

# National Day spurs C-section rethink

October 14, 2012 by Daniel J. Bauer

For me, it was a case of good news and bad news at the same time.

The day after Double Ten Day brought media reports that few cesarean births had occurred on Taiwan's National Day in local hospitals in Taipei. Ah, I thought happily, that's good news. For years I have followed with some dismay a spate of articles trumpeting the delivery of babies by cesarean section on so called lucky days.

Well, anyway, so then I read a newspaper headline more carefully. Bad news, I saw, now with a shake of my head. "Fewer births reported on 'inauspicious' National Day" (TT 10-11-12 p. 2).

The article reported that although relatively fewer babies were born in Taipei by cesarean section on Double Ten Day this year, the reason was not because more women were opting for natural (vaginal) childbirth. Fewer cesarean births occurred to avoid what was claimed to be "a day of bad fortune" for babies.

The article trotted out the words of a fortune-teller named Tsai. This year's October 10 was a good day, said the prophet, for "tearing down houses and bathing before becoming a monk or a nun," but a bad day for childbirths and, it seems, just about every thing else. This year's fabled Double Ten Day fell on Tsai's chart as a "Black Day," or day of misfortune.

Beliefs about good fortune, fate, or destiny (whatever your preference may be) are sensitive and often controversial. I have learned not to make carefree use of "superstition" in reference to matters of the spirit. Respect for a culture different than my original culture, as well as respect for freedom of belief, urge careful stepping here. Basic EQ argues too that only fools think they can fly in the face of deeply held cultural tenets or folk beliefs. The great majority of our local friends take predictions by fortune-tellers seriously indeed. Nothing I say about the folly of calling some days lucky or unlucky will make much of an impact here.

One reason talk of auspicious days for giving birth to a baby bothers me is that such a notion seems blatantly unfair to females. A belief about a lucky day for a baby to arrive hints at the claim that a woman's value lies primarily in her ability to bear a child and, not only that, but to bear that child at the right moment and on the right day, to boot. Women and girls are wonderful and precious for so many other reasons beyond the question of their motherhood, realized or potential. We need to say this more often.

Doctors of course know far more about birthing than I ever will. I am clearly no expert on cesarean sections. A bit of common sense and reading on the topic tell me, however, that medical intervention as drastic as a cesarean section is in most cases advisable only when absolutely necessary to protect the life of the mother or child.

The World Health Organization recommends that 15 % percent of a nation's babies be delivered by cesarean section. Taiwan's rate of cesareans is twice that percentage. (This is also true in the U.S.A.) Studies show women of lower educational background in Taiwan tend to choose cesarean births more readily than women with college educations.

I wonder if a sharing of values and of understandings in a non-judgmental manner in various academically-related forums might bring down the statistics for cesarean sections in our society in the time ahead. I wonder if deeper discussions about fate, destiny, prosperity and related notions about personal responsibility and life might contribute to an important national conversation about the value of both women and men in our local society and culture.

And one more thing, if you don't mind. Why does language cling so ferociously to ideas that link color with positives or negatives? Why do we at times associate the color black with evil or misery or fear?

If we choose to talk of bad luck days, must we call them a Black Day on our calendar?

Countless millions of people in our world just happen to have black skin. Black is beautiful. Isn't it more than time for some changes, not only in thoughts about fortune and babies, but in our use of words as well? (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## TALKING POINTS -

- 1) Relatively fewer babies were born by cesarean section in Taipei on October 10 than in previous years. The reason is because fortune tellers said October 10 this year was 'not a lucky day'. Do you believe in 'lucky' days? Why / Why not?
- 2) Although giving birth to a baby by cesarean section may seem far away from you, this is an issue affecting thousands of Taiwan women every year. Does this treatment of women in our society bother you?
- 3) Studies show that women of more simple educational background tend in Taiwan to choose cesarean section birthing because of "lucky" days more readily than women with a college education (in one research study, 1 of 32 for high school graduates only and 1 of 52 for women with a college education). Do you think colleges should do more by education to try to reduce the number of cesarean births in Taiwan?

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