

A world without children a result of worldwide "demographic death spiral"
Japan offers the chance to observe the demographic death spiral in its purest form

By Ian Hunter

April 5, 2007 (LifeSiteNews.com) – In his alarming -- but not, I think, alarmist -- book *America Alone* (Regnery, 2006) Mark Steyn highlights the threat posed by falling birthrates worldwide, a phenomenon he calls "the demographic death spiral".

Steyn calls Japan "the most geriatric jurisdiction on the planet", and goes on: "[There] the rising sun has already passed into the next phase of its long sunset: net population loss. 2005 was the first year since records began in which the country had more deaths than births. Japan offers the chance to observe the demographic death spiral in its purest form. It's a country with no immigration, no significant minorities and no desire for any: just the Japanese, aging and dwindling."

One consequence of deaths exceeding births is that in Japan dolls have replaced children. A news story explained: "toy makers are designing new dolls designed not for the young but for the lonely and elderly -- companions who can sleep next to them, The Yumel doll, which looks like a baby boy and has a vocabulary of 1,200 phrases sells at a price of 8,500 yen (\$80). 'I feel so good, good night', the doll says, before falling asleep if the owner pats it gently on the chest."

Just think of it: 1,200 phrases; a vocabulary in excess of most of today's university graduates. And just one gentle pat and the bedmate drifts off to Neverland. A tired wife's dream.

The first recorded commandment God gave in the Garden of Eden was: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:22). But we are moderns, hell-bent on the pursuit of happiness. We do not consider ourselves bound by ancient commandments. We decided collectively -- and quite some time ago -- that ancient wisdom has nothing to teach us.

The Japanese doll for the elderly calls to mind P. D. James's powerful novel *The Children of Men* (1993), recently made into a disappointing Hollywood movie that bears scant resemblance to the book. Baroness James sets her novel in the not-too-distant future, 26 years after the last known human birth on earth.

It is an unusual P. D. James novel; no who-done-it; no midnight chases; no Inspector Adam Dalgleish. In James's future world, women push carriages containing dolls down city streets. As an elderly population caused health care costs to soar, euthanasia became compulsory, and the government arranges for a periodic "Quietus," a mass suicide of the elderly who are put aboard barges and drifted out to sea, away from the general view.

Anxiety and despair mark the faces of those aware that in a world without children, they are the last, dying generation. P.D. James gives us a portrait of just what the late Pope John Paul II meant by his incisive phrase the "culture of death."

In P.D. James's world, the reason for the absence of children is never fully explained. Today we know the reason: worldwide birthrates that have fallen below replacement levels.

The Japanese birthrate (1.3 children per woman) is well below a replacement birthrate (about 2.1 children per woman). In some places in Europe, birthrates are even lower; these countries look to immigration -- increasingly from the Muslim world -- to bolster a shrinking workforce. But grief awaits anyone who warns that this might be sowing the seeds of our own destruction. Such Cassandras are denounced as "racists."

Moderns are more concerned about careers and possessions than about replenishing the Earth or continuing the species.

P.D. James is so much more perceptive than our politicians (admittedly, faint praise); just try to imagine any Canadian politician uttering this one luminous sentence from *The Children of Men*: "Without the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves, without the assurance that we being dead yet live, all

pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins."

In our dumbed-down age such a warning, on the rare occasions it is sounded, is dismissed as morbid misanthropy, something against which we shut our ears.

And yet it seems to me that James's single sentence not only explains why there are Yumel dolls instead of children in Japan, but also why it is impossible to arouse Canadians to action about anything-- particularly any moral issue. We are inured to things being as they are because, consciously or unconsciously, we have given up on the future.

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