

# The Zeitgeist Of Suicide (Part One): Weeping For The Children Who Are Not

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*"Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder."* —Arnold Toynbee, Historian

"Within a few centuries, the world's population could shrink below the level of America's today."<sup>1</sup> Any resident in urban America, living as he does with ever-more cars and ever-less road space, would not readily agree with such an apparently off-the-wall statement. The whole idea seems counterintuitive in a world of jammed freeways, bustling malls, long queues in post offices, and crowded classrooms. Yet, trend lines lead exactly to that conclusion—to a 95% reduction in worldwide population during the next half-millennium or so. In real numbers, that represents a decline from the planet's current 6 billion inhabitants to about 300 million by about the year 2500.

Trend lines of what? Almost any normalized population metric—examples include fertility rate, aging rate, abortion rate, HIV/AIDS-prevalence rate—point in the direction of shrinking population, not just in some nations or regions, but worldwide.<sup>2</sup> The most telling—and troubling—measure is the *total fertility rate* (TFR), a synthetic metric representing the number of children a woman will bear in the course of her lifetime.

It takes only elementary math to see why this measure is important. If mom and pop die without having produced two children to replace them, the population declines. With two children, the population holds steady, neither growing nor shrinking. Of course, not everyone marries, and some individuals die because of disease, natural disaster, or war before they have reproduced. So, the hold-steady total fertility rate is considered to be about 2.1. In aggregate, every woman must bear 2.1 children in her lifetime. In practice, this means that every tenth couple must have three children if the population is to remain steady.

## A Global Phenomenon—Almost

Worldwide, the TFR has tumbled significantly over the last thirty years or so. Estimates vary, but United Nations data suggests an unrelenting decline from 5.02 in 1950 to 2.05 by 2045.<sup>3</sup> Today the global TFR is thought to be about 2.6—scarcely above replacement levels.<sup>4</sup> "By 2045 . . . the world's fertility rate as a whole will have fallen below replacement levels."<sup>5</sup> One demographer writes, "Sub-replacement fertility . . . is increasingly emerging as the norm in Asia and Eurasia."<sup>6</sup> Another claims: "Not a single industrialized nation today has a fertility rate of 2.1, and most are well below the replacement level."<sup>7</sup>

Yet, *as a whole*, the planet's population is not declining—yet. Some areas (such as sub-Saharan Africa)<sup>8</sup> and some groups (such as Muslims) consistently report fertility rates well above the replacement rate. However, even fertility trend-lines in these holdout populations are pointing down. It is only a matter of time before the planet's overall TFR falls below the replacement rate of 2.1. At that time, just a few decades from now, the population of the earth as a whole will begin to fall.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains a standout at this time. A few words about this African exceptionalism are in order. Although African nations in general report high fertility rates, African growth remains constrained by significant health problems.

Table 1 (on page 11) compares the relatively high TFRs of selected African nations with their 1) AIDS/HIV Adult Prevalence Rates, 2) their AIDS/HIV Death Rates, and 3) the number of children living with AIDS/HIV. While not canceling out African high-fertility rates, the consequences of the AIDS pandemic is certainly diminishing their effect. The consequences of AIDS will snowball in the next generation, as indicated by the fact that African nations report a total of 2,270,360 children now living with AIDS. It is also noteworthy that, of the top thirty nations ranked in AIDS/HIV prevalence sequence, all but one, Haiti, is located in the African continent.

Nation	Total Fertility Rate	AIDS/HIV Prevalence Rate	AIDS/HIV Death Rate	Children Living with AIDS/HIV
Botswana	2.85	37.3	33,000	28,000
Central African Rep.	4.50	13.5	23,000	25,000
Egypt	2.88	0.1	700	Unreported
Kenya	4.96	6.5	150,000	220,000
Lesotho	3.35	28.9	29,000	27,000
Malawi	5.98	14.2	84,000	65,000
Mozambique	4.70	12.2	110,000	80,000
Namibia	3.18	21.3	16,000	30,000
Nigeria	5.53	5.4	310,000	270,000
Rwanda	5.49	5.1	22,000	65,000
Sierra Leone	5.72	7.0	11,000	16,000
South Africa	2.24	21.5	370,000	250,000
Sudan	4.85	2.3	23,000	30,000
Tanzania	5.06	8.8	160,000	Unreported
Uganda	6.74	4.1	78,000	110,000
Zambia	5.47	16.5	89,000	150,000
Zimbabwe	3.54	24.6	170,000	240,000
For comparative purposes, benchmark the above figures against the following data				
Netherlands	1.60	0.2	less than 100	160
United States	2.08	0.6	14,000	10,000
Mexico	2.45	0.3	5,000	3,600
South Korea	2.26	0.1	less than 200	NIL

**Table 1: African TFR Tabulated against AIDS/HIV Measures**

- The AIDS/HIV Adult Prevalence Rate gives the percentage of adults (aged 15 through 49) who are living with AIDS/HIV.
- The AIDS/HIV Death Rate gives the absolute number of adults and children who have died from AIDS during the twelve months of 2003.
- Children Living with AIDS/HIV gives the absolute number of children aged 1 through 14 living with AIDS/HIV in 2003.

