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A table of contents for the *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* can be found here:

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All costs were covered by the nominal charge made, well within the limits of the lowest income.

Many ask, "what help has this been to the 'work'?" Naturally it was a good evangelistic opportunity. Bibles and New Testaments were always on sale and free literature available. I know of some who are keen Christians today as a result of a first contact in the clinic. The homes of the believers in the fellowship are most certainly reaping the benefits of the clinic. In many cases it has transformed the economic situation, many women have had their broken health restored, marriage relationships have improved, and *more* children are growing up normally.

(Note: For general information and help on this subject, the excellent book "Birth Control and the Christian" is highly recommended.

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ANNE TOWNSEND

6: Missionary kids . . . unnecessary luxury?

Any Christian couple in England or overseas should seriously and prayerfully consider their responsibility before God, in bringing children into this world.

The 'full-time Christian worker' faces peculiar problems of his own. For instance, it might be argued, "Surely a Spirit-filled evangelist, and his wife (a well-trained teacher) should be free to fully exercise their God-given gifts at all times? He should surely be excused all the nuisance and tiredness resulting from babies which cry in the night, and make the average young father prone to periods of exhaustion? Surely he should be freed from these distractions to devote his life to evangelism. His hours of prayer should never be broken by his infant's pleas for paternal attention?"

"His wife, similarly, should not have to waste her training in youth work, her potential for winning young folk to Christ, by turning into a machine for rearing young children?" Some would argue that for such a young couple to have children, would be for them to squander their obvious talents . . . whether they live in England or abroad as missionaries is immaterial.

On the other hand, others like myself, react vigorously to such attitudes. 'What a peculiar perspective on life!' we feel.

Are missionaries, or any other Christians some kind of machine? A machine, created solely to proclaim the gospel? Is there no more to the Creator's purpose in creating us?

Surely we are all still *people*? We are people, whose lives are sanctified, enriched and matured through the rough and tumble of rearing children, the same as everyone else. We are people, whom God is painstakingly and gradually conforming to the image of His Son. He is changing us daily to make us (we trust) channels through which His Holy Spirit can flow more freely every day.

God does this for most of us in the wear and tear of family life. The intense, passionate evangelist learns real patience and love (I know, I've watched him) as he relieves his tired wife night after night with their crying baby; he understands the Fatherhood of God in quite a new dimension as he cares for his own children (before it was all in a book); he learns how to "weep with them that weep" when his own children seem to be going wrong, and his understanding of humanity deepens.

The wife who denies herself motherhood, in order to 'win souls for Christ' may feel she is doing God's will for her life. She may be absolutely right. Yet she must face the fact, that when it is too late for her to have any children she may feel she has mistaken God's guidance terribly; and bitterly regret her youthful decision.

Deliberate childlessness may repercuss in the relationship between the couple. Deep-rooted psychological harm and misunderstandings may be caused. What meaning has sexual intercourse for such a couple if it is never practised to produce children? While God gave sexual union as an expression of a couple's union at all levels, should it always, only, be used in this way . . . only half of that for which it was designed by God? Might the wife ever begin to feel she was being 'used' as an object to satisfy her husband's desire . . . no more? Does this act, symbolising a very deep union, run the risk of becoming only a ritual? Is it right to prevent permanent flowering of a couple's union, into the fruit of a child?

To deliberately have no children, a couple must be very very sure that *God*, and no "Christian pressure group", have led them to take this step.

A missionary couple who have no children face many problems. What ever do the nationals of their adopted country make of them? In a non-Western uninhibited country, such a couple may daily in the bus queue, or at the market be asked, 'Why no children?' 'Are Westerners impotent?' 'If your husband doesn't know how to make love properly would you like us to try and give him a few

tips?' 'Has God cursed your womb and stopped you from being fertile like everyone else?'

Not only is this missionary couple peculiar because of their colour and creed, but because of their childlessness . . . a stigma and shame to the Easterner.

How does an emerging church learn about Christian family life if it does not see it lived out in front of them? What value is a lecture by the missionary wife (who has no children) on 'How to bring up your children for Christ', when everyone listening knows that she has no idea of the problems involved in bringing up children. It is the living example that counts.

Since Eastern society cannot be divorced from family life, it makes nonsense to the average Eastern mind to learn that a Western couple deliberately have no children (and there are no secrets in the East . . . the village will know in a few hours). An Easterner does not face life without his family: he and they form one unit. If he is to become a Christian it will often be with other members of his family.

I believe that the 'full time Christian worker' here or overseas, should be a normal person! He should live as a normal Christian. The quality of his life should be such that other ordinary people will see Christ in him, and turn to the Christ who transforms ordinary people into those who can have a life-giving relationship with the Creator God.

Contraceptives are available worldwide: cheaper in developing countries than here. Some have reasonably suggested that if couples in England are limiting the size of their families in order to support missionaries, then missionaries should limit the size of family that has to be supported. Family planning by the missionary (and freely discussed intimately with strangers in the train or on the bus, as their normal topic of conversation!) may help those in the Third World, facing immense overpopulation problems and food shortage, to realise its advantages, and disadvantages. Most governments value missionary co-operation in birth-control programmes.

Take pity on some missionary mothers! Some pass through a period of intense longing for another child when their last has gone thousands of miles away to boarding school . . . some have a 'second family' at this stage. Those who have not faced such separation perhaps do not realise the deep psychological loss some mothers feel at this milestone in their lives. This accounts in some cases for unusually (by today's standards) large missionary families.

I believe that all the basic principles for and against family planning apply as much to the missionary married couple, as to

any other Christian couple, (unless called *very* clearly by God to have no children . . . the very small minority).

I do *not* believe that children hinder the spread of the gospel overseas. They hinder a preaching machine from preaching . . . but, the gospel in its fullest sense is more richly proclaimed by the witness of a Christian family. I have seen other missionaries' children in Thailand, and seen the impact their family life has had in non-Christian cultures. I believe that this impact may have cut more ice spiritually, than hours and hours of preaching.

Speaking personally, my three children have helped me immensely, if indirectly. Not only have they shared Christ with their lips, but they are often God's channel through which He is changing me, and gradually making me more as He wants me to be. And after all, the more I become like Christ, the more others will meet Him in me.

So, thank you my children for the hours of washing nappies, and the days when you were sick and tested my patience to the limit, and the nights when I couldn't sleep because you were separated and far away from me at boarding school. God is using you, I believe, to establish and build His Church in Thailand, just as much as He is using my husband and me. I wouldn't want to be without you!