



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

5 August 2013 | Draft

Is There Never Enough?

Religious doublespeak on population and poverty

-- / --

Introduction

Mass distraction enabling Mass destruction?

Denial of "overpopulation" as a problematic factor

Overpopulation denial as promoted by religions and fellow-travellers

Deficient analytic capacity of religions

Blame-gaming: always someone else's responsibility

Withholding aid as a means of saving future lives?

Hypocrisy of current Papal focus on poverty?

Challenge for a poverty-focused Pope

Towards a realistic simulation of faith-based population policies

LETS indulge the impoverished!?

References

Introduction

The newly elected Pope has now achieved a major worldwide media success through his visit to Latin America, on the occasion of [World Youth Day 2013](#), culminating in an iconic celebration of a Mass with 3 million people on the beach of Rio de Janeiro. His widely noted message was a preoccupation with poverty. Commentators remark with appreciation that a new tone appears to have been set.

For the Catholic Church the media coverage contrasts beneficially with a much publicised range of internal problems relating to homosexuality, corruption and sexual abuse. It is questionable whether these issues have been appropriately addressed, rather than set aside, whatever the implications that this may be the case. Indications of a new approach are carefully framed as consistent with old policies -- raising the question as to what exactly is new rather than a skillful exercise in re-imaging for Catholics desperate for some uplifting good news.

Rio de Janeiro has only recently been host to a new Earth Summit ([United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development](#), 2012), deliberately organized there 20 years after the pioneering [United Nations Conference on Environment and Development](#). During that period the world population has increased from 5,478,009,489 to 7,052,135,305 (*Population of the entire world, yearly, 1950 - 2100*, Geohive). Many of the issues of concern in 1992 remain far from resolved in 2012 -- despite the [Millennium Development Goals](#) articulated at the UN [Millennium Summit](#) (New York, 2000). Critical issues widely noted include: [extreme poverty and hunger](#), [universal primary education](#), [gender equality](#) and [empowering](#) women, [child mortality](#) rates, [maternal health](#), diseases, environmental [sustainability](#), housing, water, pollution, unemployment, corruption and conflict.

Given that the increase in population appears to exacerbate these issues in many ways, it is appropriate to continue to explore the role of religions in engendering those issues as emerging crises. Given the key role of Christianity in the governance of the world's superpowers, its responsibility merits particular attention -- specifically that of the Catholic Church, in the light of its framing of that authority (and its unique diplomatic involvement in international debate on population issues).

This exploration develops aspects of arguments made previously (*Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulation*, 2007; *Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007; *United Nations Overpopulation Denial Conference: exploring the underside of climate change*, 2009; *Mapping the Global Underground Articulating: Insightful Population Constraint Consideration (IPCC)*, 2010).

The challenge is to set such arguments within a context which recognizes the meaning variously associated with religious perspectives by their adherents -- **without** deprecating unduly the subtlety of such insights. These are potentially comparable to the most radical insights of physics regarding the nature of reality -- if only in the understanding of those adherents. As with any worldview, however, the question is how those promoting its unique value themselves provide for criticism of it from other perspectives, as argued separately (*Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews: as exemplified by the need for non-antisemitic dialogue with Israelis?* 2006).

Of potentially greater concern is that it is unclear that "rational" arguments now have any credible outcome -- irrespective of the level of crisis, the quality of the analysis, or the nature of the evidence presented. This has been made clear by the climate change debate. The very assumption that a set of arguments can be assembled in support of a "rational" strategic outcome is now questionable, as separately discussed (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011; *The Consensus Delusion*, 2011). With respect to the credibility of arguments, the narrow sense of "faith-based" governance now extends to encompass the arguments in which people have faith (*Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance*, 2003)

The wording of the title is deliberately ambiguous, inviting various interpretations. Alternatives might have been: *There is Never Enough*, or *Is There Ever Enough?* The concern in what follows is with the nature of the [doublespeak](#) in which religions seemingly engage in order to disguise the life-endangering policies they promote.

Mass distraction enabling Mass destruction?

Ironically the long-standing accusation that *religion is the opium of the people* acquires new relevance in a period in which religion is effectively used to avoid engaging with global issues -- when narcotic drugs and alcohol are widely used to reframe personal experience, and when many require medication to survive lifestyle diseases (*Cognitive Implications of Lifestyle Diseases of Rich and Poor*, 2010).

Framed in this way it is appropriate to ask whether the focus on "mass distraction" -- further exemplified by media distractions and sports -- contributes significantly to "mass destruction", as separately explored (*Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs. Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003).

Although a deliberate play on words, it is clear that "mass destruction" is an ever present reality:

- through fatal starvation and disease in the least developed regions
- through regional conflicts, most evidently between religions or between their factions
- through the much-publicised threat of terrorism
- through the much-studied probability of nuclear or biochemical warfare
- through the recognized probability of pandemics

The unchecked increase in world population can only increase the proportion of people potentially affected by such mass destruction. However, in addition to the human focus, "mass destruction" is already evident with respect to other species of the biosphere:

- through deforestation and the consequent loss of associated animal and plant species
- through overfishing and the destruction of marine environments and the consequent loss of fish and other species
- through pollution more generally and the loss of bird life and other species

The question which merits attention is the extent to which the very "popularity" of mass distraction inhibits efforts to address the ongoing process of mass destruction.

Denial of "overpopulation" as a problematic factor

There is a pattern to the denial of the impact of any factor engendering global crisis (as noted above). This is evident in debates regarding climate change, capitalism, competition between ideologies, and the like. The debates might be caricatured as "going nowhere" -- irrespective of how vigorous the righteous commentary they elicit. Blame-gaming has become a necessary strategic skill in order to avoid accepting responsibility or attributing it. This has been remarkably evident with respect to events by which the current global financial crisis has been engendered. It is difficult to imagine any crisis which would not invite denial of its larger significance.

The "obvious" impacts of the continuing global economic crisis could be said only to have elicited palliative responses which avoid addressing more challenging root causes. Quantitative easing is an exemplification of this -- shading into moral equivalents to ensure that only the few are to blame (*From Quantitative Easing (QE) to Moral Easing (ME): a stimulus package to avert moral bankruptcy?* 2010).

Missing in the case of "overpopulation" is any systemic analysis of the arguments made and questioned -- as might emerge from the techniques of [argument mapping](#) and [critical discourse analysis](#).

It is now more relevant to understand how such systemic exploration of controversial issues is avoided -- and how any presentation of such an analysis would be ignored as irrelevant. Who ensures that such research is not undertaken -- and who brings pressure to bear on institutions with the skills to undertake it, or ensures that the results are not widely disseminated (without suitable deprecation)?

