

Religious Consultation Report

News & Views from The Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health, and Ethics

Volume 6 No. 2

Why do Americans hate children?

By Daniel C. Maguire

**Show me how you treat kids
and I will tell you what you are.**

Here's a simple principle to test the moral spirit of a people and their government: *What is good for kids is good; what is bad for kids is ungodly.* Let's take that principle and look into the American soul. I warn you — the US doesn't get a passing grade.

My main guide here will be the recent blockbuster book by Participating Scholar, Gloria Albrecht, **Hitting Home: Feminist Ethics, Women's Work, and The Betrayal of Family Values** (Continuum, New York, 2002). Albrecht makes it clear that our nation does not think that having babies is in the national interest. (*How could we miss this point? If we have no babies, there is no tomorrow.*) Since 1920, the number of women in the work force rose from 21% to

In a United Nations survey of 152 countries, the US was one of only six countries that does not have a national policy requiring paid maternity leave.

60%. The economy is such that one earner per family is not enough. More facts: 58% of women with a baby under one year are in the labor force, as are 77% of mothers with kids under age six. Only 23% stay at home. This means many children are latchkey kids, unsupervised for many hours per week. Is that in the national interest?

Obviously, children need care, but the ruling assumption in this land of ours is that if you have a baby, it's your problem. Childcare is looked on as a consumer item. If you can afford it, great. If not, tough! 96% of working parents pay the full cost of childcare. What government help there is, is inadequate. Only 12% of employers provide childcare.

Of course, all this hits the poor the hardest. Low-income families who pay for childcare spend 35% of their incomes on it, compared to 7% of income spent by non-poor families.

Thus, in democratic America, the quality of childcare varies according to class. Once society decides that childcare is a consumer item — and not a basic human right that deserves national support — market logic kicks in, and you get only what you pay for. Of course, and ironically, according to classical economics, those who receive the benefits should pay the costs. The benefits of healthy, well cared for, well-educated children accrue to the nation, not just to their families. These children are tomorrow's citizens.

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Why do Americans hate children?

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Our attitude toward children also shows through in this telling statistic: the median wage of childcare workers in 1997 was \$7.03 per hour, three cents less than that of parking lot attendants — and this pay is usually without benefits. These workers could not afford childcare for themselves. Obviously, caring for children is not work that we value.

Has anyone heard from the so-called “pro-life” people on any of this? Could it be that their interest in life is short-circuited by birth?

Here is another look into the American heart. According to the Temporary Aid to Needy Families program, caring for someone else’s children is classified as work; caring for your own is not!

As Albrecht says: “*The United States lags behind all other industrialized nations in addressing family/work concerns through public policies.*” A White House report in December 2000 said, “*States were able to provide childcare assistance to only 12% of all federally eligible low-income working families.*” Albrecht states the assumption of US welfare “reform”: “*There*



is widespread social agreement that economically poor mothers cannot, by definition, be good mothers unless they work away from their homes and their children.” Poor parents can often not afford to work because of the cost of transportation, clothing, and childcare needs at home. In a United Nations survey of 152 countries, the US was one of only six countries that does not have a national policy requiring paid maternity leave.

Some 40 states are deeply in debt. They are shortening the school week and cutting certain classes and programs. According to the *New York Times* (January 12, 2003), 60% of Americans oppose raising taxes to correct this.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration is spending billions to ship soldiers to the Middle East while the states back home starve and victimize kids. So much for the hypocritical “leave no child behind” promise.

Has anyone heard from the so-called “pro-life” people on any of this? Could it be that their interest in life is short-circuited by birth?

There are countries that do not hate their children. Albrecht: “*Many European countries already provide universal healthcare, childcare ... paid parental and family leave, paid vacation time and unemployment policies.*”

- **Swedes** currently are entitled to 18 months of paid leave with job protection that can be prorated over the first 8 years of a child’s life.
- **France** provides universal childcare to all toilet-trained children. Single mothers receive government payments until their children are over the age of 3.
- In **Denmark**, all children up to 18 years of age have access to free dental care for both routine examinations and treatment.
- **Europeans** are guaranteed longer vacation times, 4–6 weeks, protected by legislation.

Americans bask in a surreal self-image, seeing themselves as a “kind and gentle” people. Most would be offended to read in Duane Elgin’s book, **Promise Ahead**, “*The United States is the stingiest developed nation in terms of the proportion of total wealth that it donates.*” We should not be surprised. If we can treat our kids the way we do, why would we be generous to strangers?

RELIGIOUS CONSULTATION MISSION STATEMENT

The Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics is an international network of progressive feminist religious scholars and leaders who seek out the positive, renewable moral energies of their faith traditions to direct them to the interrelated issues of population, reproductive health, consumption/ ecology and the empowerment of women. The Consultation accomplishes this by participating in international and governmental forums, by convening small symposia of theologians and religious ethicists, and by publishing both scholarly and popular materials.

