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Deliberate Childlessness: Moral Rebellion With a New Face

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According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Joe and Deb Schum of Atlanta aren't worried about baby proofing their house or buying a car seat. As a matter of fact, the couple doesn't ever intend to have children and they are proud of their childlessness. According to the newspaper's report, "the Schums are part of a growing number of couples across the country for whom kids don't factor in the marriage equation."

The paper also pointed to the fact that the nation's birthrate fell last year to an historic low of 66.9 births per 1,000 women age 15-44. That represents a decline of 43% since just 1960. "Many childless couples," according to the report, "revel in their decision, despite badgering from baffled mothers and friends. Others struggle with the choice before keeping the house kid-free."

The Schums just don't want kids to get in the way of their lifestyle. They enjoy cruising to the Georgia mountains on their matching Harley-Davidson motorcycles. They love their gourmet kitchen, outfitted with the very latest stainless steel appliances and trendy countertops. Deb Schum explains, "if we had kids, we would need a table where the kids could do homework." Clearly, children aren't a part of their interior design plan.

This pattern of childlessness has caught the attention of others in the media. The left-wing internet site Salon.com actually published a series of articles entitled, "To Breed or Not to Breed." This series of articles featured couples and individuals who have decided that children are not a part of their chosen lifestyle.

One woman wrote that parenthood just isn't a part of her plan, regardless of cultural expectations to the contrary. Motherhood just doesn't fit her self-image or her schedule. "I compete in triathlons; my husband practices martial arts; we both have fulfilling careers; we travel the world ... we enjoy family and friends; we have a fun, intimate relationship." For others, the bottom line is simply financial. One woman asked: "What would the return be on the investment? Are there any laws that would require my children to pay for my nursing home when I am old? Are they going to be a sufficient hedge against poverty and loneliness?" A return on investment?

Some who have chosen to be childless have actually formed organizations in order to band together. The group "No Kidding" was formed in Atlanta four years ago as a social outlet for couples choosing to have no children. Traci Swartz, an occupational therapist in her thirties, joined "No Kidding" with her husband Jeremy, a 32-year-old computer analyst. "When you don't have children, you are not involved in any activities like a lot of other people, like soccer and ballet," said Traci.

She explained that "No Kidding" members are more likely to talk about pets, travel, or other common interests. Kids rarely come up as a topic of conversation. "People think we sit around and talk about how we hate kids, but we almost never mention kids," Traci explained. No wonder.

Another woman in the Atlanta group explained, "you focus those motherly feelings elsewhere. For us, our dogs get all that love." That worldview is sick, but more and more common.

Christians must recognize that this rebellion against parenthood represents nothing less than an absolute revolt against God's design. The Scripture points to barrenness as a great curse and children as a divine gift. The Psalmist declared: "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate." [Psalm 127: 3-5]

Morally speaking, the epidemic in this regard has nothing to do with those married couples who desire children but are for any reason unable to have them, but in those who are fully capable of having children but reject this intrusion in their lifestyle.

The motto of this new movement of chosen childlessness could be encapsulated by the bumper sticker put out by the Zero Population Growth group in the 1970s: "MAKE LOVE, NOT BABIES." This is the precise worldview the Scripture rejects. Marriage, sex, and children are part of one package. To deny any part of this wholeness is to reject God's intention in creation—and His mandate revealed in the Bible.

The sexual revolution has had many manifestations, but we can now see that modern Americans are determined not only to liberate sex for marriage [and even from gender], but also from procreation.

The Scripture does not even envision married couples who choose not to have children. The shocking reality is that some Christians have bought into this lifestyle and claim childlessness as a legitimate option. The rise of modern contraceptives has made this technologically possible. But the fact remains that though childlessness may be made possible by the contraceptive revolution, it remains a form of rebellion against God's design and order.

Couples are not given the option of chosen childlessness in the biblical revelation. To the contrary, we are commanded to receive children with joy as God's gifts, and to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We are to find many of our deepest joys and satisfactions in the raising of children within the context of the family. Those who reject children want to have the joys of sex and marital companionship without the responsibilities of parenthood. They rely on others to produce and sustain the generations to come.

This epidemic of chosen childlessness will not be corrected by secular rethinking. In an effort to separate the pleasure of sex from the power of procreation, modern Americans think that sex totally free from constraint or conception is their right. Children, of course, do represent a serious constraint on the life of parents. Parenthood is not a hobby, but represents one of the most crucial opportunities for the making of saints found in this life.

The culture is clearly buying into this concept. Legal fights over apartment complexes and other accommodations come down to the claim that adults ought to be able to live in a child-free environment. Others claim that too much tax money and public attention is given to children, and that this is an unfair imposition upon those who choose not to "breed." Of course, the very use of this terminology betrays the rebellion in this argument. Animals breed. Human beings procreate and raise children to the glory of God.

Without doubt, children do impose themselves upon our creature comforts, waking us up in the middle of the night with demanding needs and inconvenient interruptions. Parents learn all too quickly that children are not only the smiling cherub sleeping in the crib, but also the dirty-faced preschooler, the headstrong teenager, and the boisterous grade-schooler.

The church should insist that the biblical formula calls for adulthood to mean marriage and marriage to mean children. This reminds us of our responsibility to raise boys to be husbands and fathers and girls to be wives and mothers. God's glory is seen in this, for the family is a critical arena where the glory of God is either displayed or denied. It is just as simple as that.

The church must help this society regain its sanity on the gift of children. Willful barrenness and chosen childlessness must be named as moral rebellion. To demand that marriage means sex—but not children—is to defraud the creator of His joy and pleasure in seeing the saints raising His children. That is just the way it is. No kidding.

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