Sources: CIA World Factbook (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>) and Human Development reports (<http://hdr.undp.org/default.cfm>).

Table 2 (on page 12) displays comparative data for two nations, the United States and South Africa. While their population sizes are admittedly quite different, and their migration rates are worlds apart, their respective TFRs rank only a few points apart. The comparison of metrics concerning the AIDS/HIV pandemic is dramatically instructive. The high infection rate in South Africa raises her AIDS-specific death rate significantly, and affects the general death rate as well. In the United States, about one in every 21,124 people died of AIDS in 2003. During that same year, one in every 119 South Africans died of AIDS.<sup>9</sup>

Demographic Characteristic	United States	South Africa
Population (2005)	295,734,134 (5)	44,344,246 (28)
Migration Rate per 1,000 Population	3.31	-0.22
Total Fertility Rate (2003)	2.08 (130)	2.24 (123)
Life Expectancy at Birth (2003)	77.71 (46)	43.27 (213)
AIDS/HIV Prevalence Rate (2003)	0.60 (69)	21.50 (5)
AIDS/HIV Deaths (2003)	14,000 (34)	370,000 (1)
Percent of AIDS/HIV(2003)	0.0047%	0.834%
Deaths to Population		
Death Rate (2003)	8.25 (111)	21.32 (8)

**Table 2: United States and South Africa Comparative Demographic Data**

Numbers in parentheses indicate rank position among 226 nations.

Source: CIA World Factbook (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>)

## Where Rates Are Falling

What about the United States? America's TFR at the time of the Founding is thought to have been about eight—they made families big in Ben Franklin's day. From that level, the national TFR dropped to a low of 1.70 in 1972, but has risen to about 2.08 today due to the higher fertility rates of some immigrant groups. Presently, American population is still growing, but at a significantly reduced rate. Natural increase (that is, births minus deaths) accounted for only 56.4 percent of her growth from April 2000 through July 2004. During that period, immigration accounted for the other 43.6 percent of her growth.<sup>10</sup> Immigration, then, is a major driver of American population growth. (Remember, migration does not directly change *worldwide* population. When a person immigrates to these shores, he emigrates from somewhere else. In coming here, he leaves there. There is no net *worldwide* population increase or decrease due solely to immigration.)

Most Asian and European nations are registering sub-replacement TFRs, usually rates lower than America's. (See Table 3 on page 13, which indicates TFRs for major nations by region.) One way to grasp the magnitude of the decline—to understand its consequences—is to consider the "loss" of people a nation experiences due to sub-replacement TFRs. "Loss" here means the number of people lost to the nation because, upon death, they were not replaced by a younger person.

Region & Nation	Total Fertility Rate
<b>North America</b>	
Canada	1.61
Cuba	1.66
Mexico	2.45
United States	2.08
<b>South America</b>	
Argentina	2.19
Brazil	1.93
Uruguay	1.91
<b>Europe</b>	
Belgium	1.64
France	1.85
Germany	1.39
Great Britain	1.66
Ireland	1.80
Italy	1.28
Russia	1.14
Spain	1.15
<b>Asia</b>	
China	1.30
Japan	1.32
India	2.78
North Korea	1.17
South Korea	1.26
Singapore	1.05
<b>Africa</b>	
Egypt	2.88
Libya	3.34
Sudan	4.85
Union of South Africa	2.24
<b>Oceania</b>	
Australia	1.76
Indonesia	2.44
New Zealand	1.79
Philippines	3.16

**Table 3: Sample National Total Fertility Rates**

Sources: CIA World Factbook (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>); Eberstadt, Nicholas, "Power and Population in Asia," *Policy Review*, February/March 2004, p. 4; Neuhaus, Richard John, "Where Have All the Children Gone?" *First Things*, May 2005, p. 58.

