

Money: Ends and Trends

World Trend Watch—Part IV: An Endtime Population Bomb?

Without a doubt, a population crisis is underway in the world today, the likes of which has never occurred before in the history of mankind. Populations trends have moved from one extreme to another in a relatively short space of time.

Though potential problems have already been identified by some experts quite some time ago, few people are aware of its implications. What kind of crisis is expected? Not a population explosion as has been feared in recent decades, but an implosion. Where once the fear was that the world would be soon overburdened by too many people, world population growth has since slowed dramatically from the peak rates of the 1960s. As a result, many policy-makers have been sounding alarms about an emerging retirement crisis and general economic troubles for the world in the future.

Populations trends have moved from one extreme to another in a relatively short space of time. Are we living at the very time of a last day population phenomenon? Readers can answer this question for themselves at the conclusion of this article. According to at least one scripture interpretation, it may be actually foretold. As we will see, these trends are in line with the symptoms of an endtime world given over to humanism and materialism.

Wide Populations Swings

A recent reportⁱ from the United Nations Population Division again underlines the immediacy of population developments. Released in February of this year, it again lowered world population growth projections. For the first time, this agency now predicts that future fertility levels in developing nations — countries that generally are not among the prosperous Western nations — will no longer suffice to ensure long-term population replacement. In other words, here too, populations will begin to decline. By year 2050, the birth rate of the majority of these countries will fall below 2.1ⁱⁱ children per woman. This is remarkable given that only 30 to 50 years ago, the average birth rate in these nations was approximately 6. Of course, many Western nations have already succumbed to negative growth for some time. In many of these countries, populations are now declining (excluding the impact of immigration.)

Consider this statistic: Today the world has approximately 6.3 billion inhabitants. According to the low-scenario prediction of the United Nations, the earth's population will peak at 7.4 billion in around the year 2030 and then begin declining. Yes, declining! It's possible that the peak could also be at a higher level. However, for well over a decade it has been clear that there will be no population explosion as many still fear. Just the opposite is true.

It is important we understand the significance of these population gyrations that the world is experiencing. For thousands of years, the number of human inhabitants on earth grew slowly. Then, rather suddenly, things changed. In the year 1804, there were 1 billion people. 123 years later, the population had doubled to 2 billion. 33 years later again (in 1960) 3 billion people lived on earth. A further 14 years, and another 1 billion people was added. Later in 1987, the 5 billion threshold was crossed. Now, predictions are that the number of people in the world will begin declining.

Why are these swings happening? Firstly, this development is partly due to good reasons ... blessings in other words. Due to advances in medicine and health care,

people are living longer and infant deaths have declined drastically. There is another reason, as already mentioned — birth rates are falling sharply.

At this point, readers may be wondering just what is so bad about a low population growth rate. Isn't this a responsible response to the apparent environmental woes of the world? There are both moral and physical aspects to this question. Sticking to the theme of this World Trend Watch series, I will not attempt any comprehensive treatment of the moral aspects. Certainly, people are free to make decisions about how large of a family God wishes to bless them with. Suffice it to say that the morality lies more in the methods and the motivations. Yet, seen in the collective for the world, a slowing trend in the entire earth's population growth — crucially even to the point of absolute decline — must be seen to be very significant. To begin, the population swing we are reviewing is an epochal development as it has never before occurred in the history of mankind as a voluntary phenomenon across the whole entire world. It means that significant economic challenges face the world in ensuing decades. Future retirees will generally face tougher times than those of today. It is a symptom of changing values that humankind today has increasingly decided to control its own existence for the sake of some other, apparent higher ideals. Here, humanity is clearly ignoring some important truths of the Bible.

Let's look at least two scriptural perspectives — the desirability of children and the possibility of endtime population swings.

The Bible's View on Children

Scripture says much about the value of children and humankind. *"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3)*

"Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

(Proverbs 17:6) Here we see that children are clearly considered a blessing.

