

Climate Change Called Major Factor in Poverty's Growth

My admiration for Bernie Sanders was badly dented recently by his faux pas: [calling for population control by the world's poor](#) as a way of curbing climate change.

No doubt the poor need better health education and access to reliable contraceptives, but not because in this way we can control climate change caused by anthropogenic global warming.

And, as Sanders well knows, if the poor raise large families, it is because children are a means of livelihood. So, talk of birth control cannot be divorced from addressing the root causes of endemic poverty.

And climate change, rather than being caused by the poor, is becoming a major factor in perpetuating poverty in nations as much as in families.

Those people who suffer most from global warming and the resultant severe climatic events are the ones least responsible for it.

One-sixth of the world population is so poor that they produce no significant carbon emissions at all.

Yet they are unfairly being blamed because their breeding rates are higher than those of the rich.

The issue is not population but addictive consumption and unsustainable energy-generating practices by the rich.

Even though the rate of population growth in Bangladesh is 50 times that of Britain, every new British consumer uses up 45 times more fossil fuels than every Bangladeshi.

Households in India earning less than \$65 a month use a fifth of the electricity per head and one-seventh of the transport fuel of households earning \$65 or more. Those who sleep on the street use almost nothing.

The British environmental activist George Monbiot once pointed out that an owner of a super yacht does more damage to the biosphere in 10 minutes of sailing than most Africans do in a lifetime.

The horrific destruction of the Amazon and other rainforests, which are the “lungs” of the planet, only sporadically make the world’s news headlines. Even as I write, over 15,000 fires are raging in the Amazon forest alone.

Governments in the region have failed to heed warnings by environmental groups over many years.

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Ignorant peasant cultivators fell forests to grow soya (60% of the soy farming in Brazil is funded by three American agribusinesses), and huge mining and logging conglomerates have been given carte blanche by the current far-right government in Brazil.

These forests morally belong to humanity as a whole and not to any nation state, but we have no mechanisms of global governance to enforce this.

For poor communities all over the developing world already struggling with inadequate wages, environmental degradation and poor infrastructure, the higher frequency of dramatic climatic events means less time for recovery and a faster spin on the downward spiral of poverty.

Poor communities are already adapting to climate change. But they are not fully aware of the speed at which the climate is changing or how that will directly affect them.

This is where outside actors can assist with developing their disaster preparedness.

Classical Christian teaching on sexual chastity is often mocked by liberal elites today, as it was in the days of the early church.

But, while recognizing that a well-ordered marriage was preferable to a badly ordered celibacy, some of the greatest theologians of the church encouraged celibacy not as a virtue in itself, but because it brought to a halt the endless cycle

of social reproduction.

In his magisterial “The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity,” the eminent historian Peter Brown pointed out the radical challenge of celibacy to the taken-for-granted world of civic and class competition and dynastic continuities.

So, this was a message of “no sex” addressed to the well-off, not the poor. Consider, for example, the famous fourth-century Cappadocian brothers, Basil and Gregory Nyssen.

Both came from a high-born class of Cappadocians and knew acutely “the power of the ancient, civic urge to pile up wealth, to gather kinsmen and to beget descendants,” Brown writes. Basil and Gregory knew what it was to struggle with such drives.

It was to tame these, and only incidentally to tame the sexual urge, that Basil had given detailed rulings on the distribution of wealth, on the abandonment of marks of status, on uniform codes of dress that would mark his monastic “brotherhoods.”

Gregory, for his part, lingered not on sexual temptation, but on the tragic root of pride, avarice and family honor in the human condition since the fall.

“Both believed that through the new, reformed social life of a monastic brotherhood, individuals set free from the demands of a family-based,

conventional society could create a Christian society in miniature beside the city," Brown notes.

"The main effort of the 'brotherhoods' would be less to tame sexuality in the few ... than to create an example of the husbanding of resources in the light of the needs of the poor. They wished to open the hearts of small-town gentry so that the river of Christian charity might flow again, from the doors of the rich into the hovels of the destitute."

Similarly, their (rough) contemporary John Chrysostom, tolled the death knell of the ancient city of Antioch in his powerful sermons.

His aim, according to Brown, was to rob the city "of its most tenacious myth - the myth that its citizens had a duty to contribute to the continued glory of their native Antioch by marrying. Instead, he repeatedly told his Christian audiences that their bodies belonged to themselves, and no longer to the city."

Chrysostom's great hope was the creation of a new form of urban community through the reform of the Christian household.

"The two great themes of sexuality and poverty, gravitated together, in the rhetoric of John and of many other Christians," Brown said. "Both spoke of a universal vulnerability of the body, to which all men and women were liable, independent of class and civic status."

Christian men and women were urged, by John, to "extend the heightened

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awareness of their own bodies so as to embrace with compassion the bodies of others. They must learn to see the faceless poor as sharing bodies like their own-bodies at risk, bodies gnawed by the bite of famine, disease and destitution and subtly ravaged by the common catastrophe of lust.”

Here, then, are narratives of “Sex and the City” very different from the shallow fare served up by American TV for global consumption.

Editor’s note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on Ramachandra’s [blog](#). It is used with permission.