In the following consideration of the arguments presented to deprecate "overpopulation" as an issue, it is appropriate to recall that there is an increasing tendency with respect to information on the internet which is somewhat analogous to the marketing technique of [placement advertising](#). The art is to feed in numerous communications effectively to reframe the balance of arguments relating to a particular theme. The technique can also be compared to [negative campaigning](#)

Overpopulation denial as promoted by religions and fellow-travellers

A number of websites are dedicated to the presentation of arguments (and research) for the recognition of overpopulation as a crisis meriting attention (*Wikipedia-human overpopulation*; [World Overpopulation Awareness](#); [Overpopulation.net](#); *RationalWiki-overpopulation*; [howmany.org-Overpopulation: Environmental and Social problems](#)).

Overpopulation is however widely denied as a "myth" -- possibly based on a set of "myths", as fruitfully argued by various authors

(Trevor Thomas, *The Myth of Overpopulation*, *American Thinker*, 10 February 2013; Jacqueline R. Kasun (*Overpopulation? lifeissues.net:clear thinking about crucial issues*). Framing overpopulation as a "myth" is however fruitfully disputed by authors such as Alex Jones (*The Overpopulation Myth MYTH*, *NaturalNews*, 15 March 2013). A spectrum of comments is presented, for example, by *Debate.org* (*Is overpopulation a global crisis?*).

The point to be stressed is that there is no process for clarifying the claims made (or their denial) -- whether as being ridiculous misrepresentation or delusion. Any participant in the debate is readily dismissed by other parties. Again, as noted above, **there is little enthusiasm for the analysis of the debate to enable its processes to be reviewed from a more detached perspective**. There is no such perspective. Nor could the results of any such analysis be meaningfully communicated to engender more insightful outcomes.

Elements of the "myth", characterizing the inherently "messy" debate, include:

- **World overcrowding:** Whilst it can be argued that cities may be overcrowded, and increasingly so, it can be argued that this has always been the case. Given the underpopulated areas of the world, it can be claimed that the world as a whole is not. Arguably there is plenty of space left for humans to occupy. Kasun has famously argued that if you allotted 1,250 square feet to each person, all the people in the world would fit into the state of Texas. The population density of this giant city would be somewhat more than San Francisco and less than the Bronx.
- **Unsustainable increase in world population:** According to Kasun, official forecasts of eventual world population size have been steadily falling due to falling fertility rates -- claimed in some cases to be endangering replacement levels. In 1992-93, the World Bank predicted world population would exceed 10 billion by the year 2050. In 1996, the UN predicted 9 billion for 2050. Future estimates may be even lower. Failure to ensure population replacement will arguably pose major problems for social security networks which depend for their finance on a stable working population. The science behind "overpopulation" is claimed by some to be outdated and false. It is claimed that "sound science" has long shown that the human race is in no danger of overpopulating the planet, and in fact is facing a demographic collapse.
 - For Alex Jones the question of overpopulation is not how many humans the planet can physically hold in terms of cubic meters and physical volume. The question is **how many humans the biosphere can support in terms of sustainable life**. He notes the land area required for the water needs of an individual, arguing that the entire population of Los Angeles, for example, needs literally thousands of square miles of water basin space to capture all the water that's pumped into that artificial city. Furthermore people produce biological waste. Where does all your waste go? Processing that waste and "recycling" it back into the ecosystem requires huge amounts of land space. Nature needs a large, functioning ecosystem to dilute, process and transform the waste products of humanity, and in fact nature isn't even keeping up. The amount of land space required to support one human life is immensely larger than the amount of physical space that one human body might occupy. Jones argues that the argument that "the entire population of the world could fit inside the state of Texas" is complete nonsense.
 - With respect to the argument that fertility rates are actually declining in certain developed regions of the world, Jones argues that that logic fails to take into account that populations are falling in selected areas **precisely because they are already overpopulated there**. Citing Japan as an example, he argues that the population of Tokyo, in fact, has **vastly exceeded the carrying capacity of the entire island nation of Japan**, requiring vast inputs of resources and food from other land masses around the globe. If Japan halted all imports, the population of Tokyo would starve to death in a matter of weeks.
- **Planetary resource constraints on increasing population:** It is readily argued that planetary resources will not constitute a constraint on world population however it may increase. The resources of the planet are held to be unlimited.
 - **For World Population Balance:** Current global population of over 7 billion is already two to three times higher than the sustainable level. Several recent studies show that Earth's resources are enough to sustain only about 2 billion people at a European standard of living... If all of the world's 7 billion people consumed as much as an average American, it would take the resources of over five Earths to sustainably support all of them. On average, each American uses nearly 20 acres of biologically productive land and water (biocapacity) per year.
 - For Alex Jones, given that all these things are finite, the global population that depends on environmental resources for sustenance must obviously be finite as well. Arguing that the human population can be "unlimited" even while depending on finite resources is held to be ridiculous. Clearly there is a limited "carrying capacity" of the planet, meaning there is a finite number of human beings who can be supported by the biosphere. Jones asks, **have we already exceeded the carrying capacity of this planet with finite resources, or is it still far off?** He argues that to live within the carrying capacity of the planet, humanity would need to be living in harmony with the planet, with an excess buffer of fresh water, food, topsoil, ocean life, watershed areas and so on. Rather than living in harmony however, Jones sees a civilization **living on borrowed time**, having already vastly exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet to the point where a population collapse is inevitable. He sees a world that seems to be over-tapped, over-exploited, over-farmed and over-populated.
- **Aggravation of global warming by human activity endangering the environment:** This argument is disputed on the basis of the lack of evidence for climate change and the human contribution to increasing temperature. The related claim concerning the consequent increase in the ozone hole is similarly disputed.
 - For Alex Jones, nearly every river that empties into the oceans creates a massive "dead zone" of chemicals, heavy metals and pharmaceutical runoff. This is not the description of a planet with the necessary excess carrying capacity, rather it is the description of a **planet that is dying**.
- **Deforestation is a consequence of increasing population:** Kasun argues that FAO and Brazilian government figures suggest

that logging takes about two-tenths of one percent of forest acreage per year, and in 1993, Brazilian forests covered 58 percent of the country's total land area. Such figures hardly suggest a catastrophic decline. FAO figures show a "decline" in forest cover even when forest land is appropriated for use as public parks, and not a single tree is cut down. And if in fact some deforestation is occurring in Brazil, it can scarcely be the result of overpopulation; Brazil has less than half as many people per square mile as the world average.

