



RESPECTING *life,* RESPECTING *nature*

IS CLIMATE CHANGE LINKED TO POPULATION?

As more people become concerned about climate change and the impact of human activity on the environment, a number of influential groups are blaming the world's expanding population for rising carbon dioxide levels. Though most of those at UN's Copenhagen Conference focused on controlling carbon emissions and changing energy use, predictably, population activists blamed population growth for climate change and called for drastic population control.

A GLOBAL ONE-CHILD POLICY?

At one extreme, Dianne Francis went so far as to claim that the entire world needs to adopt China's one-child policy, arguing that this was the "real" inconvenient truth that no one wanted to face.

The "inconvenient truth" overhanging the UN's Copenhagen conference is not that the climate is warming or cooling, but that humans are overpopulating the world. A planetary law, such as China's one-child policy, is the way to reverse the disastrous global birthrate currently...¹

The United Nations' Family Planning Association also thinks that children are the new enemy causing climate change. A 2009 report on the State of the World Population, judges that more babies will undermine attempts to stop climate change.²

Chinese Communist Party Officials have stated that 'thanks to the policy of family planning China has pursued since the 1970's, its population growth has been lowered by more than 300 million, equivalent to 1.2 billion tons of annual CO₂ emission reduction.'³ Another very influential group, Britain's Optimum Population Trust made up of notables such as Jonathon Porritt and David Attenborough, is asserting that spending \$7 dollars a day on basic family planning in the developing world will reduce carbon dioxide emissions.



Similar calls to drastically reduce our population are being made in Australia, with some arguing that Australia's 22 million people must be reduced to seven million,⁴ around the level after the great depression of 1929.⁵ It has been argued that restricting each couple to one baby, as China does, 'is one way of assisting to reduce population' and avoiding 'environmental suicide'.⁶

Others have echoed their claims. Bob Brown, leader of the Australian Greens claims that the world is buckling under 'vast and threatening population weight',⁷ while Barry Walters, an Associate Professor of Obstetric Medicine at the University of Western Australia, believes that 'every newborn baby in Australia represents a potent source of greenhouse gas emissions for an average of 80 years ...'⁸

Although some may dismiss these calls as outlandish, others among the world's "elite" have joined forces with some of the world's billionaires to make reducing the world's population a top priority. Bill Gates organised a meeting in Manhattan in 2009 with David Rockefeller Jr, Warren Buffett, George Soros, Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York and the media moguls Ted Turner and Oprah Winfrey. They agreed to make population control their top priority.⁹

WORLD FERTILITY PATTERNS 2009

Country or Area	Year	Total Fertility per woman	Year	Total Fertility per woman
World	1970-1975	4.7	2005-2010	2.6
More Developed Regions	1970-1975	2.3	2005-2010	1.6
Less Developed Regions (excluding the least developed countries)	1970-1975	5.6	2005-2010	2.5
Least Developed Countries	1970-1975	6.3	2005-2010	4.4
China	1970	5.8	2006	1.4
Australia	1970	2.9	2006	1.8

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division www.unpopulation.org

A DISGUISED POPULATION EXPLOSION

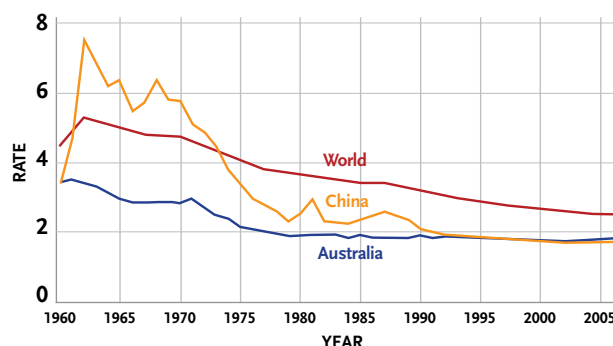
Nick Eberstadt, a demographer at the American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank in Washington, DC explains why it might appear that we have a "population explosion" today. The reason the world has experienced a population explosion over the last century is not 'because human beings started breeding like rabbits,' he says but 'it is because they stopped dying like flies. Over the 20th century, average life expectancy doubled from around thirty years to over sixty and infant mortality rates have declined substantially all over the world. With fewer people dying, populations have increased, even though global fertility levels have been in decline since the 1960's.'¹⁰

Evidence shows that fertility patterns around the world have fallen dramatically in the last 30 years, from an average of 4.7 children per woman in 1970-1975 to 2.6 in 2005-2010.

