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“The Ghost at the Table” — Are Kids a Threat to the Environment?

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The contemporary clash of worldviews comes immediately into view with controversies over children, contraception, abortion, and now the environment. A recent controversy in Great Britain makes this point all too clear.

Jonathon Porritt, chairman of the British government’s Sustainable Development Commission, told *The Times* [London] that it is high time that the government moves to limit family size in the nation — all in the name of the environment.

From the *Times*:

“I am unapologetic about asking people to connect up their own responsibility for their total environmental footprint and how they decide to procreate and how many children they think are appropriate,” Porritt said.

“I think we will work our way towards a position that says that having more than two children is irresponsible. It is the ghost at the table. We have all these big issues that everybody is looking at and then you don’t really hear anyone say the “p” word.”

In reality, a loss of total population is a greater threat to his nation than a new baby boom. But an antinatalist worldview has been part of the extreme left of the environmental movement for a long time, driven by warnings of impending disaster by a “population explosion.”

Amazingly, the prophets of population doom seem unembarrassed by the failures of their prophecies. Figures such as Paul Ehrlich warned decades ago that the world would be devoid of human life by now, snuffed out by ecological disaster and wiped out by famine.

Now, Jonathon Porritt describes family size as “the ghost at the table.” Well, in Britain it is no ghost. Just four months ago Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, suggested in [an interview](#) with the very same newspaper that curbing family size might be the answer to the current economic crisis. “Basically, it’s a little embarrassing for everybody,” said the husband of the monarch. “No one quite knows how to handle it. Nobody wants their family life to be interfered with by the government.”

Porritt proposes that the British government should take on the issue of family size by making clear that having more than two children is irresponsible.

He went on to argue that each child “born in Britain will, during his or her lifetime, burn carbon roughly equivalent to 2½ acres of old-growth oak woodland - an area the size of Trafalgar Square.” The reduction of a child to a “carbon footprint” is about as twisted a formula as can be imagined. A child is compared to the loss of “2½ acres of old-growth



oak woodland.”

If his extremism is not clear enough, consider this section of the paper’s report:

Porritt, a former chairman of the Green party, says the government must improve family planning, even if it means shifting money from curing illness to increasing contraception and abortion.

So this government official is quite willing to call for a shift from funding for cures for illness to funding for abortion.

The Culture of Death most often hides behind carefully measured statements and euphemisms. Every once in a while, the mask drops, and this is one of those cases. In the name of sustainable development this official calls for limiting family size, and compares the value of a human child to that of an oak woodland. In the name of environmentalism, he argues for shifting government financial support from finding the cures for illnesses in the body to funding the killing of babies in the womb.

Christians must be reminded that we do bear responsibility as stewards of God’s creation. But we cannot be faithful in that stewardship if we adopt the logic of the Culture of Death. Human beings cannot be reduced to any cold economic or ecological value. Each human being is made in God’s image, and each can be part of the fulfillment of our stewardship.

When a government official talks this way about what he calls “the ghost at the table,” we are witnessing an ominous shift in the debate. Thanks to this interview, the ghost is now there for all to see.

We discussed this issue on Tuesday’s edition of *The Albert Mohler Program*. Listen [here](#).

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