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**FOR MOTHERS
WHO DON'T LIKE
CHILDREN**



D. F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.

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Here is a head-on meeting with a problem that is the secret, but unfaced, cause of the unhappiness of many mothers.

FOR MOTHERS
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In a very frank and revealing letter on the subject of large families, a mother from the far-west has raised an objection, which, though no doubt present in many women's minds, is seldom mentioned in the literature on married life.

It took a very honest person to write the letter, and it may require a few sharp and straight-forward words to give the answer. The letter reads:

"I was very interested in the Liguorian articles on why parents should want large families, and in the letters

following them. However, none of the letters expressed my objection to having a large family; yet I can't believe I am alone in it. I do not want many children simply because I do not like children. We have had three; one died shortly after birth; the two living ones are aged 5 and 3. I honestly find their company both irritating and boring. The constant noise and confusion they make exasperate me, and the endless round of chores that are necessary for their physical care frustrates me because they leave so little time for activities that give me pleasure.

“I feel guilty because I am happiest when they are finally asleep at night, and in order to alleviate this feeling, I make special efforts in their behalf, for example, taking them for picnics, arranging neighborhood parties for them, etc. But pushing them in a swing or reading *Peter Rabbit*

to them thoroughly bores me. I want to be a good mother but I have the feeling that they will grow up sensing the fact that most of the time I wish they would just go away and leave me alone.

“As a convert, I took the advice of many wise people who said, ‘You haven’t lived until you have had children.’ I feel I haven’t lived since I have had children. Now the wise people say that the years when children are young are the hardest, but I know I will be just as impatient with them when they are in their teens as I am now.

“The pope says that, despite the burdens which large families bring, they ordinarily result in the healthiest state of mind and body for parents and children. Yet I cannot see how anything but an unhealthy state of mind can come to a child born of a

mother who dreads his advent. I worry about the harmful effect my attitude may have on our children. I truly wish I could enjoy them. I have resolved to do my best with the two I have, but I don't want any more. Is this a legitimate reason for limiting the size of one's family by rhythm? If it isn't, what help can you give one who wants to want a large family? . . . Mrs. N. N."



If it is true, as our correspondent says, that she is not alone in having this particular objection to a large family, then her state of mind calls for analysis and treatment that will be of help to many mothers. In the following words we directly address the mother who wrote the letter, but we have in mind all mothers who in any measure share her attitudes and her views, and all those in any walk

of life who are unhappy for somewhat the same reason.

Dear mother of two: I write these lines to you with full realization that you need far more guidance and instruction than I can possibly provide in a letter not much longer than the one in which you state your dislike of children. Perhaps, however, I can prod you into thinking along certain lines that will eventually help you to build into your character a different and more correct attitude toward your job as a wife and mother than the one you express so frankly now.

If I may choose the one central idea of your letter that needs corrective comment and instruction, I shall say that it is your misguided notion of "enjoyment." All your complaints may be summed up in the one that you get little feeling of enjoyment out of many of the tasks involved in

raising your children. On the contrary, you are bored and irritated by the confusion and disorder and noise they cause. When you are doing unpleasant things for the children, you are thinking of many pleasant and enjoyable things that you might be doing if it were not for the children. You don't want more children because you are convinced that every additional child will only multiply your present unhappiness and increase your inability to do the things you like to do.

Now let's analyze this whole notion of enjoyment in human life. There are really two kinds of enjoyment, and unless you grasp the difference between them, you will never find peace.

First of all, there is the enjoyment that comes from doing just exactly what we choose and like to do at any

given moment. This can embrace a wide variety of occupations, both bad and good. There is the enjoyment that comes from committing sin, even though one knows it has to be paid for bitterly later on. There is the enjoyment we can find in lying around doing nothing, when we are supposed to be on the job, such as a child experiences when he plays hooky from school. There is the enjoyment that some people find in spending hours at cocktail bars or drinking parties with their friends, to the neglect of their families, their business, and even their souls.

These are feelings of enjoyment in which the lower nature responds happily to our letting it have its way. However not all such feelings of enjoyment are wrong, or contrary to one's responsibilities. At the end of a busy day we can relax by going to a good show, listening to good music,

playing a game of cards with friends, and like activities. In these cases the feelings of enjoyment are approved not only by the inclinations and appetites that they please, but also by reason, which recognizes their goodness and propriety.

There is a second and higher sense in which the word “enjoyment” can and should be used. We can say that we enjoy doing an important job, even though there are many things involved in doing the job that are unpleasant and burdensome. In this use of the word, we ignore what is unpleasant to the feelings and to fallen human nature, and concentrate on the mental and spiritual satisfaction that comes from the accomplishment of good.