According to demographers, in order for a population to remain stable, the fertility rate needs to be 2.1 in nations with relatively low infant mortality. Countries with a high infant mortality need a proportionately higher fertility rate in order to replace the children that die from communicable disease or malnutrition.

Fertility rate

The average number of births per woman.



Source: World Bank¹¹

Another way of looking at this is that 99 of the 223 countries listed in The World Fact Book are not having enough children to avoid population decline.¹² Sociologist Ben Wattenberg warns that, 'never in the last 650 years, since the time of the Black Plague, have birth and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so low, for so long, in so many places.'¹³

China's fertility rate has also fallen from 5.8 in 1970 to 1.4 in 2006. Demographers are predicting that by 2019 or soon after, China's population will peak at around 1.5 billion and then enter a steep decline. By mid-century, China could well lose 20-30% of its population every generation.¹⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt thinks that we are likely to 'witness a new norm: a "4:2:1 family" composed of four grandparents, but only two children, and just one grandchild. The children in these new family structures will have no brothers or sisters, no uncles or aunts, and no cousins. Their only blood relatives will be their ancestors.'¹⁵

Australian fertility rates are also in decline. We have fallen from a fertility rate of 2.9 in 1970 to 1.8 in 2006. However, unlike Communist China, Australia accepts migrants who help to boost our overall population.

Climate change is an issue about consumption and energy use, not about population. Reducing poverty and providing education drastically reduce population birth rates without any form of coercion, and the world is already on a pathway toward negative population growth. The problems we face are the social issues associated with ageing populations when the birth rate falls.

Worldwide our population problem is the negative birth rates and an ageing population that already affects the developed world and is beginning to affect the less developed world. If we reduced the population faster than is already likely to happen then we would have even greater social problems. We need to deal with the social problems of population decline and ageing at the same time as we deal with the issue of changing consumption and energy use to reduce the impact on climate.

BLAMING THE POOR FOR CLIMATE CHANGE?

'Every time wealthy countries are reminded of their contribution to the degradation of our environment, they tend to point fingers at poorer countries and talk about population,' says Farida Akhtar, a feminist and activist from Bangladesh.¹⁶

The world's poor are not to blame for climate change. It is instead 'the wealthier countries and the wealthy people in particular, who are responsible for high levels of consumption and in turn carbon dioxide emissions.'¹⁷ Globally, even with their larger populations, the developing countries are only responsible for 7% of carbon emissions.¹⁸



**REGGIE LITTLEJOHN,
WOMEN'S RIGHTS
WITHOUT FRONTIERS**

"The one-child policy causes more violence towards women and girls than any other policy on the face of the earth."¹⁹

DOES 'OVERPOPULATION' CAUSE POVERTY AND FAMINE?

In the 1960's doomsayers like Paul Ehrlich predicted that the world faced imminent mass starvation. Yet although the 20th century saw human numbers quadruple to more than six billion, food production outstripped population growth, the average life expectancy doubled to well over 60 years, while global GDP per capita more than quintupled. Ehrlich's predictions were wrong. Ehrlich's followers often take no account of human ingenuity, or innovativeness or capacity for change. Even at the most basic level there is massive potential for improved efficiency.²⁰

Today far too many people live in 'squalor, scourged by disease and hunger – but the correct name for this is poverty, not "overpopulation". In countries where people cannot securely own property, cannot sell their produce freely and get scant protection in law, government is poverty's handmaiden.²¹ It is not human numbers that cause poverty, but bad economic policies, laws and institutions²² and greed.

