

VW Bugs, fondue and babies

The Catholic Review

Everything old is new again. That is the adage used to describe the cyclical life of fads and other hallmarks of our society that come and go and eventually come again. From cars, fashions and even hair styles, “retro” is in ... for now.

Well, apparently you can add the “population bomb” to that list.

That was the title of Stanford University biologist Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 book, which became the “bible” of like-minded “scientists” and doomsday predictors seeking an excuse to use such alarmist language to compel acceptance of population control measures.

The book’s message is perhaps best summed up in one passage: “The battle to feed all humanity is over. In the 1970s, the world will undergo famines – hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death.”

Mr. Ehrlich would not be alone, as just a few years later as scientists and academics in the United States and abroad reflected the “enlightened” thinking of the day with their similar reports and predictions.

Well, just like the VW Bug and fondue, the Population Police are back.

This time around it’s the U.N. Population Fund. The group released a statement in May saying recent United Nations data underscores “an urgent need to provide safe and effective family planning” so women in developing countries can better decide “the number and spacing of their children.”

Other agenda-sharing parties in the scientific community joined the fray. The Global Footprint Network recently determined that currently 1.5 “‘planet Earths’ are needed to sustain our growth rates.”

One of the problems with these projections is that they are not supported by the actual data.

You see, the current world population of nearly 7 billion people represents a decline in fertility rates. In fact, birthrates are said to have fallen by more than 50 percent since 1979. Moreover, about one in four people on earth will be older than 60 by the year 2100.

So, why are the academics and scientists jumping back on the population control bandwagon some 40 years later?

The head of the International Organizations Research Group for the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute said such conclusions are based more on ideology and an unproven model of predicting fertility.

"This is ideology that fewer people are better," Dr. Susan Yoshihara said. "But when you look at the data, you see that is not true. The prescription UNFPA wants is disastrous for the developing and developed worlds," she added, noting that such calls for family planning often lead to a push for contraception and abortion.

The Wall Street Journal's William McGurn also weighed in on the issue last week.

"If the experts continue to tell countries they need to control their population or else ... that 'or else' is going to mean coercion," McGurn wrote. [In the 1970s] "In India, the government of Indira Gandhi launched a massive and brutal sterilization campaign. In China, women's monthly periods were charted on blackboards at their places of work - and even today women are sometimes hunted down and forced to abort if they become pregnant without permission," McGurn said.

Surely there is severe hunger in parts of the under-developed world with the likes of the sub-Saharan, desperate poverty hardly addressed by the wealthy world. Nor do areas like the sub-Saharan seem to be the concern of those espousing the over-population myth.

While efforts to help reduce poverty are necessary and just (I'll be writing on this issue in a future column), abortion and contraception are not the answer.

Pope Benedict XVI has said, "Poverty is often considered a consequence of demographic change. For this reason, there are international campaigns afoot to reduce birthrates, sometimes using methods that respect neither the dignity of the

woman, nor the right of parents to choose responsibly how many children to have; graver still, these methods often fail to respect even the right to life. The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings.”

We must not fall victim to the economic trap of primarily viewing humans and simply mouths to be fed. Instead, we should all be working toward the goal of improving lives by making better medical care available in developing countries. Now that would be something worth repeating.