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Breeding and Believing — Linked?

Wednesday, October 25, 2006



Prospect is one of Britain's most intelligent magazines, and its writers take on some of the most interesting issues of the day. This is certainly the case with "[Breeding for God](#)" by Eric Kaufmann. In his article, Kaufmann argues that secularization is now in decline in Europe. Furthermore, this is partly due to the fact that it is the believers who are having the babies, he explains.

"The modern western world is inseparable from the idea of secularization," he explains. Yet, this modern world is witnessing a return of belief in God, he asserts. "This religious revival may be as profound as that which changed the course of the Roman empire in the 4th century."

What catches Kaufmann's attention is the fact that the more orthodox groups are growing — not the liberal churches. And they are breeding too. In his words: "Three quarters of the growth of white conservative Protestant denominations is demographic, since they have maintained a fertility advantage over more liberal denominations for many decades."

Note this:

The share of the world's population that is religious is growing, after nearly a century of modest decline. This effect has been produced by the younger generations in the developing world rejecting secularization, combined with higher religious fertility levels. Throughout the world, the religious tend to have more children, irrespective of age, education or wealth. "Secular" Europe is no exception. In an analysis of European data from ten west European countries in the period 1981-2004 I found that next to age and marital status, a woman's religiosity was the strongest predictor of her number of offspring. Many other studies have found a similar relationship, and a whole school of thought in demography—"second demographic transition theory"—suggests that fertility differences in developed countries are underpinned by value differences, with secular men and women unwilling to sacrifice career and lifestyle aspirations to have children and have them early.

More:

I found that the classical secularization trend does not work as it used to. The case of the US sheds some light on this. Much of the 20th-century growth of conservative Protestant denominations could have been lost to secularism or to more liberal, higher status sects like the Episcopalians, as conservative Protestants became better educated, wealthier and more urban. What impeded such an "assimilation" of conservative Protestants into more liberal theologies was a disruption of the pattern linking social and religious mobility. Conservative Protestants, once content to be led by an urbane liberal-Protestant elite, became increasingly conscious of their group identity. They began to reject the leadership of liberal Protestants, starting in the 1920s with their secession from the Federal Council of Churches. This intensified after 1970 with the so-called "culture wars." Liberal theologies and secularism came to be typecast as the malign "other" against which true Christians should mobilize. As evangelicals gained in self-consciousness, they increasingly erected communal boundaries—such as their own media—which could bind the generations regardless of education or wealth.

Kaufmann offers a most interesting analysis. As he looks to the future, he suggests that Europe will adapt a more American form of modernity — one less dismissive of belief in God. He explains:

Demographic currents are carrying Europe towards a more American model of modernity. They also signal that current theories of secularization need revision. Fertility in the developing world is falling rapidly due to urbanization, but the World Values Survey finds that religiosity in these countries shows no sign of declining. The religious continue to have higher fertility than their secular brethren in the developing world, regardless of income or education. Though China will probably remain more secular than western Europe, this is unlikely to be true of Latin America, south Asia or the middle east. For them, modernization is more likely to result in a US-style religious society.

There are other interesting issues raised in Kaufmann's article. How will a resurgent Islam be received by secularized Europeans? Will modernized Europeans raise their birth rate? Will Europe become more culturally conservative? Kauffman makes this observation: "Though we are unlikely to see the rise of evangelical Christian politics in Europe, we may find a long-term drift towards more conservative social values. Europeans will become more 'traditional' on moral issues like abortion, family values, religious education and gay marriage."

It will be some time before these questions are answered. In the meantime, it is important to recognize that worldview commitments — not economic factors — eventually determine birth rates. Decisions about marriage and children reveal worldview presuppositions. Most centrally, these presuppositions deal with the meaning of life, the purpose of sex, the nature of the family, the blessing of children, and the promise of the future. Those who see marriage and raising children as God-ordained functions of human existence will, not surprisingly, have more children than those who do not. By and large, the believers are the breeders.

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