

Poverty & Population Control

By Fr. Dave Heney

There is a compelling list of highly populated states in the world today, and a new understanding of the immense suffering they cause to so many innocent people. Impoverished families in Somalia, Nigeria, and Sudan suffer greatly with exploding populations and crushing poverty. There are others too, mostly in Africa. Their leaders are corrupt, greedy, and lawless. They have no concern at all about the poor people they lead. They make these failed states happen and it is a shame.

I have been a student of world affairs for most of my life, which, for me as a Catholic, also means being a student of global poverty; its causes and remedies. For over forty years I have heard many explanations. In the early 1970's, the famous book, "*The Population Bomb*" placed the cause of world poverty on unsustainable population explosions, and the *Club of Rome*, a European think tank, predicted global poverty from immanent economic collapse, and in every decade since I have heard that American prosperity was at last over.

However, I have recently noticed some remarkable changes on the list of poor states. Some have actually moved from disaster to amazing success, and relatively fast too. How did this happen despite such dire predictions from experts?

Two countries that moved from the list of failed states to the most successful have especially important lessons. These two huge countries *with the largest populations ever in world*

history reveal a path forward to economic prosperity for poor countries or failed states.

China and India were, by all accounts, the poorest of states only a few decades ago. The Communist Chinese government tragically starved millions and millions of people to death from the late 1950's to the mid 1970's with two utterly disastrous government programs: *The Great Leap Forward*, and *The Cultural Revolution*. India also tried large state directed economic programs from the 1970's into

the 1990's and suffered immensely with an *increase* in poverty each decade.

Both countries were synonymous with starvation and death. (How many millions of American kids heard parents say, "Eat your vegetables; there are starving kids in China and India!" ...No parent says that now!)

Today, both countries are global economic powerhouses. China has the second largest economy in the world and India will soon have the third largest, overtaking Japan. Both have



Are there too many people on the earth?

millions of highly educated young people who excel in business, industry, and science, and they have much *higher* populations today than in the 1970's when the "Population Bomb" predicted disaster from the levels of population then! Now decades later, these two huge countries want even more people! While population has soared, poverty has plummeted. Why is that?

Both countries adopted policies designed to grow their economies.

They promoted more liberated market systems, where business owners can freely decide what products to make and then fairly compete for customers who freely chose what to buy, all under an effective State that promotes fairness, justice, and the rule of law. This is a major reversal from earlier Chinese Communism and Indian Socialism.

A growing economy means more jobs for anyone in a family that wants one no matter how big the family is, and the chance of prosperity for anyone who wants "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as our Declaration of Independence asserts.

Both China and India discovered that the personal pursuit of happiness *motivates* people, and they learned how to build this *incentive* into the economy.

Economic growth requires, by definition, MORE workers, MORE customers, and MORE owners. It is an ever expanding economy that produces more and more prosperity and jobs for more and more people. That's the goal!

However, in poor states, families continue to have children who have no possibility of ever finding a job. *These families do not want to limit their family size because they do not want or love children, but because there are no prospects for any of them to prosper, or prospects for parents to even care for the ones they have now.* No wonder they cry out in desperate need. We all hear that cry and sincerely want to help. But let us not lose sight of the real problem or perhaps offer a shortsighted solution that actually prolongs their suffering. No one wants that!

There are no jobs and poverty in corrupt states, not because of population size, but because corrupt leaders do not promote economic growth that create jobs and wealth.

Both China and India still face enormous challenges, but it was their more liberated Free Market policies that promoted economic



An expanding economy means more jobs

growth and produced the largest movement of poor families out of poverty ever in the history of the world! More liberated markets joined with effective state supported rule of law is the greatest and most successful anti-poverty program ever. That is good news for families of any size!

Parents should always consider carefully and responsibly their family size, as Catholic morality affirms, but some efforts to limit families, even by the well-meaning *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* that funds condom distribution, tragically miss the "elephant in the room" which is massive political corruption and counter-productive economic programs that *block* the same economic growth policies that enabled

poor Chinese and Indian families to move from poverty to enjoy unprecedented prosperity compared to just decades ago.