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Ironically, states that are pro-life are anti-children



Jean Schroedel, in her book, *Is the Fetus a Person? A Comparison of Policies in the Fifty States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), investigates individual state policies, shedding light on the relationship between state laws regulating access to abortion and state spending to benefit children.

An associate professor at Claremont Graduate University, Professor Schroedel found that states with more restrictive abortion laws —

- Provide less funding for children.
- Spend less money on foster care and adoption assistance for special needs children.
- Provide lower welfare payments.
- On a per-child basis, spend less on all forms of assistance for poor children.
- Spend less per pupil on K–12 education.

In short, these facts support Representative Barney Frank's well-publicized statement that legislators who would vote against abortion *and* against any aid for children apparently believe that “*life begins at conception and ends at birth.*”

In addition, Professor Schroedel examines whether or not states with more restrictive abortion laws also take other steps to protect and value fetal life under other circumstances. She found that they do not.

Six of the states with the strongest anti-abortion laws prosecute women for prenatal drug offenses, but do not consider the third-party killing of a fetus a crime (i.e., beatings, knifings, shootings, etc.). Ironically, however, states with far less restrictive abortion statutes criminalize third-party fetal killing.

The Right Wing war on children continues...

Professor Schroedel also turned her attention to the relationship between state laws regulating access to abortion and the status of women. She again found an inverse relationship between the two. In states with more restrictive laws, women are relegated to lower economic, political, and social status.

These last two points are revealing. They illustrate that the moral imperative invoked by many anti-abortion activists is, in effect, baseless. The claim that the fetus is a “person,” fully deserving of protection as a born human being, breaks down with the failure to criminalize third-party killings. Add the current status of women in these states, and one is encouraged to regard the moral imperative as a smokescreen, covering up a broad-based attack on women.

Lawsuits may be the latest tactic to block abortions in US



R*oe v. Wade* may become a moot point and the Supreme Court irrelevant if doctors are afraid to perform abortions because they fear being sued.

Last November, in Louisiana, the State Supreme Court let stand a law that extends the statute of limitations for abortion-related injuries to 10 years. The law also

removes any cap that typically applies to other kinds of malpractice suits.

Such threats may discourage doctors from performing abortions because the financial risk is too great. It's a tactic that circumvents the moral argument and reduces the question to a financial one.



Population Connection's 7th Annual Capitol Hill Days

Bring the message to Washington

March 29-April 1, 2003, Washington, DC

Co-hosted by Population Connection, National Wildlife Federation, & Sierra Club

The Bush administration is waging a war on the world's women by denying them access to a basic human right — the ability to plan the size and spacing of their families. Fight the attack on international population assistance by coming to Washington, DC, to be the voice for international family planning.

What You Can Do

Come to Washington, DC, in March 2003 and tell Congress to stand against the President's assault on family planning and reproductive rights.

Every year, activists send tens of thousands of letters to Washington. But we have to do more in order to reverse the President's attacks. Face-to-face meetings with lawmakers let Congress know that there is a committed constituency. Let's urge them to:

- Repeal the Global Gag Rule
- Re-fund UNFPA
- Increase funding for the International Family Planning Program

We have to stop these attacks, and the US Congress is the only place where President Bush's onslaught can be fought. Congress has the power to overturn Bush's initiatives. However, your legislators need to hear from you on these urgent issues. Your voice matters more than ever before! Let it be heard!

For a packet of information, including scholarship details, please e-mail a request to lobbydays@populationconnection.org or call 1 (800) POP-1956.

Highlights of the Bush Administration's record

January 2001 — His second day in office, President Bush restricts funding for international family planning by imposing the Global Gag Rule, forcing many health care providers overseas to choose between providing needed services and participating in their own country's political process.

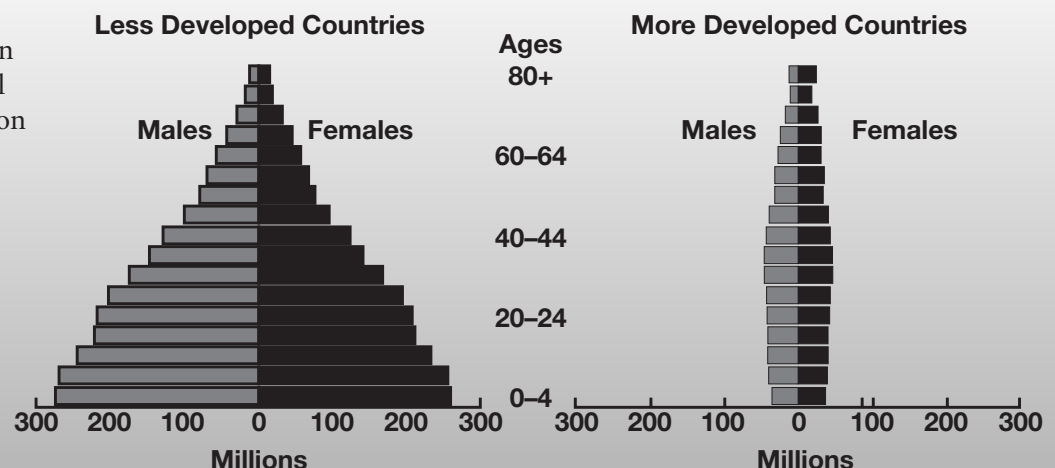
July 2002 — The President further shocks the international family planning community by withdrawing all \$34 million of promised support for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

