

Bloody Utopian Dreams - Part 3

The Politics and Religion of Population Control

by Carl Teichrib

Author's Note: While population agenda themes interlink with a myriad of other issues, such as economics, development, education, and global governance, the purpose of this article isn't to examine each area of impact, nor the historical context of the population control debate. Instead, it follows an interlocking theme: a combination of environmentalism (and its politics) and Earth-based spirituality — the utopian ideal of politics, religion, and a lot less people.

This is the third article in a multi-part series on New Age and political utopianism.

The first time I ever laid eyes on America's Stonehenge was late one spring evening. Caught in the lights of my employer's car, this remarkable monument seemed surreal in the shadow-play cast by the car's headlights. The next day, after lodging in Elberton, Georgia, we went back to this complex modern-day megalith for a closer look.

The Georgia Guidestones, a massive granite edifice planted in the Georgia countryside, contains a list of ten new commandments for Earth's citizens. The first commandment, and the one which concerns this article, simply states: "Maintain humanity under 500,000,000 in perpetual balance with nature."

This population control commandment reminded me of what I had witnessed back in 1997 while attending the Global Citizenship 2000 Youth Congress. Held in Vancouver, BC, the purpose of this event was to incite national changes to the Canadian educational system; specifically, to instill Earth-centric values through the adoption of Robert Muller's *World Core Curriculum* — a philosophy of education that incorporates global citizenship and pantheistic concepts.¹

Muller, a grandfatherly figure with decades of United Nations' experience, gave an emotionally charged speech that strongly emphasized a global population control agenda. In a dialogue between himself and Mother Earth (played by himself!), Muller, as the Earth, challenged the participants towards a new way of thinking,

What are you doing to me? You have multiplied the number of beings

on this planet from 2.5 billion in 1952 to 5.8 billion today. How could you do this to me? This big population explosion all around the world, and I, the Earth, am supposed to feed them. Why did you do this to me?... You are killing me!²

To the attending youth and educators, Muller boasted that the United Nations had, as a result of warnings to the world, “prevented the birth of 2 billion, 200 million people.” Furthermore, he encouraged the Congress to “Try to convince your people to reduce the number of children. This is one of the biggest problems we have on this planet.”³

Clearly, the heart-and-soul of Muller’s population agenda revolved around a dual theme of environmental degradation and a greater spiritual Earth-connection,

...behave correctly towards the Earth.... You are not children of Canada, you are really living units of the cosmos because the Earth is a cosmic phenomena... we are all cosmic units. This is why religions tell you, you are divine. We are divine energy... it is in your hands whether evolution on this planet continues or not.⁴

Not surprisingly, this interlocking three-way theme — population, environment, and spirituality — can be found in the literature of one of the most influential environmental policy organizations in the world, the International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD].

In a 1995 text published by the IISD titled *Empowerment For Sustainable Development: Toward Operational Strategies*, the writers (the book is a compilation of papers presented at a conference) detail the links between population management, sustainable development, and religious values:

The concept [of sustainable development] is also generally viewed as requiring major societal changes through radical or incremental restructuring of institutions and management approaches. For example, a paradigm shift is envisaged towards a decentralized society characterized by small-scale, labour-intensive enterprises, local autonomy, diversity of cultures and thinning out of population over landscape. A more forceful and dynamic role for religious and cultural groups to advocate principles of environmental protection has been urged.⁵

Management — this is the operational point of planned population shifts (“thinning out of population” certainly demonstrates this concept). And a major component of this management process towards environmental/population mind-change is education. After all, by altering the minds of the next generation, long-term target goals are advanced pupil-by-pupil.

Empowerment For Sustainable Development notes,

Education has been advanced as significant in bringing about changes in attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, and values... In order to redirect behaviour and values towards institutional change for sustainable development there is a need to investigate strategic options in relation to

educational philosophies, scope for propagation and adoption, and groups most likely to be susceptible to change.⁶

Consider the First National Environmental Teach-In, which was held on April 22, 1970 and which sparked today's annual Earth Day celebrations. For this nation-wide event (held in the US), a special book was prepared to aid teachers and students in their quest to live peacefully with the Earth. The follow quotes, some quite lengthy, illustrates the managed changes in "attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, and values" — and their impact on how to think regarding environmental and population issues. Remember, this text, titled *The Environmental Handbook*, was geared towards high school students [my own high school used this as a textbook for many years].

