

OSTM LMT2/NY JULY 19 78

MSG: P1L

TO: TIME RELIGION

FROM: LONDON BY: BONNIE ANGELO

SLUG: TEST TUBE ETHICS EOM

NEXT WEDNESDAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT WILL ADDRESS THE RAMIFICATIONS, STILL ONLY DIMLY PERCEIVED, OF CREATING LIFE IN A SMALL GLASS COLLECTING CHAMBER. M.P. LEO ABSE (LAB) HAS LONG BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE LEGAL, ETHICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS POSED BY SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS IN GENETIC ENGINEERING AND THE MANIPULATION OF THE CREATIVE FORCES OUTSIDE THE NORMAL CHANNELS OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION, BUT UNTIL THE FIRST KNOWN "TEST TUBE BABY" REACHED THE POINT OF REALITY, HIS PROPOSALS WERE ROUTINELY TABLED. NOW, BACKED BY 70 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OF ALL PARTIES, ABSE HAS LED THE WAY TO A DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THE GROUP DOES NOT ESPOUSE A POINT OF VIEW ON THE STEPTOE-EDWARDS BREAK-THROUGH. "THE BASIC ISSUE," SAYS ABSE, "IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SCIENTIST AND SOCIETY. WE CAN NO LONGER ALLOW LAISSEZ-FAIRE SCIENTISTS TO CONTINUE THIS KIND OF NEW WORK WITHOUT GIVING SERIOUS THOUGHT TO THE PROBLEMS. THERE ARE A HOST OF ETHICAL PROBLEMS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED. TO TREAT THIS RATHER SIMPLE CASE (OF THE BROWNS' IN VITRO BABY) AS ONE COUPLE'S PROBLEM IS AN INADEQUATE RESPONSE. SOCIETY FACES A NEW CHALLENGE THAT COULD SUBVERT THE FAMILY SYSTEM. THE ISSUE IS: HOW FAR WE PLAY GOD AND DECIDE HOW FAR WE ARE GOING TO TREAT

HANKIND AS WE WOULD TREAT ANIMAL HUSBANDRY. THE PRESENT CASE IS A THRESHOLD TO OTHER DEVELOPMENTS. THE PROBLEMS ARE COMING -- WE DON'T HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD. THE THING ABOUT SCIENCE IS THE EXTRAORDINARY RAPIDITY WITH WHICH IT ACCELERATES."

ABSE DOES NOT SUGGEST THAT ONLY EVIL GENIES MIGHT SPRING FROM THE TEST TUBE, BUT HE RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF HUXLEYAN DEVELOPMENTS AROUND THE CORNER IN RESEARCH LABORATORIES. "WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN A LIBERATED WOMAN DOES NOT WISH TO HAVE THE TROUBLE OF BEARING A CHILD, OR DOES NOT WANT A HUSBAND. YOU COULD GET A WET-NURSE ATTITUDE AS THEY HAD IN THE TWENTIES, THEY MIGHT USE ANOTHER BODY. OR THE EMBRYO COULD BE CREATED BY ANOTHER BODY AND OBTAINED OFF THE SHELF. NEITHER THE CHILD NOR THE PARENT MIGHT KNOW WHO PRODUCED THAT BEING. OR A WOMAN COULD HAVE AN EMBRYO 'TAILOR-MADE' IF THE HUSBAND CANNOT FATHER A CHILD. THEN WHAT ABOUT THE CHILD? LATER HE MIGHT SAY, AS ADOPTED CHILDREN DO, 'WHO AM I? TO WHOM DO I BELONG?'"

A CURRENT CASE IN BRITAIN, JUST SETTLED YESTERDAY (WEDNESDAY) AFTER A LONG COURT HEARING OFFERS A GLIMPSE OF MORE COMPLICATED PROBLEMS THAT LIE AHEAD. IT WAS A CASE WITH 1984 OVERTONES. A CHILDLESS COUPLE HIRED A COCKNEY PROSTITUTE FOR AN AGREED SUM OF POUNDS 3,000 TO HAVE A CHILD THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION BY THE HUSBAND. WHEN THE BABY BOY WAS BORN 13 MONTHS AGO, THE GIRL CALLED OFF HER CONTRACT AND REFUSED TO GIVE HIM UP. THE FATHER, A PROFESSIONAL MAN FROM THE SUBURBS, HAS EAGERLY VISITED HIS SON EVERY OTHER SATURDAY, THE MAXIMUM GRANTED BY A LOWER COURT. THE THREE APPEAL COURT JUDGES RULED YESTERDAY THAT HE CAN NO LONGER SEE THE CHILD, AND BLASTED THE COUPLE WHO BROUGHT ABOUT "THIS WICKED SITUATION," AS IT WAS DESCRIBED BY LORD JUSTICE CUNNING-BRUCE. LORD JUSTICE ORMROD CALLED IT "A SORDID STORY."

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LORD JUSTICE STAMP RECOMMENDED THAT WHEN THE BOY GROWS OLD ENOUGH TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS FATHER, "HE COULD BE TOLD THAT HIS FATHER DIED AT SEA, OR SOMETHING OF THIS SORT."

THAT CASE INVOLVED ONLY THE LONG-ESTABLISHED SCIENCE OF ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION, ALONG WITH AN UNCONVENTIONAL WAY OF THINKING ON THE PART OF THE CHILDLESS COUPLE, BUT IT GIVES AN INSIGHT INTO THE RAMIFICATIONS THAT CAN COME FROM GOING OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF THE NORMAL PROCESSES WHEN IT COMES TO THE AWESOME BUSINESS OF REPRODUCTION.

WHEN FUTURISTIC FICTION BEGINS TO BECOME REALITY, "THE SUBJECT NEEDS EXPLORATION," INSISTS H.P. ABSE. "WE ARE NOW MOVING TO A TIME WHEN AN EMBRYO COULD BE SOLD, IN EFFECT WITH A GUARANTEE THAT THE RESULTING BABE WOULD BE FREE OF GENETIC DEFECT AND THE PURCHASER COULD SELECT IN ADVANCE THE COLOR OF THE BABY'S EYES AND HAIR, ITS SEX, ITS PROBABLE SIZE AT MATURITY, AND ITS PROBABLE IQ."

END TAKE

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