Canada will lose so many people that one Canadian think tank is urging the government to "import" young workers to offset declining population. Remarkably, Mexico's TFR, at 2.45, has plummeted so fast that "the country is now aging five times faster than is the United States.<sup>11</sup> Currently sitting at 1.4, the aggregate TFR of Western Europe means that the region is losing about 750,000 people annually. The condition of the Russian Federation, which has reported absolute negative population growth for more than a decade now,<sup>12</sup> is even more dramatic. That one nation is now losing about as many people as all Western Europe loses each year—750,000 people. By 2050, Russia's shrinkage factor could be three million annually, while Bulgaria's population loss will be 38%, Romania's 27% and Estonia's 25%.<sup>13</sup>

The loss figures for China and Japan will be staggering.<sup>14</sup> Following current trend-lines, China's population will soon peak at 1.5 billion people, then begin a steep decline, manifesting itself in the loss of 20-30% of her population each generation.<sup>15</sup> China will be losing about 4.9 million people a

year by 2045. By that time, Japan will be losing about 5.7 million people per year due to sub-replacement fertility levels.<sup>16</sup> Before 2045, the Land of the Rising Sun will lose a full 25% of her 127 million people.<sup>17</sup>

### **Runaway Loss**

If the math behind the TFR is easy to understand—replacing two deceased old people requires two living young ones, the math behind the long-term cost of a declining TFR is difficult to grasp. That is why the forecast of a 95% loss in population over 500 years seems like a prediction bordering on the absurd.

It is easiest to understand how the numbers decline so fast using metaphors. We can say the situation of a declining TFR feeds itself—gets worse generation by generation. This is because the pool of women to have babies grows *smaller* each generation. Thus, in a sub-replacement environment, if one generation has, say, 100 women capable of childbearing, the next generation might have only 95. That is, when they died, not all of the 100 women were replaced by young females. If the sub-replacement fertility persists, the following generation might have only 86 women, the next 75, the next 62, and so on. The pool of women to have babies shrinks at geometric rates. Hence, fertility falls at geometric rates—faster and faster.

This makes turning the situation around—reversing the trend—more difficult with each passing generation. The compounding effect of declining fertility rates is like a snowball rolling downhill, getting bigger and bigger all the time, more and more difficult to stop. Propelled by the laws of gravity and inertia, it takes a powerful force indeed to brake the snowball's fall. So it is that civilization may become locked into a pattern of falling fertility. The zeitgeist of avalanche will be hard to stop.

Bottom line: Population decline is described by the laws of compound interest—only in reverse.

Such a vast depletion of the planet's most precious thing, its people, seems the work of a zeitgeist made the more hideous because it does not slay the living but extinguishes their desire to engender new life. It does not depopulate horrifically and violently, *en masse*, by genocide or with weapons of mass destruction. Rather, by consuming the young before they come to exist, it leaves only the old to grow older, finally to die. None takes their place.

As subtle as it is malignant, this spirit of creeping suicide impels human society to its end with ever-quickenning pace by denying those yet living a lingering bereavement for the unborn—that decent, relieving pain that would drive many to change their thinking and to engender young. This is the culture-of-death demon wearing its most ugly mask. This is the despicable demon who does not slay those whom we have wanted and whom we have seen and whom we have loved, but those whom we have not wanted, whom we have not seen, and whom we have not loved—and whom we therefore cannot miss.

Does God miss them? If humans are too callous to feel the loss, does He?

### **It Is Not Going to Happen**

Five hundred years or so from now, the world's population will not be less than America's today. God's Word paints a completely different picture. Yes, it graphically shows that catastrophic events

of the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, so vividly described in Revelation 6 through 19, will result in worldwide ecological and environmental degradation not witnessed since the Flood. In all that, both human and animal population levels will fall markedly.

God, however, will take swift action to reverse the effects of these literally earthshaking events. The prophet Ezekiel describes what God will do to refurbish the environment. A river, flowing from the Temple's sanctuary, will apparently gush eastward into the sea. Once there, the oceans' waters will be healed.

And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. (Ezekiel 47:9)

Ezekiel continues, mentioning the "exceedingly many" fish that will come to live in the seas (verse 10). In addition, "all kinds of trees," growing along both banks of the river, will produce fruit for food and leaves for medicine, all year around (verse 12).

The environment will be healed. People will be healed. As the Family of God teaches mankind God's way of life and His plan, couples will come to share God's view of children as potential God-beings. That view is implicit in the God's very *first* command to mankind:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. . . ." (Genesis 1:27-28)

Man is now subtracting, not multiplying. By the time mankind comes to understand God's perspective on offspring, Satan will be unable to deceive humans into believing that God is either too callous or too weak to provide air, food, water—all the essentials of life—for people young or old.<sup>18</sup> For then the Culture-of-Death Demon, who hates man, seeing in him the image of the true God, will be locked safely away in the bottomless pit (see Revelation 20:1-3).

In Isaiah 49:19-20, the prophet Isaiah forecasts the consequence of mankind's newfound understanding of God's will. God speaks encouragingly to Israel, dispelling at the same time any notion of a "birth dearth" in those days of restoration:<sup>19</sup>

For your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, "The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell."

These will be the land's myriad inhabitants who will eat the "great multitude of fish" and the fruit growing year-round, mentioned by Ezekiel.