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.⁷

Both our present science and our present technology are so tintured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.⁸

In a welfare state, how shall we deal with the family, the religion, the race, or the class (or indeed any distinguishable and cohesive group) that adopts overbreeding as a policy to secure its own aggrandizement? To couple the concept of freedom to breed with the belief that everyone born has an equal right to the commons is to lock the world into a tragic course of action.⁹

No technical solution can rescue us from the misery of overpopulation. Freedom to breed will bring ruin to all... The only way we can preserve and nurture other and more precious freedoms is by relinquishing the freedom to breed, and that very soon... it is the role of education to reveal to all the necessity of abandoning the freedom to breed.¹⁰

A prerequisite to any lasting solution to environmental pollution is a zero growth rate — the birth rate equalling the death rate... The essential cause of environmental pollution is over-population, combined with an excessive population growth rate; other antipollution measures can be used temporarily, but so long as the central problem is not solved, one can expect no lasting success.¹¹

So how do we deal with the "pollution" problem of too many people? On page 291 of *The Environmental Handbook*, it suggests that instead of giving gifts at Christmas, you could send money to population control organizations such as Zero Population Growth and Planned Parenthood/World Population.

It was further proposed that educators could embed population issues into core subject areas,

Biology — Compare elimination of predation and consequent overpopulation of animal species (e.g. deer) with health advances followed by overpopulation of human species... Discuss methods of contraception.

...Economics — Investigate key to affluence... Compare rates of population growth. Growth of various countries with rate of GNP growth; where former exceeds latter, living standards declines.

English — Read (perhaps as outside reading, with book reviews given in class) Malthus [author's note: Robert T. Malthus is the father of the science of population control, he lived from 1766 to 1834], Ehrlich's *Population Bomb*... any of the Sierra Club's Wilderness Conference books.

History (U.S.) — Consider changing attitudes toward birth control...

History (World) — Trace population growth in various areas of the world...

Mathematics — ...Calculate some of the horrors that will take place if breeding isn't slowed...

Psychology — Study (perhaps experiment with) effects of overcrowding...¹²

Other options were given in a section titled "Suggestions Toward an Ecological Platform,"

Stabilizing the U.S. population should be declared a national policy. Immediate steps should be taken to:

1. Legalize voluntary abortion and sterilization and provide these services free.
2. Remove all restrictions on the provisions of birth control information and devices; provide these services free to all, including minors.
3. Make sex education available to all appropriate levels, stressing birth control practices and the need to stabilize the population.
4. Launch a government-sponsored campaign for population control in the media...
5. Offer annual bonuses for couples remaining childless and eliminate tax deductions for more than two children.

Control of world population growth is simply a matter of survival of the human race. Federal priorities must be made to reflect this fact. We propose:

1. Massive federal aid to supply birth control information, planning and materials to all countries that will accept it.
2. Foreign aid only to countries with major programs to curb population growth.
3. Increased research on birth control methods and on attitudes toward limiting births.¹³

Family life, too, was targeted as a population concern. “Explore other social structures and marriage forms, such as group marriage and polyandrous marriage... Share the pleasure of raising children widely, so that all need not directly reproduce....”¹⁴

This is societal management at its highest, and religion comes directly into play. According to *The Environmental Handbook*, “...nothing short of total transformation will do much good.” So with that in mind, a list was given of appropriate religions, spiritual traditions, and philosophies,

Let these be encouraged: Gnostics, hip Marxists, Teilhard de Chardin Catholics, Druids, Taoists, Biologists [author’s note: biologists may have been listed because of the evolutionary principles underpinning much of modern day biological science], Witches, Shamans, Bushmen, American Indians, Polynesians, Anarchists, Alchemists... the list is long. All primitive cultures, all communal and ashram movements.¹⁵

As the foundation for today’s Earth Day events, the 1970 *Environmental Handbook* provided a virtual roadmap for societal transformation. Since then, our educational system, sciences, and political circles have been inundated with population change agendas — be they in the guise of environmentalism, alleviating world poverty, ensuring food security, responding to climate change, or the enhancement of third world economies.¹⁶

Regardless of the reasons for reducing the world’s population, the very idea of forcing humanity down this road has spun all sorts of apocalyptic ideas. Bertrand Russell, one of the last century’s most recognized philosophers, wholeheartedly embraced mass depopulation as a necessary for securing a more unified world.