December 2002 — At a UN Conference on Population in Bangkok, the Bush Administration attempts to single-handedly reverse a long-standing international family planning declaration that protects women and families around the world.

One-third of the world's population in less developed countries is under age 15

There will be continued population growth and even greater demands on natural resources as the over 2 billion young people in the world become the world's newest set of parents.

Source: United Nations, *The Sex and Age Distribution of the World Populations: The 2000 Revision* (medium scenario).



Will abortion-seekers need death warrants?

By Felicia Dionisio

Assistant news editor with WorldNetDaily.com.

Taken from a December 9th email we received from WorldNetDaily.com

Georgia legislators introduced a bill in January 2003 that refers to abortion as an “execution” and will require any mother seeking an abortion to go to court to obtain a death warrant.

“A mother would have to argue why the child should die and why her rights would take priority over the rights of the child,” said Rep. Bobby Franklin, R-Marietta, who sponsored the legislation.

Once a mother filed for a death warrant, a guardian would be appointed to protect the rights of the fetus. That guardian would be authorized to demand a jury trial in which the rights of the fetus would be balanced against the rights of the mother seeking to have the “execution” performed.

“It’s a grotesque violation of a woman’s right to choose,” said Ebony Barley of the Georgia Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. “Think about the women in rural Georgia. They’ll be required to talk about their personal health experiences in court. It’s the highest form of humiliation.”

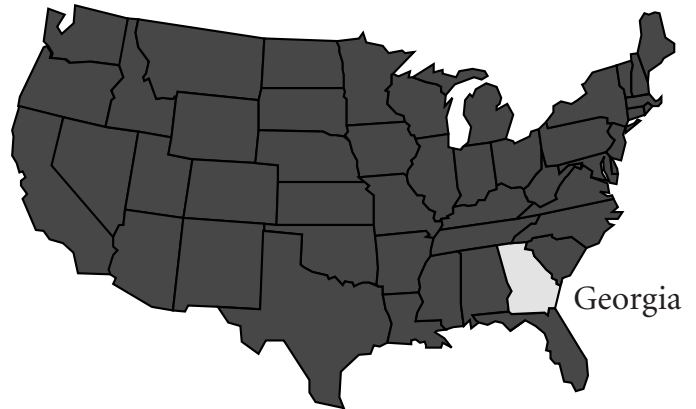
The court would be able to hold a trial within 30 days of the filing of the petition, and a death warrant would be signed only if the court finds that the rights of the person seeking to have the abortion are superior to the right of the fetus to live. Either side could appeal.

Ultimately, he hopes lawmakers in other states will be inspired by the concept of applying due-process rights to the fetus and propose similar legislation.

Franklin told **WorldNetDaily**, “It’s an attempt to restore the 14th Amendment due-process rights of the unborn. It’s a constitutional protection that we all have that’s not being adhered to when it comes to dealing with unborn children. The first thing we do as state representatives is take an oath of office to support the constitutions of the United States and the state of Georgia. Both ensure no person will be deprived of life or liberty without due process. We just want to make sure that’s adhered to. Right now, the unborn child is losing his or her life without a trial.”

Critics disagree, describing the bill as “the most extreme attempt to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.”

“Franklin’s goal in introducing a bill that refers to abortion as an ‘execution’ is to open the floodgates to other anti-choice



legislation,” Barley added. She said it’s no coincidence the legislation is being introduced during the month that marks the 30th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision that legalizes abortion. The bill stipulates it will be automatically repealed the day after the US Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*.

“It’s not outlawing abortion; it’s just recognizing the child has rights, too,” said Franklin.

The bill also mandates that no physician can perform an “execution” in the state without first obtaining a death warrant. If a doctor performs an abortion without a “death warrant,” he or she could be imprisoned for up to five years and his or her medical license could be permanently revoked. But, there’s no penalty for women who have an abortion without first obtaining a “death warrant.” Franklin, who has co-sponsored other anti-abortion legislation in the past, said medical practitioners have the most at stake because they’re the ones who would be performing the “execution.”

Franklin said he hopes the bill will make it out of committee and then be called up for a vote by the whole House. Ultimately, he hopes lawmakers in other states will be inspired by the concept of applying due-process rights to the fetus and propose similar legislation.