Take an example out of the life of a priest like myself. One of my tasks as a priest is to hear confessions. If I

were to concentrate on the uncomfortableness of confessionals, on the boring effect of having to hear the same tales of sin over and over again, or the irritation sometimes humanly felt when persons come to confession ill-prepared, or unwilling to give up their sins, I would speak as you do about your job and say that I dislike hearing confessions. In a real sense, however, I can say that I like to hear confessions, so much so that I would never turn down anybody asking to make a confession, and would never try to escape the periods set aside for confessions in a priest's life. That is because I am so deeply convinced of the immeasurable good for souls that is done through the hearing of confessions.



When you hear mothers talk about how they love children and love their work of raising their children, you may be very sure that they do not mean that they love the quarrelling their children sometimes get into, that they love the noise and confusion they often cause, that they love every one of the million chores involved in raising children. You may be sure that they too could think of more pleasant things to do than washing and ironing, putting a stop to quarrels, making up games for children, etc. But they have their eyes fixed on a magnificent eternal goal toward which they are working: to make good men and women out of their children, and in the end new inhabitants of heaven. They rightly say that they enjoy their work because they see every small item of it as related to the great goal.

Your own narrow interpretation and application of the word "enjoy-

ment” is one that comes from a widespread false philosophy in the world today. This false philosophy recognizes a duty only in so far as there are feelings of enjoyment connected with the discharge of duty. It takes the position that duty ends when enjoyment ends. Look at some examples of the evils that are spawned out of this principle.

In a true sense it may be said that almost every one of the thousands of divorces that occur originates in the principle that “duty ends when enjoyment ends.” A man and woman vow to stay with each other “for better for worse—till death parts them.” This represents their solemn duty before God. But how often, when they no longer enjoy each other as they did at the beginning, or as much as they expected to, they throw duty to the winds and look for enjoyment in someone else.

Alcoholics are made by the principle that feelings of enjoyment are the only things that matter. A man is irritated by his job. But when he drinks he feels no pain; the irritation is lifted, at least for a while. So he drinks, drinks, drinks till his job is gone and he is a burden to everyone who knows him.

Atheists and agnostics usually become such, not by reason or logic, but by acceptance of the principle that there should be no duties that cannot be enjoyed. But God imposes duties that are unpleasant to human nature. Praying daily, going to church regularly, keeping the commandments — these are not always enjoyed in the lower parts of human nature. So, some people say, let's do away with God, and these unpleasant duties will go with Him.

Let's apply all this now to your own situation.

Look hard, first of all, at your own duty. Some years ago you got married to a man whom I presume you loved. At least vaguely, perhaps too vaguely, you knew that marriage has a direct relationship to raising a family. You knew, at least vaguely, that it's no cinch to bear babies, that it's no snap to raise them. But you bound yourself to that particular task in life by the very fact of getting married.

Now look at what is happening to you. You are concentrating far too much of your attention on the elements in your life as a wife and mother that are unpleasant. You are cultivating a good strong case of self-pity. You are not yet fatally afflicted because you say that you do want to be a good mother to your children. But the disease of self-pity is gaining

momentum, indicated by the fact that you want no more children, and feel that you will not be able to hide, from the children you have, your feelings of resentment over the trouble they cause you.

What can you do to correct this situation? You can and must do two things, if your life is not to become more and more miserable, and if your soul's salvation is not to be endangered.

First you must concentrate much of your thinking, meditating and praying on the essence of your task as a wife and mother. About having children and raising children you have to establish in your mind this deep conviction: This is my job. This is God's will for me. This is how I shall save my soul. This is how I am asked to add to the number of good

men and women in the world, and of the citizens of an everlasting heaven.

With that conviction, you have to learn how to deal with your feelings, whether they run contrary to your conviction or at times support it. You have to train yourself to say: My feelings are secondary. I shall never let them tell me what my job is. I shall never try to shirk my job because it does not bring me feelings of enjoyment. I shall be thankful when I do enjoy some parts of my job, but not disturbed when I don't. I shall try to train my feelings to support me in my daily tasks, but I shall never show my feelings of displeasure when I cannot avoid them.

Your letter proves that you are aware dimly of these obligations. You still have the desire to be a good mother. You still try to hide your feelings of boredom from your chil-

dren. But you have a long way to go in overcoming the tendency to complain about that boredom.

Now for your last important question. Do you have sufficient reason, in the fact that you don't feel much enjoyment in your children, to practice rhythm for the rest of your fertile life and thus avoid having any more children?

Assuming the questionable ability and willingness of your husband to go along with your wishes without infringement of his rights or danger to his soul, I could answer yes to your question on only one condition, namely, that you are so neurotic that you can in a true sense be called a very sick person.

Your letter does not read like that of a confirmed neurotic. It reads like that of a person who has simply been carried away by the world's philoso-

phy of "pleasure above all," but who can be cured by sharp talk and straight thinking. No, I do not think you have sufficient reason to terminate, even by such an expedient as rhythm, your potential for having children and the purpose of your marriage.

Rather I think you can with continued guidance obtained through good reading and a good director, look forward to the day when you will be able to say honestly and intellectually: "I enjoy my job as a wife and mother." God bless you!

DONALD F. MILLER, C.S.S.R.



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