- **Air pollution is a consequence of overpopulation:** This has been claimed to endanger lakes, rivers and forests. The counter-claim is made that such pollution has been highest in the centrally-planned economies where population growth was low or negative.
- **Endangered wildlife as as consequence of overpopulation:** This is contested with the claim there is no scientific evidence in support of this. As argued by Kasun, some species, such as blue whales, spotted owls and blackfooted ferrets, have been found to be more numerous than was once thought. Since many species exist in forests and the earth's forest cover is remaining about the same, the claims of massive species extinction appear doubtful.
- **Overpopulation as endangering the supply of food, engendering malnutrition and starvation:** Kasun disputes this by noting that according to the FAO, world food supplies exceed requirements in all world areas, amounting to a surplus approaching 50 percent in 1990 in the developed countries, and 17 percent in the developing regions. Farmers are claimed to use less than half of the world's arable land. The progressive conversion of land to built environments to accommodate a larger population will absorb less than two percent of the world's land, and is considered unlikely to seriously diminish the supply of land for agricultural production
 - For Alex Jones, where does the food come from? Vast tracts of land that need sunshine, water and soil. It's not hard to imagine that the food needs of a single person on the planet probably exceed one thousand square meters of land. If we really squeezed the entire global population into the state of Texas, where would they grow their food?
 - It is argued that 60% of arable farm land on the planet is over-stressed (naming losing nutrients, losing top soil). 90% of farm land that is irrigated is done so from fossil aquifers that are not permitted time to recharge. 2/3 of the planet does not receive the nutrition that is required
- **Overpopulation engendering and sustaining poverty:** The claim that overpopulation is the chief cause of poverty is disputed by arguing that issues typically blamed on "overpopulation" are in fact the result of bad economic policy including: excessive government spending, high taxes on farmers, inflation, restrictions on trade, excessive government ownership, and overregulation of private economic activity.
- **Overpopulation engenders conflict:** The most war-torn continent on earth Africa is also one of the least densely populated, with about half as many people per square mile as in the world as a whole. Bad governments, propped up by ineptly and unjustly managed foreign aid, are more probably the root of strife.
- **Overpopulation engenders unemployment:** The claim that the oversupply of labour will cause wages to fall and unemployment to increase is disputed by the argument that more people ensures an increase in demand for goods and services, thereby creating more jobs. This is countered by the argument that if it were valid there would not be so many unemployed and so many living in slums unable to earn a living wage.

Deficient analytic capacity of religions

Religions, and notably Christianity (through the leadership provided by the Catholic Church), are assiduous in their denial of the effects of overpopulation -- and deny the merit of other perspectives as being simply misguided or deluded. However, as with the "messy" features of the debate, this is **not** the concern here.

The question raised here is the quality of the analytical capacity brought to bear on that messy debate as a process -- and on other controversial debates.

Simplistic engagement with interfaith differences: Most evident is the case of debate regarding the relationship between religions and between factions within a religion. Faith-based conflicts continue to be a major destabilising factor in global civilization.

In a period in which amazing advances have been made in the quality of thinking in many disciplines, theology appears to remain inherently simplistic in its approach to those with any "other" perspective. Effectively, unless the "other" subscribes to the perspective of the particular religion, it is simply framed as wrong, if not dangerously wrong -- even to be framed as "evil" or "satanic".

This methodology reinforces the strategic approaches of such as the USA, for whom *You're either with us, or against us*, as discussed separately (*Us and Them: Relating to Challenging Others*, 2009) -- with all its evident consequences. The theology of the range of religions thus sustains a worldview in which, necessarily, the perspective of only one religion is "right". The remainder are necessarily "wrong" -- or misguided in some respects.

The consequence is immediately evident in the bloody conflict engendered between adherents of religions or their factions (Catholic/Protestant, Sunni/Shiite, Hindu/Muslim, Christians/Jews, etc). **Theology has nothing to offer on such matters and experiences no obligation in this matter** -- since the other party is simply "wrong" and at fault, however compassionately such ignorance may be viewed. The conversion of the "other" to the correct view is naively to be welcomed -- although apostasy may be severely condemned. In this sense interfaith dialogue only underpins such difficulties with a "feel good" factor -- perhaps to be

deprecated as "palliative care", given the violence engendered to which so little response is offered.

Given the traditionally intimate relationship of theology and mathematics, it is a wonder that mathematical theology has not been enriched by the more recent insights of mathematics in order to offer subtler possibilities of interrelating differences of perspectives, as separately argued (*Mathematical Theology: Future Science of Confidence in Belief*, 2011). As matters stand, the relationship with otherness suggests that religions are much challenged to count beyond "one" -- the demonic being readily associated with any "other" (*Transcending Simplistic Binary Contractual Relationships: what is hindering their exploration?* 2012).

Misleading preoccupation with proximate causes: With respect to analysis of the pattern of discourse relating to "overpopulation", it is extraordinary to note the preferred focus on the proximate causes of any issue. There is seemingly almost no facility for [due diligence](#) with regard to the origin of problems:

- disastrous flooding is immediately attributed to storms, not to construction in flood plains, ill-thought engineering of river systems, destruction of woodlands previously capable of absorbing unusual levels of precipitation
- refugee influx is not reviewed in terms of factors rendering livelihoods unviable in other countries
- etc

This pattern may be described in terms of "downstream" or "derivative" thinking -- a failure of due diligence (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems*, 2013). Framed as [damage limitation](#) to minimize disruption to business-as-usual, the focus is on incidents and not on the learning to be acquired from them regarding their systemic implications.

Lack of due diligence: In the case of the Catholic Church, this failure of due diligence has been remarkably evident in relation to ongoing scandals:

- [sexual abuse by Catholic clergy](#), already subject to very extensive commentary, legal proceedings, and investigations
- [corruption in Vatican financial services](#), about which new revelations continue to be forthcoming (Samuel Rubinfeld, *Corruption Currents: From Vatican Bank Image Redux to Adopting Rules*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 May 2013; Nicole Winfield, *Nunzio Scarano, Vatican Official, Arrested In Alleged Corruption*, *The Huffington Post*, 28 June 2013)
- [homosexual activities within the Catholic priesthood](#), and allegedly within the Vatican itself (Philip Pullella, *Pope laments 'gay lobby,' corruption in Vatican: report*, *Reuters*, 12 June 2013; *Pope admits 'gay lobby' in Vatican administration: report*, *AFP*, 11 June 2013; Andrew Brown, Kate Connolly and Lizzy Davies, *Pope Francis: gay priests in the Vatican? Yes. A gay conspiracy? No*, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2013)

As commentary has made apparent, great effort has been made to treat hard evidence in the past as reflective of isolated instances. Damage limitation exercises have endeavoured to avoid the extent to which any single instance is an indication of a systemic problem. Due diligence with respect to this possibility has been avoided -- especially since those who might have been responsible for clarifying the extent of such problems may well be implicated in them in some way.

The avoidance of any larger systemic perspective could be described as a form of "systemic gerrymandering" -- framing the problem to avoid consideration of wider implications, as has proven to be a characteristic of science in considering resource-related population issues (*Scientific Gerrymandering of Boundaries of Overpopulation Debate Review of The Royal Society report -- People and the Planet*, 2012).

Enabling "new thinking": Given the range of issues noted above, it is appropriate to ask whether the process of analysis and judgment of Catholic authorities on these and other matters suggests a need for "new thinking". The initiatives of the newly elected Pope in this direction have already been welcomed (*In bold move, Pope names commission to reform Vatican bank*, *Reuters*, 26 June 2013; Hada Messia and Laura Smith-Spark, *Pope sets up body to reform Vatican's economic affairs*, *CNN*, 19 July 2013).

