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Africa is giving nothing to anyone -- apart from AIDS

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By Kevin Myers Thursday July 10 2008

No. It will not do. Even as we see African states refusing to take action to restore something resembling civilisation in Zimbabwe, the begging bowl for Ethiopia is being passed around to us, yet again. It is nearly 25 years since Ethiopia's (and Bob Geldof's) famous Feed The World campaign, and in that time Ethiopia's population has grown from 33.5 million to 78 million today.



'Africa's peoples are outstripping their resources, and causing catastrophic ecological degradation,' writes Kevin Myers. A sick child waits in line to be screened at Giara Clinic, Southern Ethiopia

So why on earth should I do anything to encourage further catastrophic demographic growth in that country? Where is the logic? There is none. To be sure, there are two things saying that logic doesn't count.

One is my conscience, and the other is the picture, yet again, of another wide-eyed child, yet again, gazing, yet again, at the camera, which yet again, captures the tragedy of . . .

Sorry. My conscience has toured this territory on foot and financially. Unlike most of you, I have been to Ethiopia; like most of you, I have stumped up the loot to charities to stop starvation there. The wide-eyed boy-child we saved, 20 years or so ago, is now a priapic, Kalashnikov-bearing hearty, siring children whenever the whim takes him.

There is, no doubt a good argument why we should prolong this predatory and dysfunctional economic, social and sexual system; but I do not know what it is. There is, on the other hand, every reason not to write a column like this.

It will win no friends, and will provoke the self-righteous wrath of, well, the self-righteous, letter-writing wrathful, a species which never fails to contaminate almost every debate in Irish life with its sneers and its moral superiority. It will also probably enrage some of the finest men in Irish life, like John O'Shea, of Goal; and the Finucane brothers, men whom I admire enormously. So be it.

But, please, please, you self-righteously wrathful, spare me mention of our own Famine, with this or that lazy analogy. There is no comparison. Within 20 years of the Famine, the Irish population was down by 30pc. Over the equivalent period, thanks to western food, the Mercedes 10-wheel truck and the Lockheed Hercules, Ethiopia's has more than doubled.

Alas, that wretched country is not alone in its madness. Somewhere, over the rainbow, lies Somalia, another fine land of violent, Kalashnikov-toting, khat-chewing, girl-circumcising, permanently tumescent layabouts.

Indeed, we now have almost an entire continent of sexually hyperactive indigents, with tens of millions of people who only survive because of help from the outside world.

This dependency has not stimulated political prudence or commonsense. Indeed, voodoo idiocy seems to be in the ascendant, with the next president of South Africa being a firm believer in the efficacy of a little tap water on the post-coital penis as a sure preventative against infection. Needless to say, poverty, hunger and societal meltdown have not prevented idiotic wars involving Tigre, Uganda, Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea etcetera.

Broad brush-strokes, to be sure. But broad brush-strokes are often the way that history paints its gaudier, if more decisive, chapters. Japan, China, Russia, Korea, Poland, Germany, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the 20th century have endured worse broad brush-strokes than almost any part of Africa.

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They are now -- one way or another -- virtually all giving aid to or investing in Africa, whereas Africa, with its vast savannahs and its lush pastures, is giving almost nothing to anyone, apart from AIDS.

Meanwhile, Africa's peoples are outstripping their resources, and causing catastrophic ecological degradation. By 2050, the population of Ethiopia will be 177 million: The equivalent of [France](#), Germany and [Benelux](#) today, but located on the parched and increasingly protein-free wastelands of the [Great Rift Valley](#).

So, how much sense does it make for us actively to increase the adult population of what is already a vastly over-populated, environmentally devastated and economically dependent country?

How much morality is there in saving an Ethiopian child from starvation today, for it to survive to a life of brutal circumcision, poverty, hunger, violence and sexual abuse, resulting in another half-dozen such wide-eyed children, with comparably jolly little lives ahead of them? Of course, it might make you feel better, which is a prime reason for so much charity. But that is not good enough.

For self-serving generosity has been one of the curses of Africa. It has sustained political systems which would otherwise have collapsed.

It prolonged the Eritrean-Ethiopian war by nearly a decade. It is inspiring [Bill Gates'](#) programme to rid the continent of malaria, when, in the almost complete absence of personal self-discipline, that disease is one of the most efficacious forms of population-control now operating.

If his programme is successful, tens of millions of children who would otherwise have died in infancy will survive to adulthood, he boasts. Oh good: then what? I know. Let them all come here. Yes, that's an idea.

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