“I’m an optimist. I think if people who claim they support the concept of the Constitution and ... those who claim to support the sanctity of human life ... really do, we have a good shot at passing this thing.”

WorldNetDaily marked the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* (Jan. 22, 1973) decision by dedicating the entire January 2003 edition of its acclaimed monthly *Whistleblower* magazine to the subject of abortion.

Clergy find active role in pro-choice

On January 19, 2003, *The Peoria Journal Star* carried a story about The Reverend Gene Mace, a United Methodist minister and retired hospital chaplain, who, along with other clergy members favoring legalized abortion, have begun to let their voices be heard. The clergy are speaking out after spending most of the 30 years since *Roe v. Wade* in relative quiet. They have watched as those opposed to abortion rights have “built, built, built,” Mace said. “They’ve built more power around the whole issue than we have.”

In reaction to all of this building, Mace helped to start the clergy advisory board, an interfaith group affiliated with the local Planned Parenthood chapter. The group has been active over the past several years. The board’s members have supported the organization, counseled Planned Parenthood clients, brought in speakers for breakfasts and luncheons on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, and developed a sexual ethics statement.

...the question centers on how can the clergy best help young women “have more life out of whatever errors they make.”

Mace also works with Planned Parenthood nationally. “We’re trying to help them look at the impact of their ideas and that faith people aren’t totally against them but are helpers with them.” Mace said that local banquets try to show people that “we are not a bunch of radical, free-love, no-morals people like the opposition would like to portray us, but that we are people who are trying to be pastoral.”

Says Mace, “Even though we don’t really think it’s a great thing for people to have abortions, there are worse things than abortion.” Mace cites the young girl whose pregnancy impoverishes her life because “she has to carry it through.” For Mace, the question centers on how the clergy can best help young women “have more life out of whatever errors they make.”

The interfaith board also promotes the use of contraception. Mace explains, “What we’re trying to do is get people to be responsible, prevent pregnancies. I’d like to see kids not be sexually active. The problem is, they’ve been that way for years and years, and we’ve stuck our head in the sand, and we’ve done nothing other than try to teach them abstinence.”

Joyce Harant, a representative of Planned Parenthood, said that having the clergy speak out about abortion rights

and contraception has been important. “Clearly having the support and involvement of clergy who have a strong sense of social justice, of religious freedom, is good for any movement ... It’s not about being pro-abortion, it’s about being pro-choice.”

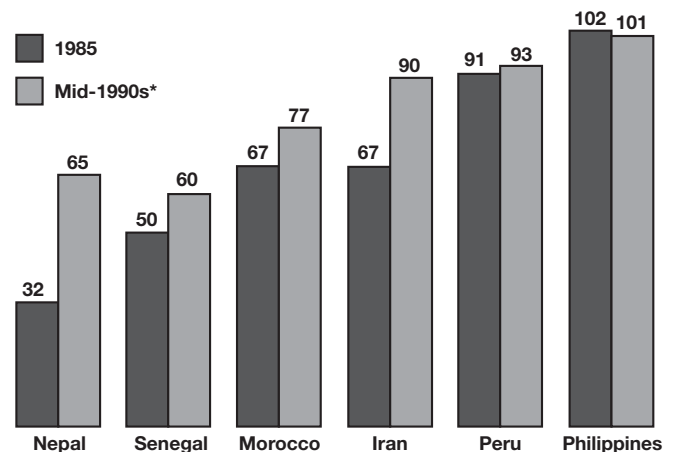
Harant adds, “Most people ... on our Planned Parenthood board ... have strong religious views, and some of them would not themselves consider abortion, but they strongly believe in religious freedom and democratic freedom in allowing others to make that choice themselves.”

The clergy advisory board is helping to deliver that message.



Gender Gap in Secondary Education 1985 and Mid-1990s

Females enrolled in secondary school per 100 males



* Latest survey year, 1993–1997.

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1999.

In the 1990s, primary and secondary school enrollments grew for both girls and boys in almost all regions of the world. Although the gender gap has closed somewhat in recent years, it remains at the secondary school levels. Girls are more likely than boys to discontinue their school because of household duties, early marriage and/or childbearing, parent’s perceptions that education benefits sons more, and worries about girls’ safety at school.

Source: *Women of Our World*, 2002, Population Reference Bureau

Blessing the condoms in South Africa

An excerpt reprinted with permission
By David Patient, Mozambique South, Africa

In Maputo, Mozambique, about 6 months ago, we were invited to attend a church service to educate parishioners about the dangers of HIV and how parishioners can get involved in home-based care, orphan care, and general education around the complexities of HIV.

The Bishop happened to be leading the day's events, and when it came to the question-and-answer period, the standard questions were raised. Then came the condom issue. "What is the church's position about condom use?" Before we could answer the question, the Bishop stood up and indicated that he would answer it.

"God clearly tells us that we must protect life at all costs. To not do so is committing a serious sin against God." We were waiting for the hellfire-and-damnation speech we have heard so many times before he continued, "So what does this mean to you and me?"