Especially striking is the Pope's declaration with regard to homosexuality within the priesthood (*Pope Francis: Who am I to judge gay people?* *BBC News*, 29 July 2013; Rachel Donadio, *On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks, Who Am I to Judge?*, *The New York Times*, 29 July 2013; Nicole Winfield, *Pope Francis says he won't judge gay priests*, *The Boston Globe*, 29 July 2013). This has however been carefully reframed by commentators to exclude carnal activity and as being consistent with Catholic teaching (Barbara Solow, *Pope's remarks on gay priests welcome news locally; clergy say it's consistent with Catholic teaching*, *Gazettenet.com*, 1 August 2013).

Others have asked whether this apparent change in tone may have a "ripple effect". Might it imply a shift with respect to other problematic issues such as:

- discriminatory attitudes towards women, whether with respect to divorce, marriage to clergy, or the [ordination of women](#)
- discriminatory attitudes to other Christian denominations and to other faiths (Islam, Judaism, etc) -- exemplified by so-called "gaffe-prone" declarations of Benedict XVI (*Benedict's Gifts and Gaffes*, *National Catholic Register*, 7 August 2007)

Might the Pope ask a similar question with respect to women and other faiths? As he might then say: *Who Am I to Judge?*

The primary concern here is with respect to unconstrained increase in population and the manner in which the Catholic Church is currently complicit in this. Can the Pope's question be applied to this matter in any new way?

Blame-gaming: always someone else's responsibility

For some religions, all tragic issues are engendered by a God who "*moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform*" ([William Cowper](#)). There is then little cause for human concern, however great the suffering or fatal the consequences. Fatalism is then indeed

appropriate. It is assumed that there is no possibility that a religion, being engendered by divine revelation, can be at fault -- whatever the tragic nature of any disaster.

There is therefore little call for critical analysis of human behaviour -- provided action is taken in fulfillment of injunctions framed as primary, such as *Be fruitful, and multiply* (*Genesis 1:28*, [King James](#) version), namely:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Complicity in violence: Inconvenient injunctions, such as *Thou shalt not kill*, can be skillfully reframed as in [Just War theory](#). Such reframing is vital as a justification for the violence in which the adherents of religions are so vigorously engaged -- with the explicit or tacit support of their religion. Clearly religion is no constraint on the violence perpetrated by the (primarily Christian) coalitions of the West, nor by those of Muslim persuasion.

Few are "excommunicated" for engendering violence. Some may be formally honoured for doing so, despite the level of violence perpetrated (*Tony Blair In Line For Knighthood from the Pope for "services to peace"*, *Daily Mirror*, 29 August 2010). Estimates for the number of [casualties in the Iraq War](#), which Blair played a key role in instigating, range from 100,000 to 1,000,000.

Complicity in ensuring the death of innocents: Whether deliberately or inadvertently, the failure to develop analytic capacity is useful to religions -- and possibly to secular political agendas in a context of faith-based governance. By this means, **religions are able to avoid recognition of the manner in which promotion of unchecked population increase must necessarily ensure suffering and death -- potentially for millions**. Briefly stated, premature mortality is virtually guaranteed when children are engendered for whom food or other essentials to survival are not available.

It can be argued that causing people to die by such means is the unstated consequence of religious doctrine, as more generally discussed (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid": from myth-making towards a "wisdom society"*, 2003; *Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulation*, 2007).

The dubious response of religions is to argue that such essentials to survival are "available" -- elsewhere (as noted above). As argued by religion, the real issue is that the essentials are not "made available" by "others" from "elsewhere" to those in need. It is the "others" who are then regrettably at fault and therefore directly responsible for any increase in suffering or premature mortality -- whether of children or adults. Any blame is then shifted to such "others" for [withholding aid to persons in need](#)

The fallacy of the argument presented by religion only becomes evident when the analytic framework is enlarged beyond the systemic focus on immediate proximate causation. As noted above, the manner in which this enlargement of perspective is avoided could be described as a form of systemic gerrymandering.

Questionable appeals for compassion: This criticism can however be reframed as unrealistic -- with the argument that a child is at risk now, for lack of compassionate response. Arguments for a larger perspective can then be framed (by religion) as "theoretical" and irrelevant to the tragic, existential reality of the moment -- to which "others" have an immediate obligation to respond.

One way to present the situation is to compare it to that of a group of people in a lifeboat with necessarily limited resources. The dilemma for those in the boat is how to respond to the insistence of some that they have a right to engender children -- thereby increasing the "number of mouths to feed":

- a proportion of the limited resources can indeed be allocated in this way -- but in response to how many "extra mouths" engendered in this way?
- those supportive of that right can advocate the search for extra resources -- perhaps by "others" in the boat -- perhaps by fishing?
- those of more fatalistic (or optimistic) disposition can assume that timely external aid will be forthcoming -- from another vessel - - or from God?

The situation can also be compared to that of the encounter of a resource-endowed person with a beggar requesting aid (possibly for a child). This is an increasingly common experience in urban environments, especially in developed countries. As a "transaction" it has the following elements:

- the person requesting the aid is clearly impoverished in comparison with the potential donor -- and perhaps deliberately dressed to emphasize a degree of suffering
- a degree of obligation (even guilt) may be thereby engendered in the potential donor -- or may not (especially if the potential donor is concerned to conserve scarce resources, in the face of multiple demands of that type)
- there is necessarily a degree of suspicion of the possibility that the person requesting the aid is one of a number judiciously positioned in that environment by someone using those in need to elicit resources through a form of "emotional blackmail"
- the donor may verbally encourage the person in need to go to appropriate social safety net services -- of whatever form (including those organized by religions)
- any suggestion that the "extra mouth" should not have been engendered is clearly irrelevant to the situation in the moment (especially if there is any implication that the child had been deliberately, if not forcefully, engendered for the purpose of eliciting resources in that manner)
- responding favourably to the request may suitably alleviate the conscience of the donor for the moment (especially if there is any degree of guilty conscience triggered by the person requesting the aid)

Related insights are offered by Kerry Kubilius (*Before You Give: Beggars in Eastern Europe*, *about.com*) and Ole Martin Moen (*Don't Give Money to Beggars*, *Practical Ethics*, 22 September 2012).

Withholding aid as a means of saving future lives?

An unusual degree of sensitivity to the longer-term systemic implications is evident in the commentary of [Dan Moller](#) (*Should We Let People Starve -- For Now?*, *Analysis*, 2006) and in a response by [Laura Valentini](#) (*On the Duty to Withhold Global Aid Now to Save More Lives in the Future*, *Ethics and Global Politics*, 2011).

The argument is presented here solely to illustrate the need for more careful consideration of the ethical issues -- not as a recommendation for the appropriateness of withholding aid.

Valentini introduces her argument as follows:

The world is riddled with human suffering, poverty, and destitution. In the face of this moral tragedy, the least that the global wealthy can do is try to support aid programs aimed at relieving the plight of the very poor. Many political leaders, pop stars, and religious personalities have realized this, and routinely urge us to be more sensitive to the conditions of the distant needy. Giving aid thus seems to be one of the most important moral imperatives of our time.