COERCION AND POPULATION CONTROL MEASURES

Parents in China must request government authorisation to have a child, and are normally allowed only one child. There are some exceptions for those whose first child is a girl or disabled, and for some minority groups. Those pregnant without authorisation are required to submit to abortions, and often sterilisation upon the birth of their first child. Women up to nine months pregnant are forced to undergo abortions.

Punishment for being pregnant without government authorisation includes: loss of employment, detainment of family members and destruction of family property, including demolition of homes. The promotion of some officials often depends on ensuring that quotas are not exceeded. 'By the mid-eighties, according to Chinese government statistics, birth control surgeries – abortions, sterilisations, and IUD insertions – were averaging more than *thirty million* a year. Many, if not most of these procedures, were performed on women who submitted only under duress.'²³

Claims have been made that the one-child policy has been relaxed, or that it is voluntary.²⁴ Neither of these claims is true. Chinese government officials have confirmed that the policy 'will be strictly enforced as a means of controlling births for decades to come as overpopulation is still a major concern,' the Xinhua

state news agency reported.²⁵ (Both the Australian and United States Governments have recently resumed funding overseas aid programs and made abortions an integral part of Australian aid to developing countries.²⁶)

ABORTION AND FORCED STERILISATIONS

Hundreds of Chinese woman have been forced to endure abortions, sometimes as late as nine months into pregnancy, as a result of China's strict family planning laws.²⁷ In some cases women have been forced to abort their first child because they were unmarried or because Chinese authorities do not recognise marriages as legal before the age of 23.

Liang Yage and his wife Wei Linrong had one child and hoped ... that they could pay a fine and keep their second baby. Wei was seven months pregnant when 10 family planning officials visited her at home. The couple was forcibly taken to maternity hospital in Baise city. Wei describes what happened:

"I was scared ... the hospital was full of women who'd been brought in forcibly ... forced abortions and forced sterilisations were both being carried out. We saw women being pulled in one by one."

Wei was given three injections ... contractions continued for almost 16 hours. Her child was still born. "I asked the doctor if it was a boy or a girl ... The doctors said it was a boy ... I felt so desolate, so I didn't look up to see the baby... The nurses dealt with the body like it was rubbish ... They threw it in the trash ... I think that their methods are too cruel ... my heart really hurts. Such a tiny baby, it was innocent and they killed it ..."

Liang added, "Every time we talk about this child we both cry ... We can't bear talking about this child."

Liang and his wife risked further official disapproval by contacting a Christian group overseas to publicise their plight. China may once have depended on its state apparatus of control and fear to silence those who suffer human rights abuses at the hands of its officials. But China's victims are angry, and they want their voices to be heard.²⁸

In addition although sex-selection abortions are banned in both China and India, they occur in the thousands. (Sex-selection is currently banned in Australia but there are groups lobbying the National Health and Medical Research Council to overturn the ban to allow IVF couples to choose the sex of their child through pre-implantation genetic diagnosis.)

"DOING" GIRLS – FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN CHINA

Xinran, a former journalist in China has recently written about the harrowing experiences of women who have been forced to abandon or even kill their daughters at birth. In an interview with the ABC's Eleanor Hall, which left both women in tears Xinran explained that discrimination against baby girls is centuries old:



In many ways we have improved quite a lot, the living condition, education, economic power. But this country has been rooted in over 5,000 years of cultural beliefs, particularly this kind of male cultural beliefs that you have to give a boy to the family tree.²⁹

Xinran, Author of *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother*.

MOTHERS OF THE HEARTSICK – CHINA'S HIGH RATE OF FEMALE SUICIDE

Xinran says that although she knew China's female suicide rate had been climbing since the 1980's, she did not realise why until she met many village women. Once the village women travel to the city and realise that life for them and their daughters could have been very different, 'lots of the mothers feel the pain – very painful and they realised they killed their own daughters.'³⁰ She now believes that they find it very difficult to live with the knowledge that they have aborted or killed their own baby daughters.