Abraham and Sarah's experience concerning the birth of Isaac indicate that *human reproduction is an act of faith*. As couples in the Millennium begin to trust God—believe that He is willing and able to provide for them and their children, they will begin to reproduce again. They will work with God, multiplying, rather than against Him, subtracting.

Next month, the second part of this four-part series will examine some of the causes of today's population implosion. It will also review some of the dire consequences of man's refusal to multiply.

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## Endnotes

1 Kurtz, Stanley, "Demographics and the Culture War," *Policy Review*, February/March 2005, p. 33.

2 See also Longman, Phillip, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It*, Basic Books, 2004.

3 United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects: the 2002 Revision*. Population Database, accessed May 20, 2005, [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel\\_population.htm](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm).

4 See the CIA Global Factbook (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook>).

5 Longman, Philip, "The Global Baby Bust," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

6 Eberstadt, Nicholas, "Power and Population in Asia," *Policy Review*, February/March 2004, p. 3.

7 Kurtz, *ibid.*, p. 34.

8 In 1960, the TFR of North Africa was about 7.1. Today, it is 3.2 and still in free fall.

9 *World Population Prospects*, *ibid.* The Executive Summary comments:

Twenty-five years into the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the impact of the disease is evident in terms of increased morbidity and mortality and slower population growth. In Southern Africa, the region with the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence of the disease, life expectancy has fallen from 62 years in 1990-1995 to 48 years in 2000-2005, and is projected to decrease further to 43 years over the next decade before a slow recovery starts. As a consequence, population growth in the region is expected to stall between 2005 and 2020. In Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, the population is projected to decrease as deaths outnumber births.

10 Total growth from April 1, 2000, through July 1, 2004, was 12,230,802. Natural increase accounted for 6,901,964 people. Immigration accounted for 5,328,929 people (U.S. Census figures).

11 Longman, *ibid.*

12 Kurtz, *ibid.* Putin has called the demographic situation a "disaster" and a "crisis." However, he has done nothing to curtail abortions in Russia. Russia leads the world in number of abortions, over 2.76 million annually. This is more than double the abortions in America, which ranks number two.

13 Neuhaus, Richard John, "Where Have All the Children Gone," *First Things*, May 2005, p. 58.

14 Chinese population loss is clearly attributable to the one-child-per-family rule. By simple math, this rule makes China a sub-replacement nation. In the 1960s, China's TFR was 6.06. Today, it is 1.30—and falling.

15 Neuhaus, *ibid.*, p.59.

16 *World Population Prospects*, *ibid.*

17 Neuhaus, *ibid.*

18 For example, God's adversary (and ours!) has convinced many that the earth is catastrophically warming due to excess greenhouse gases. The United Nations based its prediction of environmental degradation on the premise that the world's population would not peak until it reached 11.5 billion, 5 billion more than are currently living. Grudgingly, the UN has had to back off its predictions of disaster due to global warming because current demographic trends point away from population growth, toward population decline, away from explosion and toward implosion.

19 Eric Cohen, the editor of *The New Atlantis*, writes intriguingly of the Jewish view of reproduction in "A Jewish-Catholic Bioethics?" (*First Things*, June/July 2005, p. 7). When God told Abraham that He would give land to his descendants (as in Genesis 15: 18), He connected the *identity* of Israel with the absolute necessity that there be future generations. If there were no descendants, there would be no one to receive the land.

So, to Jewish thinking, Genesis 17:7 records an implicit *command* to multiply: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." It is implicit because the covenant *requires* descendants forever. Without descendants, there would be only half of the covenant (God); the other half, "your descendants after you in their generation," would be missing. *This means couples must multiply*, generation after generation. Without procreation, Israel as an identifiable covenant people would not exist. From our standpoint, Cohen undoubtedly summarizes the matter too darkly when he concludes: "To give birth is to be eternally remembered; to be childless is to be eternally forgotten."

An extended quote from the *Yevamot* (a part of the *Mishnah* which discusses the reciprocal responsibilities and rights of married couples) recaps the Jewish perspective:

"Should the number of Israelites happen to be two thousand and two myriads less one, and any particular person has not engaged in the

propagation of the race, does he not thereby cause the Divine Presence to depart from Israel?" Abba Hanan said in the name of Rabbi Eliezar: "He deserves the penalty of death; for it is said, 'And they had no children, but if they had children they would not have died.'" Others say, "He causes the Divine Presence to depart from Israel; for it is said: 'To be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee'; where there exists 'seed after thee,' the Divine Presence dwells among them; but where no 'seed after thee' exists, among whom should it dwell?"

For more information on the Jewish perspective of all things sexual (homosexuality, masturbation, single-sex marriage, etc.), see <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/procreation-and-contraception/>.