

How to respect life

I had some difficulty comprehending Mary Thornburg's rather convoluted and lengthy July 20 letter ("Roe v. Wade isn't the answer"), but I found I agree with at least one of her points: that "if anything good has come out of Roe v. Wade, it is that the humiliation of childbearing outside of marriage does not hold the stigma it once did."

I thank God for that.

If we want to be people who truly respect life, we must establish social policies that support women and children financially, regardless of marital status. We also must provide support to women who choose to raise their own children and not continue to provide huge stipends to infant adopters.

Adoption, like abortion, is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Anyone suggesting a return to the pre-Roe era, the years between 1945 and 1973 when women and girls "hid their shame" of being pregnant outside wedlock by being closeted away in maternity homes, should read Ann Fessler's *The Girls Who Went Away*.

The government's stated social policy at that time -- which transferred over a million infants from their single, white, middle-class mothers to childless married couples -- was coercive and dehumanizing. Mothers were told to "forget and get on with your life" as soon as their babies entered the world.

Most mothers did not forget. They grieved silently for years for the lost child many never got to hold.

Thornburg seemed to suggest that having the "young woman disappear for nine months and then return" was a good method of dealing with unplanned pregnancies. Those today who would like to reinstate that social policy of maternity homes, including our president, have forgotten the "good old standbys of integrity and self-respect."

Vulnerable women and girls who surrendered their babies were, with a little support, perfectly capable of raising them themselves. Instead, many of these mothers from the closed adoption era were condemned to lifetimes of disenfranchised grief, not knowing whether their babies were alive or dead. Many of their babies, adoptees now grown, have no idea of their genetic heritage. Many have banded together in states across the country to open records so they can obtain necessary medical information.

Once the choice for life has been made, every effort, every social policy, should focus on family preservation. That would be showing integrity with a life-enhancing policy and encourage self-respect as we help women raise their children with dignity.

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