Xinran says countless Chinese country women commit suicide every year by swallowing pesticides. The Chinese Ministry of Health reported that from 1995-1999, one in every five Chinese people who died aged 15-34 had committed suicide. China is one of the few countries in the world where the female suicide rate is higher than for males: 25% more women commit suicide than men, and accounts for 3.6% of deaths in China.³¹

The World Health Organisation and the World Bank figures confirm that female suicide rates in China are among the highest in the world, with around 500 Chinese women suiciding every day. The (US) State Department's 2008 human rights report said "many observers" believe that the one-child policy contributes to the high suicide rate.³²



WITNESS TO LIFE: HERO AND PIONEER

In 2005 blind activist **Chen Guangcheng** exposed the 130,000 mass forced abortions and forced sterilisations in Shandong Province. For this he is currently serving a prison sentence. *Time Magazine*

named him in its list of "2006's Top People who shape Our World." He has been beaten in prison and is reported to be near death due to untreated medical conditions. (Source *Women's Rights Without Frontiers*.)

SEX RATIOS IN CHINA

Recent figures (January 2010) published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) show that the sex ratio is unbalanced in China, as a result of an overwhelming preference for sons. 'Within ten years ... one in five young men would be unable to find a bride because of the dearth of young women – a figure unprecedented in a country at peace.'³³ In ten years time China will have 30-40 million more young men aged 19 and below than young women.³⁴ Unnatural distortion of the sex ratios has spread from China to other East Asian countries.³⁵ (See table *Where boys are off balance*³⁶ overleaf) Already, the evidence shows that the crime rate has almost doubled in China during the past 20 years of rising sex ratios, with stories abounding of bride abduction, the trafficking of women, rape and prostitution.³⁷

GENDERCIDE

'It is no exaggeration to call this gendercide. Women are missing in their millions – aborted, killed, neglected to death.'³⁸ *The Economist* rightly calls it 'the war against baby girls.'³⁹

As far back as 1990 'an Indian economist, Amartya Sen,⁴⁰ put the number of missing girls as high as 100 million; the toll is higher now.'⁴¹ One human rights group puts the number of missing girls at 400 million.⁴² This is the equivalent of an entire nation of women not living in the world today.⁴³

WILL EDUCATION CHANGE ATTITUDES?

Some people are tempted to think that the problem is due to "backward" ideas about women and girls and that once societies modernise the problem will be solved. But the problem is more complicated than that as wealthy Taiwan and Singapore also show a similar preference for boys. The wealthiest and best educated parts of China and India are among the most affected.⁴⁴



POPULATION DECLINE IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Population decline is not just a modern problem. Many great civilisations have experienced population problems including the ancient Greeks and Romans whose fertility rate fell below replacement rate.

Sociologist Rodney Stark shows, as early as 59 BC Roman emperors were trying to reverse population decline, with Julius Caesar granting extra land to those with three or more children. (There is a parallel now to the Australian government paying baby bonuses and the bi-partisan move toward paid parental leave.) Subsequent emperors also tried to implement policies to increase the fertility rate but nothing worked.⁴⁵ As a result, the population of the Roman Empire was in decline during the last years of the Republic, even *before* the onset of the first great plague.

At the beginning of the Christian era the rate had fallen to below replacement levels. Stark points out the effect of the low fertility rate was of far greater significance in the decline of the Roman population than the not insubstantial role of the plagues.⁴⁶ The Empire was only able to continue as long as it did because it was able to draft settlers. (This is our situation now with migration making up the missing numbers.)

