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SELLING BABIES

In recent months, there have been a number of arrests for the crime of selling babies. The very idea of paying money for human beings sounds offensive to a civilized society, and police have moved energetically against the guilty parents and baby brokers.

I think it's time to revise our thinking about this problem, but first let's define it. We are not talking about either abandoning or abusing a child. Those are both crimes that should be severely punished.

The crime that needs to be reevaluated is the case of parents who don't want their baby, but do want the baby to be provided for in a good home with loving foster parents. Most of us can't imagine a mother who doesn't want her baby, but some come to that conclusion because of the shame of illegitimacy, the tender age of the mother, emotional immaturity, economic hardship, or the burdens of single parenthood.

On the other side of the scale, there are thousands of couples who, to their acute disappointment, are unable to have babies of their own. Adoption agencies have long waiting lists and can't possibly satisfy the demand. On the black market, many couples have paid $10,000 or more to get a baby. The..orice in New York City is reported as high as $35,000.

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What's so wrong with that? If I hadn't been blessed with babies of my own, I would have been happy to have paid thousands of dollars for a baby. Where there is a willing seller and an eager buyer, and the babkoves from an unwanted environment into a home with loving **dortivei**

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parents, where's the crime?

Adoption agencies argue that all adoptions should go through their hands in order to provide the best placement for each baby and confidentiality of the parties. I agree that is the better way. But it doesn't necessarily follow that those who choose an alternate procedure should be sent to jail.

Five states have outlawed independent adoptions, and 29 states have signed the 1974 Interstate Compact on the Placement of C ildren designed to control placement across state lines. The Compact,however, applies only to "children," not to women who transport them in utero.

Those opposed to independent adoptions claim that the natural and adoptive parents and the baby-broker lawyers conceal their deal behind a wall of silence, "launder" the money, and sometimes commit perjury. Since all three parties believe they are benefiting, no one is willing to talk.

When Chicago authorities last year arrested and prosecuted a baby broker after having an investigator pose as a desperate "father," the police were deluged with callers who said, "Go catch criminals. This guy was helping people. He was getting them babies."

Much publicity was recently given to a young couple who allegedly sold their five-month old baby for $80. The baby had been well taken care of. Although their motive in selling the baby is unclear, it would be ridiculous to send that pathetic couple to jail for a year, the prescribed punishment for that offense.

I suggest that the police spend all their available time protecting society against real criminals instead of chasing after those whose actions result in transferring babies to better homes than they were born into. If there is such a thing as a victimless crime, this is it.

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