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# Are Children Threatening the Earth? The Great Liberal Death Wish Strikes Again

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Malcolm Muggeridge, a keen observer of the twentieth century and its horrors, used to speak of the "[The Great Liberal Death Wish](#)." Over the years, Muggeridge applied this explanation to a number of perplexing issues, especially the liberal embrace of abortion. If alive today, he would surely see the death wish at play in the April 21, 2008 edition of [USA Today](#).

In his periodic column for the paper, Oliver "Buzz" Thomas asks: "[Might Our Religion Be Killing Us?](#)" His primary concern is environmental, and his tone is apocalyptic. "We all remember the Aztecs," Thomas warns. "Some say their religion, with its penchant for violence and human sacrifice, played a critical role in the destruction of their civilization. We moderns are far more sophisticated, of course, but if we persist with some of our religious practices, we could be heading down the same disastrous dog trot."

Well, it is unlikely that many would encourage a cultural future like the Aztecs' "disastrous dog trot," but what really worries Thomas is that religion — Christianity in particular — is encouraging us to have too many children.

Thomas points to recent scientific studies that warn of ecological disaster. He then warns that we might already have passed the crucial "tipping point" in the ecological equation. As he sees it, the big problem is population growth and the related problem is any religious belief that would encourage large families.

Then again, Thomas sees the church as a problem in more than one sense. He implausibly criticizes churches for failing to ordain women and homosexuals without even attempting to tie this criticism to his main point — except to argue that religious institutions are often "late to the party."

Here is the key section of his article:

*In the interest of preserving our planet and our species, shouldn't religious organizations be encouraging smaller families? Do our spiritual leaders need additional divine revelation to realize that our current doctrines — which threaten to take the entire world down with us — have become ethically and theologically questionable?*

*Population growth hits hardest in the poorest nations, and as poverty increases, public health declines. I am quite certain that God is not the author of human misery, but by preaching against birth control at the same time we are preaching against abortion, it seems that we're making God out as cruel, a buffoon, or both.*

Thomas' article fails on multiple grounds, but it serves as an example of the kind of thinking that poses for wisdom in some circles. If the issue is truly as serious as Thomas indicates, it surely deserves a more serious article than his.

Thomas bemoans the fact that Roman Catholics and Mormons (among others) encourage large families, and the fact that many religious groups (including many Muslims) discourage birth control. Indeed, many evangelical couples are planning and having larger families even as an entire generation of younger evangelicals is rethinking the birth control question.

These doctrines now “threaten to take the entire world down with us,” Thomas exclaims. He pleads for religious leaders to encourage smaller families — no more than two children per couple. “Clergy should consider voicing the difficult truth that having more than two children during such a time is selfish,” he argues. “Dare we say sinful? The average American might not listen to his elected representatives, but he darn sure listens to his pastor. Every week. This will be a hard message for pastors to preach and parishioners to hear, but without it we court disaster.”

There is no argument against the fact that a larger population consumes more resources than a smaller population. But this is a short-sighted way to look at a very complex situation — far more complex than Thomas’ simplistic approach can even admit.

The real population problem the world is almost certain to face in the future is too *few* babies being born — not too many. Russia is experiencing a net decrease in population, a situation that could threaten social stability. In China, the nation’s disastrous “one child only” policy has led to a dramatic gender imbalance (far more males than females born since the policy took effect), and the rapid aging of the population means that basic social needs will present a crisis.

Beyond this, Africa faces an AIDS epidemic that has undermined the social fabric. Even in the advanced economies of the West, aging populations will present significant social and economic challenges. What happens when the number of retirees approaches the number of workers? That economic experiment cannot work.

This kind of approach to population control is rooted in an elitist distaste for larger families and an ambition of some to control the reproductive destiny of others. This is precisely the kind of calamitous nonsense historian Matthew Connelly of Columbia University has documented so well in his important new book, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Harvard University Press).

In reality, population growth is already subsiding on a global basis. In any event, a couple deciding to have additional children will often reflect a rational approach to getting out of poverty — not the cause of poverty in itself. Put bluntly, even in economic terms children usually bring greater economic benefits than costs over the long term.

For Christians, far more than economics is at stake. The far larger issue is the glory of God in the birth and maturation of godly progeny. Children are to be received — and conceived — as gifts, not as threats of environmental disaster.

Like the Malthusians of old, the new prophets of population control warn of imminent disaster. Their arguments are not likely to be of much effect where it matters — among couples actually deciding to have babies. They are not likely to be deterred by an op-ed column in *USA Today* or any other newspaper, nor are they likely to be discouraged by its arguments. They simply don’t believe that having babies is killing us.

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Matthew Connelly, author of *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*, was my guest on *The Albert Mohler Program* on April 15, 2008 [listen to the program [here](#)].

Southern Baptist readers may recognize that Oliver “Buzz” Thomas was once General Counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, DC. After years of protracted controversy, the SBC withdrew from the BJCPA in 1991.