Significantly, the Bible also clearly connects children with prosperity. Often when God promised to bless a nation it was equated with the number of offspring. Abraham's seed was to be innumerable ... more than there are stars counted in the sky. Consider these verses spoken to Israel: *"14You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor any of your livestock without young."*

(Deuteronomy 7:14) *"25You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth."* **(Job 5:25)** There are other verses implying a similar value put on children. On the other hand, a declining population was considered a punishment. *"39Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; 40he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. 41But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks."* **(Psalm 107:39-41)**

In short, everything else being equal, the more children, the more blessing and prosperity. But aren't these Old Testament viewpoints irrelevant in the present "enlightened" times of modernity? Surely these principles no longer apply in our day. After all, today we have the benefits of pension plans, sophisticated financial markets and economies that are seemingly able to deliver limitless prosperity and secure retirements for everybody with or without population growth. This is mostly delusion.

In olden times one's retirement did not depend on the ability of financial markets to act as store houses for the future spending requirements of the aged. Retirement needs

were mostly the responsibility of extended families. If you had no children or relatives, retirement prospects were poor.

The error that is sweeping the world is the idea that prosperity and well-being in retirement is entirely disconnected from overall trends with respect to the world's youth. The reality is that retirement prospects today depend on children and extended families just as much as they did in former times. Despite the emergence of sophisticated, modern financial pensions systems, one would be deceived to think otherwise. Pension systems still depend on the extended family, only in today's society the family has been socialized. The fact remains: Less youth, therefore the smaller the eventual extended family; therefore the worse off will be our retirement years. Pensions funds, for example, cannot overcome the physical impact of declining youth though they may seem to do so for a time. Space does not allow even a brief technical explanations as to the reasons.

Common sense alone suggests that the physical laws of life and sustainable prosperity remain the same. The older the earth's population, the less wealthy will be the world. Suffice it to say that a declining generation of youth and an ageing population is beginning to cause some serious difficulties.

Actually, today many societies still rely on extended families to care for their aged. For example, in China, more than 80% of people over 60 years of age live with their children or relatives.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, for the 85% or so of the world's population living in lower-income countries, greater than 75% of people over 60 years of age live with their children. Perhaps only 5% of the aged in these countries live on their own. The comparison with the high income countries — the likes of Canada, the US, UK, Australia ... etc.— is stark. There, only 23% of the elderly live with their children.

The scriptural perspective on children is still correct.

Changing Perspectives On Children in Endtimes?

I am persuaded that the Bible indicates that people will change their perspectives with respect to the desirability of children in the endtimes. I can only refer to one verse that may specifically indicate this change — Daniel 11:37. Others, while in alignment to such an attitudinal shift with respect to children, are silent on this matter in specific.

Daniel Chapter 11 contains a prophecy about the period of the “last day ruler.” In verse 37 we read, *“He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all.”* Here we see that the world society of that day will have nor regard for the god “desired by women.” What could this mean? There have been two traditional interpretations of this reference. Connecting this statement to recorded conventions of early Jewish times, some believe that it refers to the Messiah. It was a convention that women would desire to be the mother of the Messiah. Along this line of reasoning, the god desired by women was the God ... or the Messiah.

The other interpretation is that this god refers to a pagan fertility god. This meaning is much more likely in my view for a number of reasons. For one, this section of Daniel refers to the three false gods that would be venerated at that future time and the ones that they would replace, the “gods of his fathers” (plural) and the “one desired by women.” It is difficult to see how these references to multiple deities could be to anything other than pagan or false gods. As well, it would seem uncharacteristic for Daniel to refer to the Messiah — the One promising the redemption of mankind — as simply being one only desired by women. Many scholars think that the “god desired by

women” is a reference to Tammuz, a fertility god worshipped during that time. This god is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14^{iv}

This latter interpretation also aligns with the fact that fertility was highly prized in olden times. Throughout much of history women have regarded it as a virtue to bear as many children as possible. To be cursed with a barren womb carried a humiliating social stigma as it struck to the very foundation of economic health and a nation’s power. Wealth and prosperity were directly equated with large families, huge populations and big armies. To have many children was considered an honor and an enrichment — representing a storehouse of labor and real wealth, and above all, a comfortable retirement. Therefore, the worship of fertility goddesses played a large role in all pagan societies. Both men and women worshipped them in the hopes of being favored by the gods with many sons and sizable families.

