

# A Liberal's Re-thinking *Speech before a Maine Unitarian congregation*

by Jonette Christian

There is a Chinese proverb that says, "If you continue to go in the direction you are going, then you will end up where you are headed." This is a talk about population and immigration — two subjects which have been generally stonewalled in the media [along with] where we are headed as a nation. My comments will focus on the arguments of political liberals who have largely dismissed any national debate about population and immigration. A central theme in this discussion will be ethics and whether the direction we are headed is promoting our traditional liberal values.

Many liberals believe that any conversation about reducing immigration is motivated by racism or xenophobia. If you hold such views, I ask that you set these opinions aside for the next 45 minutes and be open to another point of view. Two years ago, I did not have the views I have today. However, as I began to educate myself, I realized that you couldn't always shoot from your "good liberal hip" and arrive at an ethical stand. These issues are far more complex than they initially appear. Having good intentions is not enough; you must know precisely how these good intentions play out in people's lives and where they lead us. The yardstick which measures the integrity of our choices today lies in the quality of life we bequeath to our descendants, and in the example of responsible self-government we set for other nations.

America is long overdue in making a plan to stabilize its population. We consume more natural resources and produce more pollution on a per capita basis than any nation in the world. The failure to stabilize our own numbers is unethical. In order to stabilize our growth, we

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*Jonette Christian is a member of a Unitarian Church in Maine. She gave a speech to members of her congregation a few months ago, portions of which we have excerpted for our readers.*

must reduce immigration — bring it back to the numbers

that we have traditionally had in this country before Congress changed the laws and brought upon us today's massive immigration.

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Let me be clear that this is a talk about what is wrong with immigration laws and where they are leading us. It is not a talk about what is wrong with immigrants. Our present immigration laws were written in response to a collection of special interests looking to feather their own nests, and Congress never considered the long-range impact of these laws on American society. The American people were never consulted when these laws were written and nearly all intelligent debate about these laws has been glibly dismissed with accusations of racism and xenophobia.

I was born into a family of devout political liberals. Today, my family includes immigrants from Central America and Mexico. In 1964, my family gave a great sigh of relief that Barry Goldwater hadn't gotten into the White House. We were confident because our kind of people were in command — America's "best and brightest," the Ivy League elite of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who crafted our Vietnam policy. By 1965 we were bombing North Vietnam. We weren't happy about this development, but the overwhelming majority of us liberals stood shoulder to shoulder with LBJ in 1965. It was a matter of principles, of being true to whom we thought we were, and we knew our intentions were good.

In 1965, I went off to college. I came to the conclusion that this war was nothing like what the media was presenting to the American people — that it was absolutely wrong for us to be there and that all the moralistic talk about our "global responsibilities" was baloney. I went home to tell my parents, devout Adlai Stevenson liberals, what I had learned. We were a political family and I was excited by my discovery. But as I began to explain the situation to my parents, one of them a college professor, surprisingly, I hit a brick wall. Nothing went in. They were convinced that they held the high moral ground. Their reasoning was intuitively

obvious, from their point of view, and they didn't need any new information. They really didn't appreciate how little they understood the situation.

The anti-war movement had a defining impact on my life, launching a lifelong interest in world issues, and particularly concerning the problems of poverty and under-development in Third World nations. After taking a minor in Latin American studies, I worked for an organization committed to ending hunger, and eventually taught a three-hour briefing on that subject. Three years ago, I began to focus on population. Today, I believe that over-population is the most serious problem facing mankind. Until world growth stabilizes, we cannot possibly handle any of our pressing issues concerning the environment, human rights, or hunger. But the most important lessons about human arrogance and good intentions gone astray were learned back in 1965 while arguing with two of the most intelligent and caring people I know: my parents.

First, I learned that there is no substitute for doing your own homework on any issue because sometimes one's own kind of people, no matter how smart they are, are dead wrong. Secondly, America is sometimes infatuated with the idea that we are here to save the world, and this infatuation with ourselves as the world's savior has prevented us from seeing the real situation. In her book, *The March of Folly*, Barbara Tuchman says about Vietnam: "No one could ever plead ignorance; all the information was there. Our folly was in our refusal to face the facts." That refusal, of course, led to enormous suffering for both the Vietnamese and us. Finally, I learned from my own parents, in some situations there is nothing more sanctimonious nor close-minded than a devout liberal who is convinced of the moral superiority of his own opinion.

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Do we have "global solutions" to over population as the liberals like to think? The most successful global solution today is the Montreal Protocol. Under this treaty, nations set targets to limit their ozone-destroying pollution. But the legislation and the debate about how those targets would be reached were determined within and by each nation, individually. Likewise, population stabilization will be an in-house conversation. The way

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this issue would be handled in a country like Pakistan would most likely be very different from the way it is handled in Mexico. Each culture must find its own solutions. Stabilization will not be possible if cultures with astronomical growth rates are allowed to send their

poor and unemployed citizens into the labor markets of other nations. Importing [labor from] Third World countries will only postpone the solutions and incapacitate Americans as we struggle to control corporate power within our own borders.