Citing a rigorous argument by Moller, Valentini notes however that:

The principle of development (or aid)-effectiveness is a widely adopted one in both academic discussion and policy making. However, following the familiar and seemingly unproblematic logic behind this principle, in conjunction with empirically plausible premises, we quickly reach an unpalatable conclusion, namely that we have a duty to refrain from giving aid at present, if we can save more lives in the future with the money we are now contemplating giving away'.

Recognizing "a few plausible empirical assumptions", Valentini notes "the fairly uncontroversial premise" that present lives and future lives are equally valuable leads to a very controversial duty (D) to let the present generation starve, in order to save more lives in the future. Valentini presents the argument in support of this conclusion as follows:

- P1. Future lives count just as much as present lives; preventing future deaths is just as important as preventing present-time deaths.⁴
- P2. There will continue to be at-risk people in developing countries whose lives we could save by contributing to aid organizations in the foreseeable future.
- P3. The real cost of providing life-saving aid will decrease over time.
- P4. There are methods of increasing our wealth (in real terms) over time.
- P5. It would often benefit us to delay providing aid.⁵
- D. We have a duty to let people starve for now, in order to save more lives in the future

As Valentini notes:

This conclusion has very far-reaching implications. For instance, if there are principled reasons for delaying giving aid, then we can no longer assume that it is appropriate to criticize the wealthy of the world for their inaction with respect to world poverty. Politicians, religious leaders and pop stars may have simply urged us to do the wrong thing. Instead of devoting a substantial portion of our income to development aid, we ought to neglect the plight of the poor at least for now, if doing so enables us to save more lives in the future.

After countering this argument, Valentini concludes:

In this short note, I have attempted to reject the suggestion that we may be under a duty to let people starve for now' in order to save more in the future. I have argued that, contrary to what has been recently suggested by Dan Moller, this duty cannot be justified from within either a consequentialist or a deontological ethical perspective. In particular, I have challenged the plausibility of assumption P2 in the line of consequentialist reasoning that leads to establish such a duty; and shown how, for a deontologist, letting people starve for now can be at most permissible, but is in fact likely to be impermissible under existing empirical circumstances.

Hypocrisy of current Papal focus on poverty?

The previous sections provide a context framing the recent focus on poverty offered by the newly elected Pope -- and widely publicised by the media.

Challenge of increasing global inequality: The focus is to be welcomed, given other arguments regarding global inequality and the manner in which it is increasing (Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins, *Global Inequality: beyond the bottom billion*, UNICEF, April 2011; Jason Hickel, *The Truth about Extreme Global Inequality*, *Al Jazeera*, 14 Apr 2013).

At the time of writing, the degree of inequality is highlighted by a new report by Lawrence Mishel and Natalie Sabadish (*CEO Pay in 2012 Was Extraordinarily High Relative to Typical Workers and Other High Earners*, Economic Policy Institute, 26 June 2013). This has been the subject of widespread media commentary (*CEO-To-Worker Pay Ratio Ballooned 1,000 Percent Since 1950*, *The Huffington Post*, 30 April 2013 1; Jordan Weissmann, *CEOs Now Earn 273 Times the Average Worker's Pay -- Should You Be Mad?* *The Atlantic*, 27 June 2013; Kathryn Dill, *CEO Pay Has Risen More Than Twice As Much As The Stock Market*, *Forbes*, 27 June 2013;

Elliot Blair Smith and Phil Kuntz, *Disclosed: The Pay Gap Between CEOs and Employees*, *BusinessWeek*, 2 May 2013).

Vatican complicity in inequality: Whilst the above figures are readily upheld as "shocking", potentially more shocking is the disparity evident from the wealth of the Catholic Church -- as problematically characterized by its buildings, land-holdings and other assets -- and flaunted in the course of munificent pomp and ceremony in the face of the impoverished (John L. Allen Jr., *Challenges to vision of a 'Poor Church for the Poor'*, *National Catholic Reporter*, 19 March 2013; *Papal Paradox: Vatican Wealth and Jesuit Humility*, *France 24*, 15 March 2013; Kristopher Morrison, *Wealth of Roman Catholic Church impossible to calculate*, *National Post*, 13 March 2008; Avro Manhattan, *The Vatican's Billions*; *Roman Catholics: The Vatican's Wealth*. *Time Magazine*, 26 February 1965).

This disparity is compounded by the Vatican's financial assets and the **scandals** associated with them, most specifically through the **Vatican Bank** (Rachel Donaldo, *Panel to Study Vatican's Finances and Transparency*, *The New York Times*, 19 July 2013). It is unfortunate that part of the Vatican's defence is that a significant proportion of the assets are in fact held "separately" by **Catholic religious orders** -- given that this argument bears a strong resemblance to that dubiously made by multinational corporations in distributing their assets worldwide through **shell corporations**. as a means of avoiding exposure to taxation. As with the remark above concerning complicity in violence, notably through honouring those who enable it, the matter is further complicated by the lack of transparency long cultivated in relation to Catholic "military" orders such as the **Knights of Malta**. With the involvement of the wealthy and the influential, such as Tony Blair, these are typically a focus of conspiracy theorists. Despite the declared aims of many such orders in support of the impoverished, it is necessarily far from clear how these relate to the reality of their activities in practice -- and how Vatican reform might remedy this.

Misrepresentation of causes of poverty: The unstated difficulty for the Catholic Church is that **the poverty with which the newly elected Pope is so honourably concerned is in part a direct consequence of policies enabled and encouraged by that Church**. These have ensured that there was no constraint on increase in population, even if resources were unlikely to be made available for their livelihood.

The Catholic Church, now aided and abetted by the Christian Evangelicals, has effectively engaged in a form of "misselling" comparable to a high degree with that which triggered the **subprime mortgage crisis**. Like the financial institutions responsible for the latter, malpractice will be vigorously denied and will remain unproven. To what extent are these processes to be compared with **confidencity trickery** -- exploiting the gullibility of believers in religion? Tragically however, rather than houses being **repossessed**, it is lives which are "repossessed" as a consequence.

Contrasting strategic possibilities: With respect to reducing suffering and tragic mortality, the question to be asked of the Pope is how a distinction is to be made between the appropriateness of three approaches:

- Seeking poverty alleviation assistance from the system in place -- as exemplified by the examples (above) of the lifeboat or of the beggar.
- Awaiting a miracle -- as suggested by the Biblical accounts of **feeding the multitude** (whether "feeding the 4,000" or "feeding the 5,000")
- Reducing the need for poverty alleviation -- by reducing the number born into poverty

The **first approach**, seemingly preferred by the Pope, is consistent with strategies advocated over past decades. This is clearly not about to reframe the situation significantly -- irrespective of the "positive" propaganda disseminated by the United Nations in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. The hope might have been that the requisite "handout" would correspond to the "bailout" provided to those institutions "too large to fail" as a consequence of the recent financial crisis. It is increasingly clear that the impoverished have however been cynically reframed as those "too small to survive" -- thereby reducing the probability of any fruitful response to any such request.