He paused, looked around the silent church, and continued, "It means that A is for abstinence and looking around at all of you today, many of you cannot live by this advice. Let us be realistic, few if any of you can abstain. Which brings us to B, be faithful." Once again he looked around the room. "Some of you are faithful...many of you are not. So that leaves us with C...condoms. Now many of you believe that

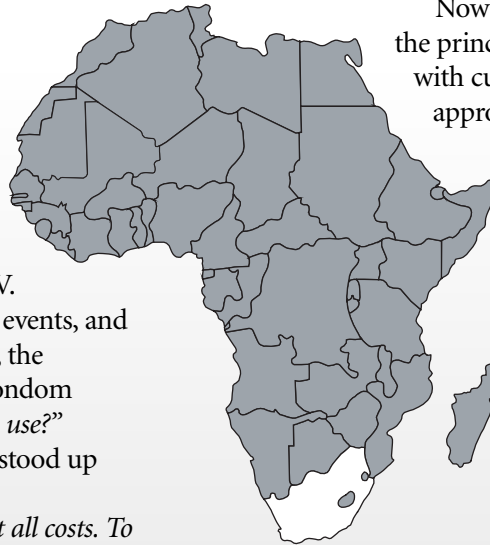
[Catholic] church services will never be the same as now every Sunday, part of the celebration is the blessing of the condoms.

condoms are a crime against God...that wasted semen is a sin, and I am here today to tell you otherwise. You see, if you are HIV+ and you have unprotected sex and you infect someone, you have, in the eyes of God, committed murder. Or if you are HIV- and you have unprotected sex with someone who is infected, and they infect you, you have, in the eyes of God, committed suicide."

You could hear a pin drop!

"So my children, wearing a condom is not a sin ... not wearing one IS!"

Can't argue with that logic! Sunday church services will never be the same as now every Sunday, part of the celebration is the blessing of the condoms. That's right, the BLESSING OF THE CONDOMS!



Now here is a leader who has learned the principles of *adapt or die*. He is dealing with current reality, and not basing his approach on a 2000-year-old dogma riddled with contradictions and very outdated 'period' messaging. What was appropriate advice 2000 years ago is hardly a guideline for [today.]

Many churches have the blood of their parishioners on their hands, and their approach towards condoms and human sexuality is not helping to [keep] the rank and file of the Church[It] is driving

[The Bishop said] "So my children, wearing a condom is not a sin ... not wearing one IS!"

people away from God, not towards him. Many leaders in the religious community are as guilty of killing their flock as the virus itself.

Why is the church not taking an active role in showing people how to be faithful to one another? Why not teach a man fifty ways to make love to his wife? Why is a woman not being taught ways to make love to her husband, in the hopes that he will be sexually satisfied and not have to stray outside their relationship? Why not have 50 ways to make love to one partner instead of one way to have sex with 50 partners? Why are we not being taught how to make love to our partners by the Church? (Yes, I'm talking about hands-on classes in how to make love!!! And we're doing exactly that in Mozambique!!!)

Why are sexual pleasure and intimacy not part of what parishioners are taught through the church? Sex is a celebration of life (*Book of Solomon*), of God's love, yet the church has manipulated sexuality to serve its need to control. It has made something truly God-given into something that we are ashamed of and deny At the end of the day, the Church's dogma is killing us, just as quickly as the HIV virus. The Virus kills our bodies, and the Church kills our souls.

Participating Scholar Ayesha Imam receives John Humphrey Freedom Award

On December 9th, Ayesha Imam accepted the **John Humphrey Freedom Award**, an annual honor conferred by the Canada-based organization, **Rights and Democracy**. The award recognizes Dr. Imam's continued work as a founding director of BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights.



*Participating Scholar,
Ayesha Imam*

General work in women's rights

BAOBAB draws public attention to women's rights issues —

- Organizing Nigeria's first National Tribunal on Violence Against Women.
- Organizing art competitions for young people on building women's human rights.
- Coordinating both national and international campaigns in gender justice.
- Running training workshops in leadership skills for women and in gender awareness
- Supporting women and girls to fight for or redress rights violations in individual cases — ranging from domestic violence, to forced marriage, to rape and sexual abuse, to achieving custody, guardianship, and maintenance rights for their children.

Defending women's rights in Muslim Law

But the work for which BAOBAB is best known — and for which Rights and Democracy has chosen to honour it — is that of defending women's rights in Muslim laws and practices.

It was clear that many Nigerian women could not access their rights in Muslim laws because they did not know them. BAOBAB and its volunteer outreach teams began making that knowledge available to women (and men) through legal literacy leaflets and activities, training workshops, paralegal support, etc.

