affirms nor condemns the choices made by Abraham and Hagar – but it is clear that God does bless Ishmael. God can bless some of our interventions: when it comes to children – who are a gift from God and who ultimately belong to God – God will honour them once these lives have been brought into being. Stories in the Bible which include children who are created outside of the norm show that these children are consistently accepted and integrated into the narrative. Perhaps some of our circumstances or our choices may result in more complex families, but it appears that does not mean that these families cannot be blessed, or be *good*.

The example of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar does however raise questions about control and trust. All life is a gift from God, and when the creation of families or processes of reproduction are open to more human intervention than ever before, there remains for Christians the question of how far we should intervene in these processes of life creation. To some, the idea of using NRTs, of perhaps employing the services of a surrogate or of using donated gametes may appear to be 'playing God' in the creation of families, and be an attempt to take control over a process of reproduction that should be left to God. Here, Denis Alexander's arguments for a Christian attitude towards technological advancements provides a helpful framework. He draws distinctions between technologies that can be used for healing, and those used for enhancement.<sup>25</sup> He argues that healing was central to Christ's mission on earth, and thus should be central to ours, but that our support for new technologies should bear in mind that the physical and the material are not the ultimate realms of hope for the Christian believer. Alexander affirms the development of technologies that can help restore us to wholeness and act as a pointer to the coming kingdom in which all will be restored.<sup>26</sup> NRTs sit at a difficult juncture

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander, D. (n.d.). *Healing, enhancement and the human future*. [online] [www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org). Available at: <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/cambridge-papers/healing-enhancement-and-the-human-future-by-denis-alexander> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2021].

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

between Alexander's distinctions: certainly, some of the assisted reproductive measures now available do serve a healing purpose, facilitating the creation and birth of children for couples for whom this would not otherwise be possible. However, the point at which the use of NRTs crosses the line between healing and a desire to transcend all the limitations of our human bodies may require some discernment for each Christian seeking to create a family using NRTs.

There is also a mysterious and profound truth to the idea that God honours our desires – of course, not all of them, and not all of the time – but, if we trace the narratives of infertility in the Bible, we do see God over and over again giving the gift of a child to women who have deeply longed for children but have struggled to conceive, with Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth as prime examples. Of course, the first command given to humanity in Genesis 1 is to 'be fruitful and increase in number' and the desire to reproduce and have children is deeply built into human nature. This does not mean that having children is for everyone, and especially not that a woman's worth to God is tied to her ability to bear children, but it is clear that God does desire man to be fruitful and for life to proliferate.

### **A broader definition of kinship**

Sahlins defines kinship as 'mutuality of being', meaning persons who are members of one another, and who participate intrinsically in each other's existence. He writes of kinspeople that '...they lead common lives, partake of each other's sufferings and joys, sharing one another's experiences even as they take responsibility for and feel the effects of each other's acts.'<sup>27</sup> He argues that this definition covers all the various modes by which we see kinship being constituted:

*'...mutuality of existence helps account for how procreation and performance may be alternate forms of it. The constructed modes of kinship are like those predicated on birth precisely as they involve the transmission of life-capacities among persons. If love and nurture, giving food or partaking in it together, working together, living from the same land, mutual aid, sharing the fortunes of migration and residence, as well as adoption and marriage, are so many grounds of kinship, they all know with procreation the meaning of participating in one another's life.'*<sup>28</sup>

Sahlins' definition of kinship can help us to connect some of the apparently contrasting messages about family found in the Bible. The three-generational household unit found in ancient Israelite society was often bound together by marriage and procreation, yet these household units were also constituted as kin through living from the same land, working together and eating together. The new spiritual family of believers described to us in the New Testament are from different occupations, ethnic groups, social classes, ages and genders – and one of the most subversive acts of this diverse community is to gather and eat life-sustaining meals together at the same table, both as a mark of kinship and as a kinship-forging act.