Despite explicit arguments for a **moral imperative**, or implicit use of "emotional blackmail", the world is as resistant as those in the lifeboat, or those confronted by a beggar in the street. There is therefore a strong case for articulation by religion -- and by the new Pope -- of an appropriate transaction in any encounter with a "beggar". More specifically and provocatively it might be asked what is the Vatican policy with regard to beggars on the steps of St Peters, especially given the numerous web references to the challenging encounters with beggars in Rome?

The point is well made by the simple tale of Greg Szymanski (*Vatican Wealth 'Truly Astonishing': simple beggar asking for help reveals world problems*, *Rense.com*, 16 March 2006). The case of gypsies is especially challenging (*The plight of Europe's Roma: Europe's biggest societal problem*, *The Economist*, 25 May 2012; Lauren Moxley, *The predicament of the Romani people* 17 November 2010; Marius Dragomir, *Europe's Beggars, Romania's Roma*, *Central European Review*, 27 November 2000) Isabel Fonseca, *The Truth about Gypsies*, *The Guardian*, 24 March 2000). Most curiously, as with many beggars suspected of concealing their real wealth, the Vatican casts itself in the role of a beggar in order to elicit the compassion of the world.

More generally, Kelly Johnson (*The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics*, 2007) asks why Christian ethics so rarely tackle the real-life question of whether to give to beggars. Examining both classical economics and Christian stewardship ethics as reactions to medieval debates about the role of mendicants in the church and in wider society, Johnson reveals modern anxiety about dependence and humility as well as the importance of Christian attempts to rethink property relations in ways that integrate those qualities. Given the repeated appeals of Pope Francis to Europeans with regard to refugees arriving in **Lampedusa**, or dying in the effort to get there, should the Vatican not consider offering its own facilities to house them -- recognizing its fundamental responsibility in the process whereby they are engendered? **Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:14)**.

With respect to any possibility of transforming the "system in place", the Catholic Church is itself too complicit in that system to disrupt

it. Were it to do so, it might well run the risk of being framed as advocating "terrorism", as separately argued (*Would Jesus Now be Prosecuted by US?*, 2013). The dynamics were evident in the case of the controversies regarding the **Occupy London** encampment on the steps of **St Paul's Cathedral** (*St Paul's protest: Occupy London camp evicted*, *BBC News*, 28 February 2012).

The **second approach**, however it may be espoused by believers, implies a denial of immediate responsibility in the face of the unnecessary suffering and death of others. The focus can then be placed on the much-anticipated reframing offered by the prophecies of **Armageddon** and a **Second Coming**.

The approach, especially if efforts are deliberately made to neglect implications of unsustainable growth, could be understood as "helping God" in the fulfillment of such prophecies. This approach is notably associated with **Christian Zionism** (*Armageddon Lobby: trying to hurry up God*; Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: the heresy that undermines Middle East peace*, *Middle East Monitor*, 1 August 2013; Rammy M. Haija, *The Armageddon Lobby Dispensationalist Christian Zionism and the Shaping of US Policy Towards Israel-Palestine*, *Information Clearing House*; Margot Patterson, *Will fundamentalist Christians and Jews ignite apocalypse?* *National Catholic Register*, 11 October 2002; Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism*, *Foreign Affairs*, January 2008).

The **third approach** calls for imaginative new thinking into how to enable a reduction in the numbers born into poverty -- and the associated risks of suffering and premature mortality. One stimulus for such thinking is to relieve the Catholic Church of its current responsibility for effectively signing the death warrants of those likely to die prematurely in poverty -- whose birth it has so systematically encouraged. This is not however an argument for population reduction by violent means. Rather it is an argument for avoiding the violence deliberately perpetrated on people by failure to prevent their exposure to conditions of suffering.

Such new thinking calls for a recognition of the systemic consequences of birth under conditions when vital necessities are not available in practice. Arguably it is inappropriate and undignified for the Catholic Church to adopt the strategy of those forced to multiply the number of children born to them in order to increase the emotional blackmail on those who might thereby be persuaded to donate resources. This is a legitimate strategy for some individuals, but it is unworthy of the Catholic Church. It is an exploitation of the suffering of some to place moral pressure on others in pursuit of a questionable theological interpretation of an agenda attributed to a mysterious deity -- *who moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform*.

Crimes against humanity? It is appropriate to note two major concerns of others (deliberately omitted above) in relation to the policies of the Catholic Church -- for which some "new thinking" is sought -- namely the controversies surrounding:

- use of contraceptives, namely the prevention of births
- use of abortion, namely the termination of births

Both are framed by critics as intimately (if not directly) related to a form of homicide. As with discussion of overpopulation more generally, the debates are inherently "messy" (Tom Head, *Is abortion murder?* *about.com:civil liberties*; Charles Montaldo, *Fetal Homicide: a question of when do we become human -- can a fetus be a victim of murder?* *about.com:civil liberties*).

A point could however be argued that by encouraging and facilitating birth of so many into life-threatening poverty, the Catholic Church is engaged in a form of mass homicide by proxy -- of an extent and nature yet to be adequately articulated. To what extent might this be interpreted as a **crime against humanity** -- whether now or in the future? Framed otherwise, does the refusal to share resources with the impoverished justify what amounts to **human sacrifice** of the poor by the Catholic Church in an effort to exert moral pressure to persuade the wealthy to do so? How many can be justifiably sacrificed to this end?

Christianity, in undeclared complicity with the other Abrahamic religions, is effectively a poverty engendering process -- and is possibly designed to be so, if only unconsciously. There is then a degree of perversity to the manner in which remedial charity may be subsequently framed.

Challenge for a poverty-focused Pope

The newly elected Pope has made a number of widely-remarked gestures with respect to his own behaviour in support of his focus on poverty. These have been widely welcomed as indicative of new thinking. This approach was strongly reinforced by his message on his visit to Latin America.

The message has however to be placed in the context of:

- an iconic gathering of 3 million people on the beach of Rio de Janeiro in 2013 obscures the support of the Catholic Church for the injunction *Be fruitful, and multiply* -- and its consequences in terms of the number of progeny likely to result, and the proportion likely to be born into poverty
- the undeclared purpose of matching the ever-increasing appeal of **Protestant evangelicism** in Latin America (Chris Arsenault, *Evangelicals rise in Latin America*, *al Jazeera*, 26 March 2012; Tom Hennigan, *Evangelicals challenge Catholic Church's dominance in Brazil*, *MinnPost*, 15 March 2013; Ezra Fieser and Lise Alves, *Latin evangelicals' explosive growth*, *Catholic San Francisco*, 8 May 2012)
- the size of family Pope Francis is likely to favour, if only unconsciously -- as the eldest of five children. Many Cardinals come from even larger families -- offering the possibility of further guidance to the Pope.
- Evangelical Christian interpretation of desirable family size (*The Quiverfull: the evangelical Christians opposed to contraception*, *BBC News*, 17 May 2013), reinforced by former US presidential candidate **Mitt Romney** (and father-of-five) in a recent speech to graduates: *Get married. Have a quiver full of kids if you can*. It was a conscious echo of *Psalms 127*, where children are

compared to arrows for war. The psalm is the inspiration for the [Quiverfull](#) movement:

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 shall not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Given the lack of constraint on *Be fruitful, and multiply*, as exemplified by the Quiverfull movement, it is appropriate to ask how it might be determined when a family had "enough" children. **Why indeed should the number of children considered acceptable by Christian religions not be 7, 10, 15 or 20** -- especially if wider society is expected to contribute to their social security? Are there ever enough children from a Christian perspective -- or an Abrahamic perspective?

