

Kyoto and Population Control

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In the 1995 Proceedings on Population Issues: Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing, Dr. Alene Gelbard, one of the essayists for this meeting, made the following remarks (page 104):

“The biggest diversity within the population community is between the population control people and those who have done a lot of development assistance. Many here seem to think that everyone in the population community shares the opinion that we have to control population growth and to constantly keep in mind the numbers of people on a macro level - on both the international and national levels. People seem to think that all of us want to put resources into programs that will bring down that growth in women’s fertility. . . .

“Population stabilization, development and quality of life together are the goal of everyone in the population community. We did agree among ourselves on the means of achieving that goal. . . . The current administration (Clinton administration) said it was very concerned about this issue, largely because of its concern about the environment, about the relation between population and environment. . . .”

I personally think that the situation may not be quite so equitable and even-handed as Dr. Gelbard suggested. While not disputing what Dr. Gelbard said about the population community, it seems that in the last year or so the population control wing has made significant inroads. The population control people have harnessed their wagon to the ongoing campaign against global warming. No matter what we think about global warming - whether or not it is occurring or whether or not it is or will be as bad as forecast we must be cognizant of some things.

First, the opponents of the Kyoto treaty have predicted steeply rising costs both for energy and the products produced by manufacturing. Allowing for exaggeration and admitting that we may have to “force” energy saving manufacturing, it can be said that energy will cost more and so too will the products manufactured for consumption. As always, the large corporations will not suffer. They will simply raise their prices. The people who rely on their products will pay the freight or do without. The small manufacturers may be put out of business. Anyway, the poor will suffer, the rich may hardly even notice the increase in prices and inflation.

But that is not the only result of the Kyoto treaty maybe not even the greatest one. Certainly, Vice President Gore speaks for the administration on matters of environment and population. What is he saying these days?

At Kyoto, Vice President Gore urged more flexibility from the U.S. delegation on the “global climate treaty.” In an article in *Insight* (December 29, 1997), Donald Hodel, former Secretary of Energy and of the Interior under Reagan, remarks that the global climate treaty is better viewed as an energy-suppression treaty. I don’t intend to develop the debate on whether we have a global-warming situation or we do not. This is not particularly the forum for such a debate.

In *The Population Explosion* (1990) Paul Ehrlich redeveloped the arguments in his 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*. His solutions to the problem are many: among them are such proposals as making government larger, expanding regulations, increasing foreign aid, encouraging abortion, restricting family choice, doubling the price of gasoline, and so on. Obviously population control is a paramount objective for the Ehrlichs. The quotation most often associated with “the Ehrlich crowd” is: “The cancer of population growth must be cut out or we will breed ourselves into oblivion.”

Vice President Gore wrote for a book-jacket blurb for *The Population Explosion*: “The time for action is due, and past due. The Ehrlichs have written the prescription. . . .” It might be well to read the prescriptions that the Ehrlichs suggest (those listed above and others).

Hodel writes: “At a White House briefing for television weather forecasters Gore, asserting that climate change was a symptom of population growth, suggested that people in poor nations could reduce emission by having fewer children. He cavalierly proposed reducing world population growth by 2 billion to 5 billion human beings during the next two decades. And calling for “the empowerment of women to participate in decisions about childbearing,” he implied that more abortions would help save the Earth.

“The administration has yet to explain how its proposed program of tradable emissions permits would work, but Gore’s ‘family-planning’ approach to emissions control suggests interesting possibilities. Since each person, through consumption activities, generates a certain tonnage of carbon dioxide each year, the United Nations could establish equivalency ratios for all “emissions sources,” including individual human beings. Many critics of the climate treaty complain that it leaves China and other developing countries off the hook. But by Gore’s logic, might not China already be in compliance? Hasn’t China amassed vast stores of emissions credits through forced sterilization, coerced abortions and the liquidation of millions of “class enemies?” Gore’s gaffe at the weather briefing his careless admission that the climate treaty and population control are two sides of the same agenda - exposes the hopelessly Malthusean mind-set of modern liberalism.”

The only point I want to make here is the caution that there is a “natural connection that could be made between lessening the green-house gases and population control. It’s something that we have to keep in mind. It would seem that Dr. Gelbard’s statement could lead to an overly-sanguine feeling about population.

Certainly, the Kyoto treaty can be seen as an energy-suppression treaty. Growth and development practices have relied on an increasing availability of reasonably cheap energy. That could all be changed now.

The Jewish and Christian God is not a “nature god” and our faith is not subject merely to the rhythms of natural forces. It seems to me that we are both transcendent and immanent. In some ways we can affect the course of nature and our ability to do so is seemingly increasing. We are not merely subject to planetary forces. We must live within them; we cannot annul them; we can indeed also affect them. We are creatures who have come to serve God in freedom and it really does us no good to resubmit ourselves to slavery to “the gods of the air,” as St. Paul says. Nor should we submit ourselves to the doomsayers who promote population control in the guise of ecological concern. They may be deeply concerned by such things as global warming (if it exists), the ozone hole (if it is not natural), resource exhaustion and so on. The answer to those concerns is not killing people, within or without the womb.

I remain an optimist. God cannot be so parsimonious that he does not provide each and everyone of us with the things we need to come to him. We humans can mess up the distribution part, we cannot alter the fact of his generous love.