Historians have attributed the decline in part to an extreme shortage of women, with some reporting that the ratio of males to females in Rome was in the order of 131 males to 100 females and higher in some provincial cities.⁴⁷

FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

There is ample historical evidence of tinkering with life through unsavoury practises such as female infanticide, which was legal, morally accepted, and widely practised by all social classes in the Greco-Roman world.⁴⁸ In theory, exposed infants were left outside where they could be taken up by someone else and adopted. In practise exposed infants became prey for animals, birds or the weather.



Even large families hardly ever reared a second daughter. Excavations of a villa in the ancient city of Ashkelon confirm the practise of infanticide:

a gruesome discovery in the sewer that ran under the bathhouse...we found (the) bones...of nearly 100 little babies apparently murdered and thrown into the sewer.⁴⁹

Their bones reveal them to be day-old babies, and it is mostly likely that they were girls, but either way they provide evidence of a major cause of population decline.⁵⁰

Infanticide was not the only reason for population decline in the Greco-Roman world, attitudes to women, marriage, abortion and birth control also played a significant role. Abortion was widely practised and very dangerous. Under Roman law 'the male head of the family had the literal power of life and death over his household, including the right to order a female in the household to abort.'⁵¹ As Stark notes:

It is hardly surprising that a world which gave husbands the right to order the exposure of their infant daughters would give them the right to order their wives and mistresses to abort. Thus the emperor Domitian, having impregnated his niece Julia, ordered her to have an abortion – from which she died.⁵²

WHAT CAN WE DO?

So many people fall victim to exploitation and persecution around the world that at times it appears there is little anyone can do. However, the first Christians also witnessed widespread attacks on human life and yet in time they transformed the Roman Empire into a new civilisation based on respect for every human person. We are also called to build a new culture of life and to promote authentic human development.

Pope Benedict XVI says that the world is in need of 'profound cultural renewal' and 'needs to rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future.'⁵³ Openness to life must be at the centre of true development.⁵⁴ He points out that population increase is not the primary cause of underdevelopment, even from an economic point of view.⁵⁵ 'Populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people.'⁵⁶ We need to exercise a responsible stewardship over nature and at the same time work to build increased solidarity between the world's peoples.

On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself – God's gift to his children – and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognise our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it.⁵⁷

We need to develop a 'human ecology.' For where there is a lack of respect for human life, society also ends up losing the concept of human ecology and along with it environmental ecology: the book of nature is one and indivisible.⁵⁸ By presenting the "God of love" to the world Christians can transform attitudes, hearts and ultimately cultures. Protecting human life means showing reverence and love for every human person and the life of every person.⁵⁹

By insisting that *every human life* has a unique dignity and is an unrepeatable gift from the God of Love, a female child is no longer feared, the stranger becomes my neighbour, my little

sister, my little daughter, my little niece, my little cousin, not someone to be feared but some one to be welcomed and loved – who will love and be loved in turn.

Defending and protecting every human life, especially the baby girls and poor women is a task that God gives to all of us. The first Christians rose to the challenge.

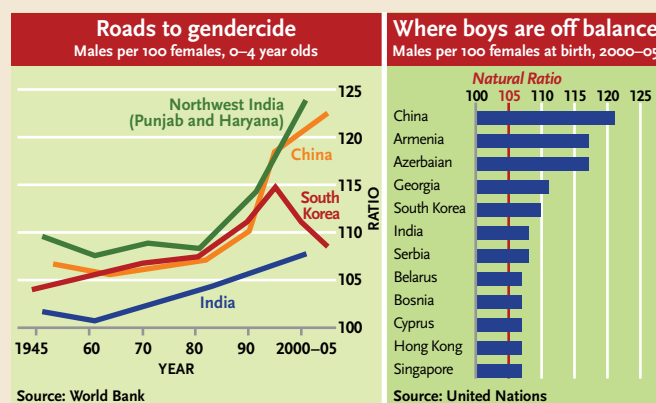
NEW ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN?

As Stark points out, 'amidst contemporary denunciations of Christianity as patriarchal and sexist, it is easily forgotten that the early church was so especially attractive to women that in 370 AD, the Emperor Valentinian issued a written order to Pope Damasus I asking that Christian Missionaries cease calling at the homes of pagan women.'⁶⁰ Why?