Liberals often argue that we have a moral obligation to "share the wealth" with poor people. Usually the people who are most enthusiastic about this generosity are not in fact those who are making the sacrifice. Inner city Black Americans who watch their jobs and wages tumble with the arrival of immigrants willing to work for almost nothing are the ones who end up "sharing the wealth." In reality, taking in immigrants in order to spread the wealth is a game plan for universal poverty. It makes a few people very rich and some people very sanctimonious. Here again the numbers tell the story. The world grew by 83 million last year — 98 percent of that growth coming from poor countries, and we accepted one million legal immigrants. It's a crummy little gesture. What does this do for poverty in the Third World? Practically nothing. It buys off a little guilt, and that's it. Promoting the idea that migration can save people is a disastrous hoax. Poverty in Third World nations must be solved within those nations. Every nation must put its own house in order.

Now let's talk about America. We have a population of 269 million and we add about 2.7 million people a year and at least 60 percent of this growth is due to immigrants and their children. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, America is presently accepting more immigrants than all other nations combined. When people tell me that America should be generous to foreigners, I ask them if they have any idea how generous we have been. Our generosity in giving jobs and welfare benefits to foreigners is breathtaking any way you look at it. The point is, immigration is driving our population growth and forcing America to grow into a densely populated country of nearly half a billion people. If we continue at the rate of growth that we have averaged in this decade, we will

double our own population in about 60 years.

Can anyone imagine all of America's cities being double their present size? Can you imagine America with twice as many houses, twice as many cars, twice as many schools and prisons, twice as many freeways, and far less land to grow food? Is this the future we want to give to our children and grandchildren? Is there anything about this future that is ethical, compassionate, or wise?

Will this policy promote civic cohesion or tolerance for our ethnic differences? Are we confident that we can overcome these negative feelings that there are too many immigrants by simply introducing more programs which "teach tolerance" or more conversations about racism?

America exports \$40 billion dollars in grain to countries who cannot feed themselves. Historically, we have been the world's primary source of food during famine. What are the ethical implications of allowing our population to grow beyond the point that we can share food with others?

America is 4.7 percent of the world's population, but we consume 23 percent of the natural resources and produce 23 percent of the pollution destroying the biosphere. In 1950, our entire economy might have run on domestic supplies of oil. By allowing our population to expand, we are now required to import 60 percent of our petroleum and we must invest \$265 billion in defense, which is largely to protect our interest in foreign resources. As we grow more populous, we grow more aggressive and more vulnerable, and we consume a much bigger share of the world's wealth. How can we possibly sign treaties to limit our carbon emissions at the same time that we promote massive growth [through immigration]?

Increasing numbers of well-educated and talented immigrants from foreign countries are forsaking the problems in their own countries in order to enter the American labor market. What are the ethical implications when we rob poor countries of their most talented citizens? These are the people most capable of solving the problem in their native land.

When American universities fill their affirmative action quotas by hiring talented foreigners, what are the social implications for less advantaged native-born American Blacks and Indians for whom affirmative action was originally intended?

When we allow American companies to give high-paying jobs to foreign applicants, what are the ethical

implications [in light of] our responsibility to plan for the employment of our own people? In a world where labor is unlimited, do we have a responsibility to protect the labor market for our own children? Our children will not find jobs in those countries from which we have received many immigrants.

It is well documented that the arrival of foreign workers is flattening the wages and job prospects of unskilled American workers, especially for Blacks and ethnic minorities, making it increasingly difficult for these groups to free themselves from poverty. What are the ethical implications of favoring the immigrant over the native-born? Who has a greater right to expect that job in America?

What are the implications of allowing countries with authoritarian governments dominated by the wealthy elite to send their poor and unemployed into the American labor market? Would Americans tolerate the idea of sending our welfare recipients into Canada as a way of unburdening ourselves of responsibility for our poorest citizens? Do we have a responsibility to hold other nations to the same standard that we hold for ourselves?

What are the global implications of promoting the idea that migration is a solution to national problems and personal problems? Where would South Africa be if Nelson Mandela had decided to cut and run?

George Washington used the word "posterity" nine times in one speech. After signing the Declaration of Independence, John Adams wrote to his wife, Abigail: "I do not know what will be the outcome of this. We may pay a very high price. But it is certain that posterity will profit from our sacrifice." Our founding fathers were men who thought deeply and wisely about the choices before them in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the impact those choices would have on the lives of their descendants. Today, we are the lucky beneficiaries of that wisdom. Surely, we owe our own descendants no less. -//-