For women who are victims of baseless legal practices, BAOBAB put together a legal strategy team of independent Muslim lawyers, rights activists, and Muslim scholars to offer women advice and information. Drawing on its international links, BAOBAB researched similar cases in other geographical jurisdictions, as well as raised resources to cover the costs of

the appeals and support activities (legal fees and court costs, transport, counseling, safe houses, and so on).

Also, BAOBAB has been collaborating with a wide range of women's and human rights activists and organizations — the whole Nigerian human rights movement has been working in solidarity, in different ways. So far, none of the

So far, none of the death sentences by stoning for adultery have been carried out. All of them have either been quashed on appeal, or are still in the process of appeal.

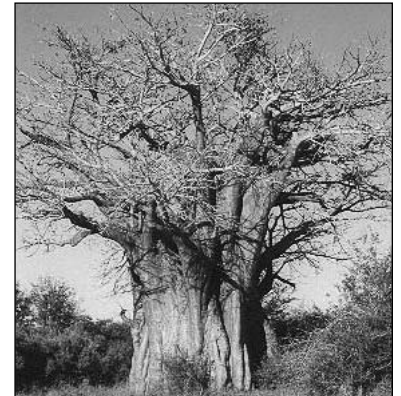
death sentences by stoning for adultery has been carried out. All of them have either been quashed on appeal, or are still in the process of appeal.

BAOBAB has also consistently worked to widen the discussions and end the current climate of fear. It has publicly raised critiques of rights violations in the name of Muslim laws and Islam, and it has encouraged others to do so.

BAOBAB started a series of workshops to examine the actual constructions of Muslim laws in countries and communities around the world. They do this for each of thirty or so different issues of particular importance to women e.g. choice of marriage partner, rights to inheritance, forms of divorce, witnessing, leadership, reproductive rights, bodily integrity.

The Consultation congratulates Dr. Imam on her award and her courageous and extraordinary work in defending women's rights.

To learn more about Dr. Imam's work, go to www.thereligiousconsultation.org. There you'll find her acceptance speech under the same title as this article.



The baobab tree, found throughout Africa, is tenacious and long-lived, despite drought and adverse conditions. The tree is bountiful, giving shade, shelter, fuel, and fruit. Its bark can be made into rope and strings for musical instruments. With its huge trunk (often 25 meters around), the tree is a symbol of strength in distressing times.

The American Micro-Conscience

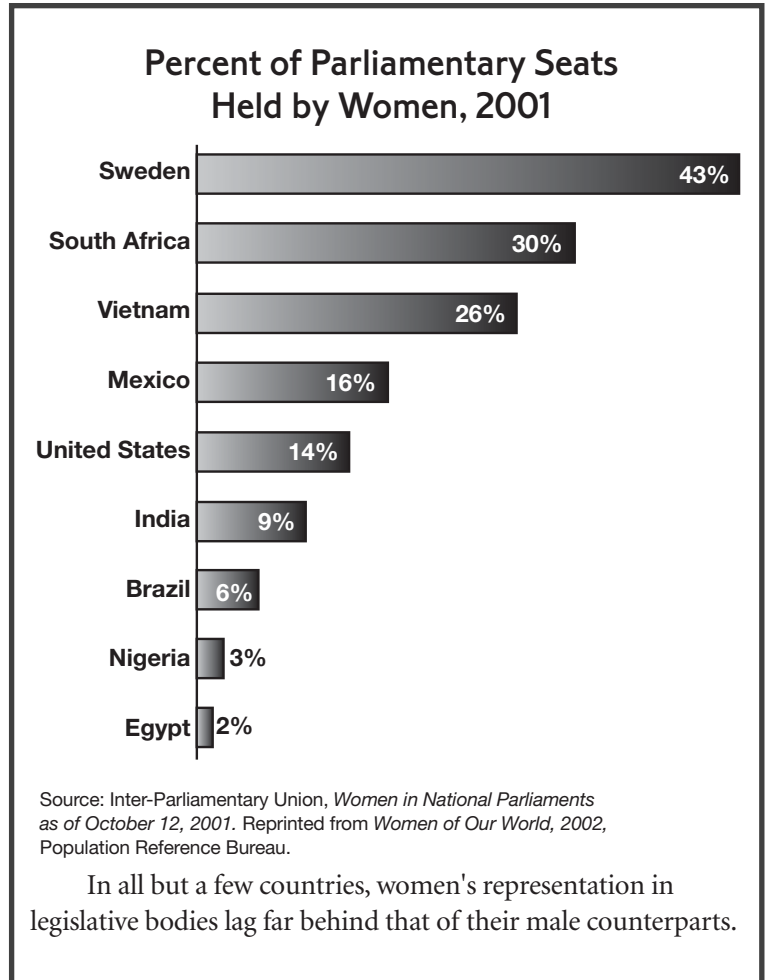
By Daniel C. Maguire

It is reported that more Americans recycle than vote — 61% of eligible voters did not vote on November 5, 2002. This perfectly exemplifies the original sin of American ethics: myopic individualism. In this dim-witted mindset, individual efforts and private virtue are more important than political involvement.