China has now belatedly recognized the problem of its earlier “One-Child Per Family” rule, adopted (predictably) under a Communist regime, which now threatens future economic growth under their new more liberated market policies that have produced such spectacular results.

Even France, Italy, and Germany have launched new initiatives to increase their populations because their now small younger generation cannot support the large older generation with contributions to the social welfare network. They need more people!

Poor nations understand this. At every UN World Population Conference, poor countries have opposed many Western ideas on limiting population, seeing them as a means to keep them economically dependent.

They now look instead to the example of the once poor BRICS, (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), as the way forward through more liberated markets supported by effective state-supported rule of law that produces more jobs for families.

The way to success for poor countries is not population limits but rather joining the global economy that especially welcomes new customers worldwide.

The 2008 economic crisis severely affected everyone, even China and India, but also led politicians everywhere to affirm job growth as the

answer, whether for the “PIGS” (Portugal, Italy-Ireland, Greece and Spain), or for ourselves by both Republicans and Democrats.

All political dialogue worldwide now centers on job creation, as the main goal of economic activity because more jobs mean the economy will grow and more families will prosper, no matter how big families are.

Western nations and private foundations should use their considerable influence in poor nations to foster economic education and policies that promote job growth. It is jobs that helps poor families more than anything else.



The poor need to join the world economy

Large well-intentioned efforts to help poor families today often backfire. For example, sending emergency aid is essential at times, but can also make things worse, in that aid shipments are often hijacked by corrupt officials who then

resell them for their own profit. Our aid makes crooked and dishonest officials richer.

In addition, some population control programs, such as condoms, abortion, and contraceptives, even if well-intentioned, often only serve to embolden young men into thinking they are now “invulnerable” and so they engage in even more irresponsible sexual relations. It can lead to what some sports psychologists call the helmet effect (where having a stronger football helmet induces players to take more risks on the field, ironically leading to more concussions).

The irresponsible behavior of young men with no job prospects and no family in failed poor

states are the least likely to do something responsible, or use a condom effectively.

However, a powerful teacher of responsibility actually is a job, in that you have to show up on time and perform a function that is accountable to a boss or a customer, or risk losing that source of income. A job is an incentive to gradual moral development. It is job creating economies that help bring responsibility to families in failed states.

The 1970's book "*Population Bomb*" assumed the easy stereotype that population size is the problem in the world today (despite the doubling of Chinese and Indian populations who still enjoy comparative economic success).

That stereotype also feeds a "Zero Sum Game" mentality, that perceives the world's resources as only so big, and if there are more people; well, that means there is less for the rest of us.

"Zero-Sum Game" thinking is probably a personality preference, and no amount of logic, reason, or economic examples from the real world can dislodge it. That the BRIC countries have higher populations than ever before and are enjoying amazing prosperity compared to earlier decades often does not make a dent in a person who believes that economies just cannot grow.

It may be that those in Western nations (ironically with very low populations) who urge families in the third world to use condoms or allow abortions might feel an unconscious need to justify their own use of these methods by spreading their use around the world. Many in the west also still remain amazed at the World Population Conference



Welcoming everyone to the world

policies, and the success of China and India.

All these ideas have been taken from the language of global economics and psychology. However, they are also in almost perfect agreement with the

Church's moral teachings on the importance of personal initiative and responsibility, State supported fairness and rule of law, free market capitalism, Natural Family Planning, the danger of socialism and communism, and the importance of welcoming new generations into the world and the new world economy.

The way of the Church has worked well, ironically, in China and India, neither of which is a Christian nation. But then again, Catholic moral-

ity is actually non-denominational and applicable to everyone in every culture and at every time. Catholic morality is simply "the study and practice of true and lasting human happiness."

We are most Catholic when we promote that true and lasting happiness for people everywhere.

Millions and millions of once poor Chinese and Indians, and poor families everywhere, have a better hope for that now as they enjoy more life, more liberty and the pursuit of more happiness. The impoverished people of Somalia, Sudan, and Nigeria certainly deserve it.

The way forward out of poverty is not limiting their population, but helping them and their many children to enter the ever expanding global economy.

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