I do not pretend that birth control is the only way in which population can be kept from increasing. There are others, which, one must suppose, opponents of birth control would prefer. War, as I remarked a moment ago, has hitherto been disappointing in this respect, but perhaps bacteriological war may prove more effective. If a Black Death could be spread throughout the world once in every generation survivors could procreate freely without making the world too full. There would be nothing in this to offend the consciences of the devout or to restrain the ambitions of nationalists. The state of affairs might be somewhat unpleasant, but what of this? Really high-minded people are indifferent to happiness, especially other people’s.¹⁷

As ugly as Russell’s model appears, it resonates with a certain segment of the population control community. In 1968, Paul Ehrlich wrote that, “We must rapidly bring the world population under control, reducing the growth rate to zero or making it go negative.”¹⁸ His suggestions seem tame by comparison to Russell’s ideas, but “making” a population “go negative” carries with it some amazing connotations.

The Environmental Handbook also suggests a radical cut in human numbers.

Situation. There are now too many human beings, and the problem is

growing rapidly worse. It is potentially disastrous not only for the human race but for most other life forms. *Goal*. The goal would be half of the present world population, or less.¹⁹

Cutting the world's numbers in half is not "population control" — it's mass extermination.

In 1998 I was a subscriber to the Progressive Population Network listserver, an online community of environmentalists and population control advocates. One posting, a short note written by a lady named Joan, offered a glimpse into Russell's version of population control [author's note: I have intentionally left off Joan's last name],

Humans had to thin a heard [sic] of deer by shooting them because the natural mechanisms (probably wolves) for keeping the deer population in check had been disrupted. So instead of shooting humans to "thin" us, lets find the natural mechanisms for keeping human populations in check. Otherwise people will just keep breeding and we'll just have to keep shooting them. And that's just too icky for me.

Since there is no equivalent to wolves for humans, one idea would be to just stop providing food and medicine to people who out-breed their habitat. Let them make the choice between starving or limiting their procreation. People need to see more clearly the connection between their reproductive habits and the destruction of the environment.²⁰

We've come around to a point in our society that in striving to "save the Earth" we're proclaiming humanity's suicide. Is this the logical end-run of the great Earth-first, New Age dream?

Notes:

¹ A copy of Muller's *A World Core Curriculum*, distributed during the Global Citizenship 2000 Youth Congress, is on file in the author's archives.

² An audio recording of this event, including Muller's speech, is in the author's file archives. This section of his speech is also included in the facilitator's guide, *When the Earth Still Had 1000 Days*, a post-event handbook published by Creative Learning International (May, 1999).

³ For more information on this event, see Carl Teichrib's article "Global Citizenship 2000: Educating for the New Age," *Hope For The World Update*, Fall 1997. Copies of this issue can be obtained by writing: Hope For The World, P.O. Box 899, Noblesville, Indiana, 46061-0899, USA.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ IISD [general editing by Naresh Singh and Vangile Titi], *Empowerment for Sustainable Development: Toward Operational Strategies* (published for the IISD by Fernwood Publishing, 1995), p. 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *The Environmental Handbook: Prepared for the First National Environmental Teach-In* (Ballantine/Friends of the Earth, 1970), p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *The Environmental Handbook*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹ Jon Breslaw, "Economics and Ecosystems," *The Environmental Handbook*, pp. 111-112.

¹² Gary C. Smith, "Suggestions for the Schools," *The Environmental Handbook*, pp. 295-296.

- ¹³ Keith Murray, "Suggestions Toward an Ecological Platform," *The Environmental Handbook*, pp. 317-318.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 324.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 331.
- ¹⁶ For a comprehensive list of reasons for population control, see *Why Population Matters*, by Population Action International, 1996.
- ¹⁷ Bertrand Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society* (Simon and Schuster, 1953), pp. 103-104.
- ¹⁸ Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (Sierra Club-Ballantine, 1968), p. 131.
- ¹⁹ *The Environmental Handbook*, p. 323.
- ²⁰ Copy of email listserver message on file. Progressive Population Network listserver, November 29, 1998 posting.