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ELSIE M. SIBTHORPE

4: Comments on the free prescribing of contraceptives

It is difficult to comment at this stage on the free prescribing of contraceptives, as the full implementation of the service has not yet taken place. There is no doubt that the announcement of a free contraceptive service was political and had not been worked out with the profession.

If prescription charges had been abolished, so that patients who are dependent on drugs for their well-being were supplied free, then the additional supply of free contraceptives would be a rational measure, but it seems unfair that those who are ill should have to pay, and fit persons get contraceptives free.

The actual costs of the pill or other contraceptive appliances are very small compared with the amount many people spend on tobacco or alcohol, but even so there are women who would refuse to pay, but who can be induced to accept a free service. As these women are usually those in the lower social scale, who tend to have large families, this is a good thing.

It is more important for married couples to be able to obtain contraceptive advice easily and from competent advisers than that it should be provided free. While many people can get all the help they need from their general practitioners, some doctors for personal reasons do not wish to be involved in a contraceptive service, and so the provision of special clinics is necessary.

For some years now certain London Boroughs in conjunction with the Family Planning Association have run a free contraceptive service, and there is no doubt that many young women have appreciated the ease and anonymity with which married and unmarried alike could obtain advice and supplies of pills, etc. However much we may deplore sexual intercourse outside marriage, it is much better to encourage a responsible attitude and provide contraception, rather than have to deal with an unwanted pregnancy.

JOHN HART

5: Family planning—a missionary responsibility

The days have long since gone when a missionary was somebody who only preached the gospel and taught the Bible. However, most missionaries today would agree that the real missionary job involves

establishing churches. And happily, many churches are getting away from the ideas of 'just having three meetings in the week' and "spirituality is determined by faithful and punctual attendance complete with hat". There are now many professional missionaries, doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants, pilots, radio technicians, musicians, and a host of others. Many go to the mission field intent on doing a specific job, for example flying missionaries in jungle areas, or running radio stations. This article refers to those missionaries who find themselves in the rather do-it-all situation of evangelising, establishing churches and building up churches in areas where many of the normal facilities for living just do not exist. Many are trying to give specific attention to the needs of the area in which they are living, apart from regularly preaching and teaching the Word of God. However, even if the job in hand is 'mundane', most are working with a means to an end, that of establishing mature, independent fellowships under local leadership.

Of all the obstacles to spiritual growth and maturity in Ecuador, probably the greatest is the marital, family and home situation of the people. I suspect the same to be true of the majority of cultures throughout the world. Whether it be in the high class people of the society, the near to starvation poor people from the country, or the up and coming 'gente' of the cities, many marriages are on the rocks and many homes are at breaking point. The real problem is neither poverty nor riches, but ignorance, and/or lack of adequate facilities. There are many thousands of unwanted children in Ecuador who are suffering the consequences of the ignorance of their parents. Some, the majority, are uneducated, hungry, poorly dressed beggars and robbers. Others are sophisticated, educated, unpleasantly wealthy children who have been brought up by the maid.

The missionary both can and should be prepared to step into these situations with education and, if other facilities are not available, with practical help. Can the missionary take the 'gospel' to these people without feeling the responsibility to share in their problems? Can a Christian keep quiet who has the knowledge so desperately needed by others?

During four years from 1968—1972, we were able to hold a special clinic in our area for Family Planning. At first I worked with a doctor who is a specialist from the U.S.A. The local medical facilities were unable to provide any form of family planning. Four thousand women were treated in the clinic, and we consider that about 12—16 thousand unwanted pregnancies have been avoided. Nevertheless we still have a good Sunday school. In 1972 we were able to hand over to a group of national doctors, specialists in family planning. The time involved in our clinic was one day per month seeing patients and one day per month for making preparations.

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.