The challenge for the Abrahamic religions is indicated by the total fertility rate (or average number of children per woman). In 2012 this was indicated as 2.4, and 4.4 in the poorest countries. The range is from a low of 1.1 in countries such as Latvia and Taiwan, to a high of 7.1 in Niger (*2012 World Population Data Sheet*, Population Reference Bureau).

Natalism, as promoted by the Abrahamic religions, is the belief that human reproduction is the basis for individual existence, and therefore promotes having large families. Child-bearing and parenthood is promoted as desirable for social reasons and to ensure national continuance. As a feature of public policy it seeks to create financial and social incentives for populations to reproduce, such as providing tax incentives that reward having and supporting children.

Competitive use may be made of natalism to promote the numbers of one religion relative to another. Such policies are known as **fecundism** (*The Demographic Jihad and Muslim Fecundism, Info on Islam*, 23 January 2010; William R. LaFleur, *Ending Fecundism: An Open Letter to the Pope*, *Beliefnet*, 2000)

Towards a realistic simulation of faith-based population policies

If the Biblical injunction common to the Abrahamic religions is to be taken seriously -- *Be fruitful, and multiply* -- the consequences should also be seriously explored. This might have been a result of the election of **Mitt Romney** to the presidency of the USA -- given his explicit support for the Quiverfull movement (as noted above).

Future simulations: Although there have been many global models, as with that promoted by the **Club of Rome** (*The Limits to Growth*, 1972), there is clearly a strong case for taking account of an unconstrained increase in family size beyond 5 children, whether to 10, 15 or 20. This must necessarily take account of the accumulating consequence of such increases in later generations. Rather than "messy" claims and counter-claims, as above, how can such simulations be rendered realistic -- using all the multi-media facilities now available.

Of specific interest in any such simulation is consideration of:

- food and related resources -- how can the reality of constrained resources be best represented?
- housing and urban infrastructure (water, sewage, transportation, etc) -- how can the reality of constrained space be best represented (especially in the light of claims for the "Texas model")?
- financing of health care and social safety nets -- how can the reality of absence of health care and other safety nets be best represented?

Could such simulation be related to a new approach to so-called **reality television** -- as originally inspired by **Biosphere 2** (*Reality bites: the lessons of Biosphere 2*, *New Scientist*, 24 July 2013). How might claims of denial and ignorance be factored into such a simulation? Augmenting comprehensibility might also be inspired by a population variant of an historical economic model (Amy Farber, *Historical Echoes: A Water Machine that Simulates the Economy*, *Federal Reserve Bank of New York*, 29 June 2012).

Promotion of natalist policies: If the Catholic Church takes seriously the injunction *Be fruitful, and multiply*, then the Pope could be much more explicit in actively promoting natalist policies by governments in order to achieve much larger family sizes.

On the other hand, **if there is some implicit constraint which merits consideration from a Catholic perspective, then this too should be stated more explicitly**. Should parents be encouraged to have more children -- if the family cannot assemble the resources to feed the "extra mouths"? If not, why not -- given the Biblical injunction? If the community fails to respond to such a Biblically justified need, what then is the appropriate response? How can these be best explored in a simulation?

What are the constraints to which adults should be attentive before engendering children and what responsibility does religion have in reinforcing those constraints -- irrespective of any commitment to natalism? To complement the human right to engender children, is there a case for a *Universal Declaration of Responsibilities of Human Intercourse* (2007)? How do factors relating to prudent parenthood -- in relation to resource availability -- get integrated into such a simulation?

Analysis of chains of dependency and risk: Earlier steps towards highlighting the systemic relations that might figure in any simulation (centered on the possible challenge of overpopulation) included the analysis of chains of dependency and associated feedback loops. This is exemplified by the **World Problems Project** (most recently as developed through the research of **Nadia McLaren**). The dependency chains, associated with overpopulation in the following table, derive from that work as previously described (*Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007).

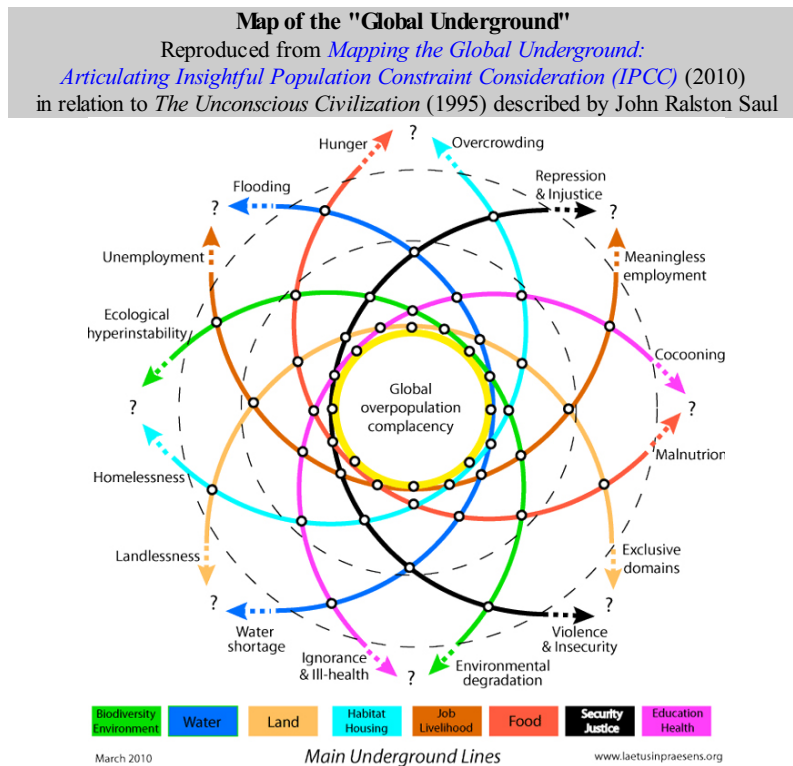
This lends itself to various forms of visualization via the web (cf *Preliminary NetMap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values*, 2006). The *Netmap* example notably included visual representations of analyses of the connectivity of potential "Where, When, What, Which, How, Who and Why-Questions to be asked about the relationship between Faith and Prosperity" (interrelating 2980 questions and 4804 links between them). Another application specifically designed for strategic causal mapping is *Decision Explorer* (John M Bryson, et al, *Visible Thinking: Unlocking causal mapping for practical business results*, 2004;

Colin Eden and Fran Ackermann, *Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management*, 1998). Clearly there is a case for applying such techniques to the relation between faith and overpopulation.