Stark argues it was because many women were converting to Christianity. Christian women were treated with much more dignity and respect and had a higher status. Christian women had more choice in when, and if, they married. (Pagan girls were often married at 12 years or younger). The Christian subculture opposed female infanticide. Abortion was prohibited, as it was in the Jewish culture.⁶¹

Reduced female mortality would have led to a surplus of women in the Christian subculture, and eventually led to a major shift in the sex ratios compared to the surrounding pagan culture. Christianity became very attractive to women. Christian women went on to play a major role in the rise of Christianity in the first few centuries, and ultimately the conversion of others.

It is a task that the Christians in Korea seem to be taking up.



Source: The Economist

South Korea: Religious Makeup			
Religion	1985	1995	2005
Christian	20.7%	26.3%	29.2%
Catholic	4.6%	6.6%	10.9%
Protestant	16.1%	19.7%	18.3%
Buddhist	19.9%	23.2%	22.8%
Confucian	1.2%	0.5%	0.2%
Other	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
No Religion	57.4%	49.3%	46.9%

Source: National Census Bureau.
Note: Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Christians in East Asia (2005)			
	% Christian	Christians	Population
China	8%	109,816,000	1,306,314,000
Japan	3%	3,407,000	127,537,000
Mongolia	1%	39,000	2,866,000
North Korea	2%	446,000	22,912,000
South Korea	40%	19,694,000	48,641,000
Taiwan	6%	1,465,000	22,701,000

Sources: World Christian Database; U.S. Census Bureau, International Database (population estimates).

REASONS TO HOPE

For years the South Korean government urged families to only have one child in an effort to reduce Korea's high fertility rate. It worked. Korea's fertility rate dropped from a high 6.1 in the 1960's to 1.19, one of the lowest in the world. But now Korean officials are concerned that such a low population rate will seriously affect the continuing sustainable development of Korea.

President Lee Myung-bak has recently called for "bold" steps to increase the nation's birth rate. There are fears that a rapidly ageing population will drag down the economy.⁶² Even the head of Planned Parenthood, Choi Seon-Jeong, has pleaded with Koreans to have more children. South Korea's once high sex ratio is now moving towards 110 to 100.⁶³ (See Chart Roads to gendercide)

What makes South Korea stand out from its neighbours, is that around the same time, it has undergone a marked conversion to Christianity. This is much more likely than education to have had a profound effect on attitudes to women and girls, and especially to infanticide and abortion. Currently around 30 to 40 percent of South Korea's population identifies as Christian.⁶⁴ In addition, 'South Korea now has the largest percentage of Christians in East Asia.'⁶⁵ Korean Christians are active and vibrant. The Church has been leading the way with the Archbishop of Seoul saying, 'today, it is the mission of Catholic believers to build a society where everyone respects the value of life.'⁶⁶ We all have much to learn from the Koreans. Let us hope and pray that we can help to defend and protect every human life, and that together we will once again transform our cultures, just like the first Christians.

Prayer for Life

Heavenly Father,
At the very heart of true development there must be openness to life.
Help us to recognise that every human life is an unrepeatable gift from you.
Guide us as we work to promote solidarity, and the wise use of our natural resources for the development of the whole world and the dignity of every human person. Amen.

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SIGN OF THE TIMES



Fig 1



Fig 2

The South Korean Government now promotes larger families due to concerns about Korea's population decline.

Fig 1 Poster 1980's – Korean Planned Parenthood poster promoting one child per family. English translation is 'one-family and one-child, full of love and full of health.'

Fig 2 New Poster – Designed by 'Department of Health and Welfare' (formerly Planned Parenthood Korea) and 'the Association of Family Health and Welfare in Korea.' English translation 'siblings are the best assets to present to your children.'

Source: *Catholic Times*⁶⁷



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