Both the Old and New Testaments suggest a movement by God towards gathering a new family and expanding our idea of family in the process. God's covenant with Abraham and ancient Israel is for the purpose of drawing a new family from all tribes and nations, and Jesus continues this work in his life and ministry, drawing in the marginalised, the disadvantaged and the stranger, and gathering a new spiritual family around himself. The Bible therefore pushes against a narrow, exclusive notion of family and challenges us to reconsider who may belong to us, who may participate intrinsically in our lives, and who could be kin. Alongside this, both the three-generational family household model of ancient Israel and the family of believers in early Christianity affirm the idea of the family finding its place in

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<sup>27</sup> Sahlins, M. (2011). What kinship is (part one). *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17(1), p14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p14.

broader community, and thus challenging modern Western notions of the ideal family as being a freestanding nuclear unit consisting only of parents and children.

### **The Importance of lineage**

Alongside this movement of God to redeem humanity by drawing together a new family, there is a consistent thread running through the narrative of scripture, up to the point of Jesus's birth: the importance of lineage. From Genesis through to the Gospels, kinship, descent and filiation appear to be hugely important markers of identity, even if we know that our ultimate identity rests in being children of God.

The fracturing of different processes of kinship formation that may occur through the use of NRTs, if not sinful, could in any case present the members of non-traditional family units with a complex and fragmented sense of self, due to the difficulties in constructing a straightforward autobiographical narrative. I intend to explore some of the implications of this using insights from Janet Carsten's ethnographic research with adoptees in Scotland and their quests to reunite with their birth mothers. She finds that the motivating drive for adoptees to make contact with birth kin is not necessarily the presumption that the biological tie to these individuals will automatically generate a kinship bond, but in an attempt to establish continuities in their own lives between past, present and future.<sup>29</sup> Memory is deeply tied to identity, and these in turn are deeply connected to kinship.<sup>30</sup> She finds that a sense of historical continuity is key to the adoptees' sense of self and that gaps in one's personal biography (eg not knowing the woman who gave birth to you) can trouble our sense of identity. I would suggest that the emphasis on lineage and descent throughout Scripture is of crucial importance for our understanding of the identity of Jesus and of the continued faithfulness of God to his promises for humanity. It is for this reason that we need to be able to trace Jesus back to Abraham and that, rather than concluding that the scriptural emphasis on lineage supports the vital nature of blood and biogenetic ties, it instead points us to the importance of shared memory, continuity and faithfulness for our understanding of our true identity.

### **Conclusion**

Children born from NRTs, whether via surrogacy or donated gametes – or indeed adopted children – are not automatically doomed to a fractured sense of self any more than are children of 'normal' families. The security of our identity is not dependent on the choices of others, even if those others are our kin, but rests in the fact that we are all beloved children of God. In the practical realm of navigating questions of biography for families who have more complicated histories, perhaps many of these questions of identity could be better navigated by a culture of openness between kin about the origins of these kin relationships. In turn, I suspect there would also be far less silence on those topics of children born via surrogacy, IVF and gamete donation, were these methods of reproducing to be less stigmatised in broader society. The responsibility does not rest only on 'non-conventional' families to own and speak their biographical narratives in order to support a continuous sense of self, but on the wider community to affirm more diverse forms of family.

It has not been possible to cover the other many complex questions that have been raised in this inquiry into kinship and new reproductive technologies and any definitive conclusions for the Christian affirmation. or condemnation. of any particular assisted reproductive methods are beyond the scope of this work. I do hope, however, to have highlighted some areas for further investigation, including

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<sup>29</sup> Carsten, J. (2000). "Knowing where you've come from": Ruptures and continuities of time and kinship in narratives of adoption reunions. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6(4), p696.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p696.

the working out of thorough biblical ethics for reproduction and kinship. Tentatively, I would suggest that the scope and power of kinship reach far beyond the nuclear family unit, and that the Bible challenges our assumptions about who we belong to, and with whom kinship-bonds can be forged.

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