So, while the citizens visit the recycle bin and shun the voting booth, politically involved corporations and lobbyists create a corporate-governmental axis that dumps international earth-friendly treaties and rapes the biosphere that is the maternal womb of earth-life. Recycling is fine and morally mandatory, but inadequate. Much that we recycle is dumped into landfill because of recycling costs which the government will not subsidize. Recycle as we will, per-capita garbage is increasing.

Meanwhile, with little to fear from the non-voting citizenry, corporations and the government they co-opt, pollute the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink.

Americans are many things. Dumb is one of them.



Bush loses a battle in his war against women

Reprinted from the *Planned Parenthood Action Center*

The Fifth Asia and Pacific Population Conference closed with a resounding victory for reproductive health and rights. Despite the heavy-handed tactics of the US delegation, Asia-Pacific countries rejected the Bush Administration's anti-health and anti-women agenda.

In an effort to advance the Bush Administration's agenda to overturn laws and policies that protect reproductive freedom, the Bush delegation made explicit its position that life begins at conception, attempting to pave the way for eliminating access to abortion in the US and around the world. US proposals met resounding opposition. The US agenda was to water down sex education; promote abstinence until marriage to prevent HIV/AIDS; and undermine efforts to prevent unsafe abortions.

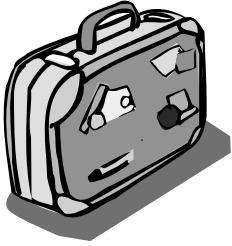
Throughout the week, senior officials from countries as diverse as India, Pakistan, China, Turkey, Fiji, New Zealand, Iran, Indonesia and the Philippines spoke forcefully against

...India, Pakistan, China, Turkey, Fiji, New Zealand, Iran, Indonesia and the Philippines spoke forcefully against the Bush Administration.

the Bush Administration. In the end, every nation spoke one-by-one, opposing each of the Bush Administration's anti-health proposals and stood united in their support of reproductive health and rights for the world's citizens.

To read the *New York Times* on this topic, go to our website, www.religiousconsultation.org, and click on *The War Against Women*.





Tracking the Activities of Our Participating Scholars

Movers and Shakers

Gloria Albrecht's latest book *Hitting Home: Feminist Ethics, Women's Work and the Betrayal of Family Values* (see cover story) describes how business and government are abandoning their social responsibility to sustain the well-being of families. It exposes "family friendly policies" as really being profit-friendly to the corporate world.



Marvin Ellison, along with Sylvia Thorson-Smith, has co-edited a collection of essays entitled *Body and Soul: Justice-Lovers Rethink Sexuality* (Pilgrim Press, Spring 2003). In it, two dozen prominent theologians, including Participating Scholars Dan Maguire, Beverly Harrison, Judith Plaskow, and Mary Hunt, play off the controversial 1991 Presbyterian study, *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice*. Scholars take stock of sexuality, religion, and ethics at the beginning of the new millennium. Their cutting-edge analyses address the possibilities — and demands — of a justice-love ethic for individuals, church, and society.



Outstanding features of the book include —

- The use of a wide justice lens to explore religion, sexuality, and ethics.
- Analyses of the intersections of sexuality with race, gender, sexual orientation, ecology, economics, and other dynamics.
- Rich insight into the history and complexity of religious debates over sexuality.
- Constructive guidance for resolving conflict, based on biblical and ethical principles of love and justice.

Riffat Hassan was the guest speaker at the 13th annual ALT Lecture in **Rochester, New York**. Riffat spoke on *Feminism and Islam*. She delivered the same lecture to an audience of Planned Parenthood supporters in **Syracuse, New York**. Both events were great successes. (See page 15.)



Patti Jung has been appointed Graduate Programs Director for Theology at **Loyola University Chicago**. In addition to Patti's new duties, she has been an active speaker and writer. Here is a list of her latest efforts.



- "Catholic Thought about Sexual Diversity" in *New Jewish and Christian Approaches to Homosexuality: A Symposium* (a pamphlet) University of San Francisco: The Swig Lectureship, 2002: 5–10.
- **Moral Issues and Christian Responses**. 7th Edition. Co-edited with L. Shannon Jung. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003.
- "Blessing Same-Sex Marriages," *Word and World*, 23/1 (2003): 57–67.
- Member, Editorial Board, *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Re-elected to 3rd term. Class of 2003.
- Panelist, in absentia, for a Concurrent Session on "Women, Men and Bodies: Inter-Religious Perspectives," **SCE Annual Meeting**, Vancouver, January 2002.
- **Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions**, was the subject of a "Breakfast with an Author" Session at the **Annual Meeting of the SCE**, Vancouver, January 2002.
- Workshop Leader on Diversity, *Women's Programs, Heartland Gathering II*, July 19, 2002, Loyola Chicago.
- Three Plenary Addresses at an **ELCA Synodical Conference on Spirituality and Sexuality** in Cedar Rapids, IA, October 2002.
- Keynote Speaker: *Christian Sexual Formation*, Christ's Body, Our Body Conference, **Harvard Divinity School and New England ELCA Synod**, Boston, MA, November 2002.