Consider how dramatically these perspectives have changed today. Most people in the modern-industrialized world — North America, Europe and other high-income countries — consider a large family a throwback to olden times. An increasing perspective is that people would rather live for themselves ... to enjoy life without the burden and responsibility of children. In fact, society overall tends to view larger families as an encroachment upon the resources of the world. Better to have less children in the hopes of maintaining more comfortable lifestyles. This attitude is the same as is prophesied to occur in the last days. Anticipating that time, Christ said *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”* **(Luke 21:34)** A comfortable, indulgent lifestyle appears to be prefigured in this verse. In a similar vein, Apostle Paul prophesies: *“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ²People will be lovers of themselves [...] disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, [...] lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”* **(2 Timothy 3:2-5)** James also reprimands the people of the last days saying that they *“[...] have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.”* **(James 5:5)** Taken together, these scriptures seem to point to a society that’s more self-interested than dedicated to loving and raising children.

Points to Ponder

The population trends we have discussed will cause serious problems for the world into the future. In fact, troubles are already emerging. One aspect is that there will be fewer people to support the living requirements of the aged. The number of elderly that will need to be supported by the productive labors of those of potential working age group is rising in relative terms and is expected to jump up sharply over the next decades. Paying for the living requirements of this burgeoning retirement class will prove to be a heavy, heavy burden on the future work force. Another challenge is that slowing population growth following a period of very high expansion this past century will likely cause quite a readjustment in general prosperity levels. Few people ... even professionals ... understand or anticipate this.

Already many pensions systems around the world are deteriorating, projected to run out of money before retirement income demands are met. In fact, much of the financial instabilities we see in the world today — large swings, booms and busts — are significantly related to this modern-day pension and retirement crisis phenomenon. The worst is still to come in this regard.

Population swings in my view are a significant dynamic and possible endtime signpost for the world. As mentioned, the population trends being witnessed today are unprecedented and are sure to lead to severe problems and instability for the whole

world. It is a condition that aligns or contributes to a severe Great Tribulation at some point.

I have often found the verses found in II Esdras 14:10 and 17-18 very interesting in this regard. *“For the world has lost its youth, and the times begin to wax old. ... For the more that the world grows weak with age, the more evils will increase upon those who live on it. Truth will more and more retire, and falsehood draw nears.”* Of course, Christians today do not consider the books of the Apocrypha as canon. I certainly do not argue with this convention. All the same, the books of the Apocrypha have been considered as wisdom literature for thousands of years. It certainly does no harm to note the relevance of the view expressed in these verses to our time. If not prophetic, it is true that the conditions mentioned in these verses do exist today. The world has indeed adopted many falsehoods and evils are increasing. And as we have reviewed, at least some of these are related to the advent of narcissism and indulgence, consequently impacting world population trends. God is the giver of life and prosperity. Mankind has the ability and choice to tamper with creation ...even its own human life form. But God is not mocked. He has promised to give the world over to its perversions and to punish them for it. Without a doubt, our generation is already witnessing this World Trend.

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ⁱ World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision. This report, containing the eighteenth global demographic estimate undertaken by the United Nations Population Division since 1950, was released on February 26, 2003.

ⁱⁱ A birth rate of 2.1 children per woman is required to maintain the population at a same level.

ⁱⁱⁱ In late 1994 the United Nations published a large report entitled Averting the Old Age Crisis which opened with this line: “Systems providing financial security for the old are under increasing strain throughout the world [...] the result is a looming old age crisis that threatens not only the old but also their children.

^{iv} Ezekiel 8:14 refers to the "mourning for Tammuz." It was a fertility god associated with the cult of the Queen of Heaven. Its rituals were characteristic of the eastern fertility cults. Other pagan fertility rites were associated with Ashtoreth, goddess of love, synonymous with the Assyrian and Babylonian Ishtar and the Roman Venus.