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Future "Belongs" to the Religious, Says Demographer

By Douglas A. Sylva

An article in the current issue of the prestigious quarterly *Foreign Affairs* warns that, since religious people are having so many more children than nonreligious people, the future actually "belongs" to the religious.

Phillip Longman, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, describes the steep demographic decline now taking place in both the developed and developing worlds, and asks the question, "So where will the children of the future come from? The answer may be from people who are at odds with the modern environment" of urbanization and economic and materialistic advancement, notably those people with strong religious convictions who "reject the game altogether."

"Does this mean that the future belongs to those who believe they are (or who are in fact) commanded by a higher power to procreate?" wonders Longman. "Based on current trends, the answer appears to be yes."

Longman claims that "there is a strong correlation between religious conviction and high fertility. In the United States, for example, fully 47 percent of people who attend church weekly say that the ideal family size is three or more children, as compared to only 27 percent of those who seldom attend church."

Longman even asserts that people with strong religious convictions are now beginning to enjoy a profound "evolutionary advantage" over nonreligious people, since the "clean living" of the religious boosts fertility and overall health. He writes that, "Current demographic trends work against modernity in another way as well. Not only is the spread of urbanization and industrialization itself a major cause of falling fertility, it is also a major cause of so-called diseases of affluence, such as overeating, lack of exercise, and substance abuse, which leave a higher and higher percentage of the population stricken by chronic medical conditions. Those who reject modernity would thus seem to have an evolutionary advantage, whether they are clean-living Mormons or Muslims."

Longman sees little reason for hope that a worldwide demographic catastrophe can be avoided. "Once," he writes, "demographers believed that some law of human nature would prevent fertility rates from remaining below replacement level within any healthy population for more than brief periods.... Today, however, it has become clear that no law of nature ensures that human beings, living in free, developed societies, will create enough children to reproduce themselves. Japanese fertility rates have been below replacement levels since the mid-1950s, and the last time Europeans produced enough children to reproduce themselves was the mid-1970s.

Nor can immigration resolve fertility decline. According to Longman, "if the United States hopes to maintain the current ratio of workers to retirees over time, it will have to absorb an average of 10.8 million immigrants annually through 2050."