<p>Overpopulation (red circle)</p> <p>with indication of problems aggravating it (to the left of it) and those aggravated by it (to the right of it)</p> <p>Data from the World Problems Project, imported into FreeMind and exported as images</p> <p><u>"Religious opposition to birth control"</u> is the problem underlined in blue</p>	
<p>Indication of form of less detailed image (click for large legible version)</p>	<p>Indication of form of partially expanded image (click for large legible version)</p>
<p>Readers can also explore the complete map in a FreeMind browser (4 levels)</p> <p>This allows branches of the 270 aggravating and 1025 aggravated problems to be selectively expanded/collapsed (in that map start by right clicking and select toolbars; reduce magnification to 25%; click any branch in that map to unfold or enfold it)</p>	

Other approaches can be taken through packages such as *RiskOutlook* that might provide a sharper focus on the risk dependency associated with the position taken by the Abrahamic faiths. It is appropriate to note that most of the problems directly aggravating overpopulation in the maps below are those subject to pressure from the Abrahamic faiths.

Quest for comprehensible representations: A more succinct presentation is offered by the following in order to frame the complacency and denial regarding overpopulation.



LETS indulge the impoverished!?

Indulgences for believers: In preparation for World Youth Day, in an effort to modernize one of the oldest practices of the Roman Catholic religion, the Vatican indicated that those following the Pope on Twitter and other social media during the occasion would be eligible for **indulgences**, namely a reduction of time spent in **purgatory** (Heather Clark, *Vatican Offers Time Off Purgatory' for Following Pope on Twitter During World Youth Day*, *Christian News*, 17 July 2013; Andrew Brown, *So, the pope's Twitter followers get time off purgatory. What's the problem?*, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2013).

An indulgence is a remission before God, through the mediation of the Church, of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven. They were one of the key contentions that sparked the **Protestant Reformation** during the 16th century through the efforts of Martin Luther.

Poverty challenge exemplified by beggars: In the light of the challenge constituted by beggars for the poverty-focused Pope (as noted above), it might be asked whether the "new thinking", suggested by the use of Twitter in relation to indulgences, could be oriented otherwise to benefit the impoverished directly. Given the theological challenge of interfaith dialogue (noted above), is there any possibility that the Catholic church could learn from other religions in these matters -- as exemplified by the challenging relationship with beggars?

It is appropriate to note that begging has deep roots in Orthodox Christian cultures. Many Orthodox saints were beggars. Beggars make the Sign of the Cross on receipt of a donation. Almsgiving has performed a significant role in the current socio-economic crisis in Greece. As noted by Detelina Tocheva (*Crafting Ethics: the dilemma of almsgiving in Russian Orthodox Churches*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 2011):

With the liberalization of religious practices after the fall of the Soviet regime in Russia, almsgiving to beggars in Russian Orthodox churches has become one of the most widespread forms of Orthodox charity.

Historic exemplar: As noted by John Chakos of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church (of Steubenville, Ohio) with respect to the *Great Steward of the Church*, the seventh century Patriarch of Alexandria, **St John the Almsgiver**:

An indication of the kind of Patriarch that he was to become is given to us upon the occasion of his enthronement to the Patriarchal See of Alexandria. His first act as Patriarch was to summon the treasurers and financial administrators of the various branches of the Church. He addressed them in the following words:

It is not right, brethren, that we should prefer anyone over Christ Go, therefore, through the whole city, please, and make a list of all my masters down to the last.

But his listeners could not imagine who his masters could be. In astonishment they asked him to reveal the names of those who were above him in stature... and he again said:

Those whom you call poor and beggars, these I proclaim my masters and helpers. For they, and they only, are really able to help us and bestow upon us the Kingdom of Heaven.

Once his command was carried out with all speed, he instructed his private treasurer to set aside a daily sum sufficient for the needs of these poor; and there were more than seven thousand of them.

A "modest proposal": The process would combine traditional Catholic practice (recently highlighted by the Pope's Twitter initiative) with features of the financial system -- potentially with additional innovative features of a [Local Exchange Trading System](#) (LETS). Recognized otherwise as an "alternative currency" or a "[complementary currency](#)", this could combine a monetary exchange with one centered on a spiritual value (for those for whom the latter had credibility) to the benefit of all participating.

In this light, briefly stated, one possibility would then be for the Vatican to issue indulgence certificates via beggars -- most appropriately through the [Institute for the Works of Religion](#) (aka the Vatican Bank). This would then enable beggars to offer the indulgences to others for a price. Purchasers would then be appropriately rewarded according to their belief, and the beggars would benefit financially as intermediaries (as do stockbrokers). Beggars could obtain the certificates from the Vatican at an appropriately discounted price -- thereby contributing to Vatican resources. This formalization would introduce a degree of order into the currently chaotic engagement of people with beggars.

References

Paris Arnopoulos. The Sociophysics of Theopolitics: nature, culture and human suffering. *SKEPSIS: A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research*, 15, 2004, 1 [[text](#)]

Norman H. Baynes. The Life of St John the Almsgiver. Fordham University, 1948 [[text](#)]

Pamela Couture. Child Poverty: love, justice, and social responsibility. Chalice Press, 2007

W. Demewozu. begging as a survival strategy. Addis Ababa, ?2003 [[text](#)]

John W Fenton. All of Us are Beggars. *Conversi ad Dominum*, 19 June 2006 [[text](#)]

Douglas A. Hicks and Mark Valeri. Global Neighbors: Christian faith and moral obligation in today's economy . William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008

Donald W. Hinze. To Give and Give Again: a Christian imperative for generosity. Pilgrim Press, 1990

Kelly S. Johnson:

- Beggars and Stewards: the contest of humility in Christian economic ethics. Duke University, 2001
- The Fear of Beggars: stewardship and poverty in Christian ethics. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007

Dan Moller. Should We Let People Starve -- For Now? *Analysis*, 66, 2006, pp. 240-247 [[text](#)]

The Royal Society. People and the Planet. The Royal Society Science Policy Centre, 2012 [[text](#)]

John Ralston Saul. The Unconscious Civilization. House of Anansi, 1995

Detelina Tocheva. Crafting Ethics: the dilemma of almsgiving in Russian Orthodox Churches. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 84, 2011, pp.

1011-1034 [[text](#)]

Laura Valentini. On the Duty to Withhold Global Aid Now to Save More Lives in the Future. *Ethics and Global Politics*, 4, 2011, 2, 2011, pp. 125-134 [[text](#)]

Nikolai Velimirovich. About the Justification of Almsgiving. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 5 June 2013 [[text](#)]

Aaron Weiss. Christian Ethics and Poverty: a position paper on stewardship, social responsibility, and the poor. 2010 [[text](#)]



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

For further updates on this site, [subscribe here](#)