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Childless by choice

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This is impolitic in a country that extols the virtues of having children and it certainly goes against Church teaching that all married couples should be "open to fertility," [1] but I found an article on being childless by choice refreshing.

Although it was ironic (or prophetic, depending on how one looks at it) to find the article [2] in a magazine titled "More [3]," I was glad to see the subject addressed openly. The sad fact is that there are people who should not be parents. One look at this [4], or this [5], or this [6] demonstrates the indisputability of that claim.

Many people who do not have the personality, patience or perseverance to parent well nonetheless end up with a passel full of progeny for a variety of reasons. Some of them -- the 14-year-old freshmen with bellies as large as watermelons in the school at which I taught last year come to mind -- get that way because they are young, poor, and think having a baby will make their lives better.

Others have children because they are unwilling to learn Natural Family Planning [7] or unable to practice it in the manner in which it works.

Still others have them because, choosing to use birth control, they use it incorrectly or are in the 0.3 to 26 percent failure rate, depending on their contraceptive of choice.

But then there are others -- married, stable, educated folk -- who don't fall into any of those categories, but have children anyway because they think that's what is expected of them -- even though they've never had the urge for a child. They have them, in other words, because that is what grown-ups in our culture do.

"Childess by (100 % Regret-Free) Choice" challenges that assumption. Maybe, author Nanette Varian argues, some people weren't *meant* to have kids. Maybe they lack the baby-gene. Maybe, like Varian herself, they've never once thought, "I can't wait to have children!"

The article examines the contention that these childless by choice folks are selfish because they aren't procreating. Perhaps they are, if selfish is defined as wanting to have life on your own terms. And, at least from a Catholic-Christian standpoint, that would be a negative trait, since we are called to be giving and lay down our lives for others.
But what if you know you can't lay your life down? Should you risk the life of a child to see if you can learn? I've known parents who obviously did not want children and, frankly, they are horrible parents.

It does the children no good, and it certainly does society no good, if people pop out babies they will not love. Trust me, I taught high school; I've seen these kids. They are suffering because their parents are emotionally or physically unavailable for them. Teachers (and aunts, uncles, good friends, academic advisors, counselors, etc.) can only do so much for these bruised souls, and many times, it isn't enough.

Granted, our world has become increasingly (and perhaps overly) child-centric, but I'm not talking about the

necessity to be focused on your children all the time. That isn't good for kids either. But it is a far sight better to be over-focused than neglectful or abusive, things that happen when people who know they do not want children have them anyway because that's just what grown-ups do.

We readily accept that God creates everyone as an individual; maybe we should accept -- even as the Church -- that some of the individuals he creates are not meant to create babies.

And just in case folks think I'm arguing for abortion, I'm not. I'm arguing for forethought and self-control, and if that doesn't work, adoption. And, before all of that, acceptance of the childless by choice.

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