

# Make Room for People

Stephen W. Mosher

For over half a century, the population control movement has waged war on human fertility. Originally a fringe movement driven by fear of a "population explosion," especially among peoples of color, the movement has over the years gained clout, if not respectability. Its ranks now include major international organizations like the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Population Fund, as well as the foreign aid bureaucracies of most of the wealthy countries of the world. Billions of dollars are at its disposal.

Many governmental recipients of foreign aid object to population reduction targets and coercive contraception and sterilization policies, but often they can do little against the "powerful of the earth," as Pope John Paul II called them, who "prefer to promote and impose by whatever means a massive program of birth control. Even the economic help which they would be ready to give is unjustly made conditional on the acceptance of an anti-birth policy" (*The Gospel of Life [Evangelium Vitae]*, no. 16).

For those who believe in this agenda, population growth is the root of mankind's problems. They wrongly calculate: More people equals less . . . of everything: Prosperity, food supply, economic growth, social order—all are jeopardized by any increase in human numbers.

Over the decades, the movement has increasingly used the environment as a pretext for its actions. To hear them tell it, all the earth's real and imagined woes—from too little food and fresh water to too much pollution of air and water—are a result of the same cause: The planet we call home is simply too crowded. The solution to all our collective ills, they say, is to reduce the birth rate.

advocates now claim that the most cost-effective way to cool things down again is to flood the developing world with contraceptives. A report sponsored by the United Kingdom's Optimum Population Trust, for example, claims that reducing the number of babies born will mean "fewer emitters" of carbon dioxide, which in turn will "lower emissions." The Optimum Population Trust went on to call contraception "the latest in green technology" and to insist that the effort to combat global warming must have a large population control component.<sup>1</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI made the case for people in his recent encyclical, *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)*, writing that "to consider population increase as the primary cause of underdevelopment is mistaken, even from an economic point of view" (no. 44). The Pope criticized "non-governmental organizations [that] work actively to spread abortion, at times promoting the practice of sterilization in poor countries, in some cases not even informing the women concerned. Moreover, there is reason to suspect that development aid is sometimes linked to specific health-care policies which *de facto* involve the imposition of strong birth control measures" (no. 28).

For consistently defending human life, the Church in general and Pope Benedict XVI in particular are blamed for causing governments to shy away from taking the "overpopulation problem" more seriously. Sir Crispin Tickwell of the Optimum Population Trust did just this in a recent televised debate.<sup>2</sup>

What population control activists fail to understand is that the Church's stance is supported by hard science and not "just" traditional morality. Science has shown that reducing the number of babies born does not in itself solve political, economic, or environmental problems. Rather, reducing births often *creates* grave problems. Take Social Security and Medicare, for example. In the United States and other industrialized countries, these programs are difficult to sustain unless each generation

**RESPECT LIFE**

of taxpaying workers is larger than the one that went before it.<sup>3</sup>

This is exactly the problem that we face now. Birth rates have been in free fall in most of the developed world for some time. Europe as a whole is averaging only about 1.3 children per couple. Russia and some Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, are in even worse shape demographically. This means that the work force and revenues are shrinking at the same time that elderly citizens are growing in number—and demanding the retirement and health benefits they have long been promised. Those who would reduce our numbers also forget that people are ingenious producers and problem-solvers, not just inert consumers.



In fact, population growth has been the primary driver of progress throughout human history. A growing population can naturally create temporary shortages of certain raw materials, goods and services. Innovators and entrepreneurs can be drawn to extract resources and to produce and distribute more goods in ways that sustain the natural environment and contribute to human development. At the end of this creative process you will have more goods available at lower prices—precisely because of population growth.<sup>4</sup>

People need to be understood as the answer to problems, and not the cause of all problems. Through efforts supporting sustainable development and economic growth, environmental indicators will also improve. As the late Julian Simon often remarked, children born today will lead longer, healthier lives than ever before. They will eat better, receive more education, and enjoy a higher standard of living. They will have more time for leisure activities and travel. And they will live in a world where vast tracts of land have been set aside to preserve their natural beauty, and where the ugly scars of early industrialization have largely been healed. The world is not an overcrowded human ark, but it is—as it was designed to be—a beautiful horn of plenty. And people, the pinnacle of creation, are the ultimate resource.

*Steven W. Mosher is the President of the Population Research Institute and the author of Population Control: Real Costs and Illusory Benefits (Transaction Press, 2008). He is the host of the EWTN series, "Promoting the Culture of Life Around the World," and frequently testifies before the U.S. Congress on population and human rights issues.*

i Thomas Wire, "Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost Reducing Future Carbon Emissions by Investing in Family Planning, a Cost/Benefit Analysis," a thesis presented to the London School of Economics (LSE) in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of science. August 2009. It should be noted that the study was sponsored by the Optimum Population Trust (OPT), and that LSE specifically disclaimed responsibility "for any part of the subjects study or conclusions." (p. 1) See also the OPT News Release of September 9, 2009 entitled "Contraception is 'Greenest' Technology."

: A debate between Steven Mosher, Paul Ehrlich, and Sir Crispin Tickell on *Lateline*, 5 November 2009, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

..The difficulties of maintaining existing entitlement programs in the face of a declining worker/dependency ratio are described in *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America and the World* by Peter G. Peterson (New York: Random House, 1999). Peterson served as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce in the early 1970s.

jThis argument is elaborated in Steven W. Mosher *Population Control: Real Costs and Illusory Benefits* (Transaction Press, 2008). See esp. chapter 8, "We're from USAID, and We're Here to Help."