In 2002, **David Loy** presented his popular lecture, *Beyond Good and Evil? A Buddhist Response to the New Holy War* at Davis & Elkins College (WVa), Wheaton College (Mass.), Sharpham College (Devon, UK), Illinois State University at Normal, Columbia University, Marymount Manhattan College, Southern Methodist University (Dallas), University of San Francisco, UC Santa Barbara, and Beijing University in China.



continued on page eleven



Movers and Shakers

continued from page ten

David also represented the Rector of the United Nations University at a conference on *Dialogue among Civilizations* that he co-chaired in **Tehran, Iran** at the end of August.

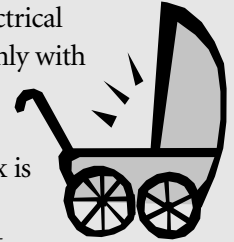
Parichart Suwanbubha offered the Buddhist perspective in the panel discussion *(Un) Believable: Reinterpreting Religious Texts From A Gender Perspective* on November 5, 2002, at the **Church Center for the United Nations, New York**. This seminar was organized by **The World Conference of Religions for Peace, Women's Program**. On the same day, she joined another panel discussion organized by **The World Conference of Religions for Peace, The Children's Program**, *"Theological Reflections on The Impact HIV & AIDS Has Had in Faith Communities."* Parichart lives in Bangkok, and so she was able to talk about the situation in Thailand and the response from Buddhist communities in her country.



A Fetal Fact

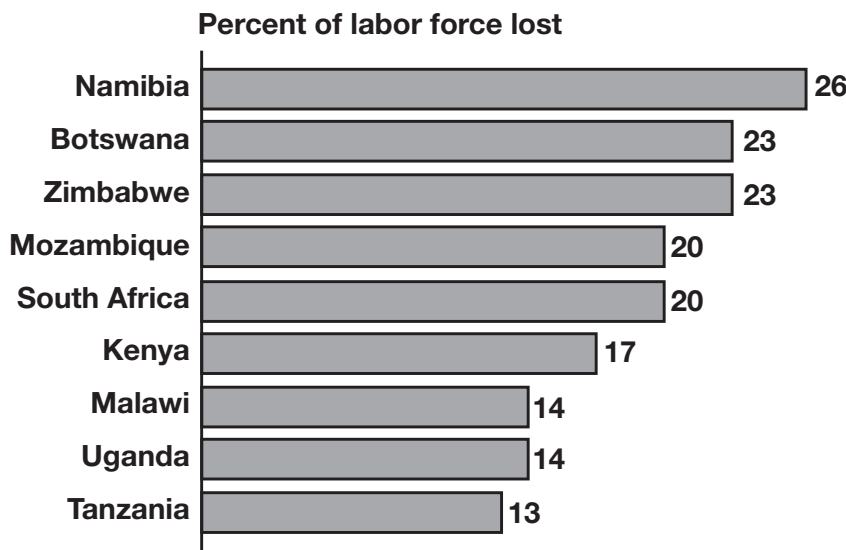
The silent scream is a loud fraud

It should be noted that the electrical activity detected in nerve cells [of the fetus] at, say, nine weeks, is not all that significant when we realize that there is electrical activity in all cells. Rather it is only with the burst of synapse formation toward the end of the second trimester that the cerebral cortex is born. So anti-abortion films like *The Silent Scream* are at best, misleading, and at worst, fraudulent.



From A Brief, **Liberal Catholic Defense of Abortion**, Daniel Dombrowski and Robert Deltete, University of Illinois Press, p. 57.

Projected Loss of Agricultural Labor Force Because of HIV/AIDS
Selected African Countries, 1985–2020



In most affected countries, the epidemic is eroding households' socioeconomic well-being and threatening the social cohesion of communities. For families, the consequences of HIV/AIDS are different from those of other illnesses. The people most likely to be infected are at the peak of their productive and income-earning years; they often support spouses and children.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Aids — A Threat to Rural Africa: Fact Sheet" (www.fao.org/Focus/E/aids/aids6-e.htm, accessed July 12, 2002).

Source: *Population Bulletin*, a publication of the **Population Reference Bureau**, September 2002, p. 21.

107 countries (and sometimes the Vatican) visit the TRC web site each month

By Ed Mitchell, Webmaster

Since the Religious Consultation web site (www.religiousconsultation.org) was reorganized two years ago, over 150,000 visitors have read a half million pages on our site. They spent a total of 7,500 hours reading information on population, reproductive health, ethics, and a host of other topics.

Where do these visitors come from? From 107 countries in the average month. The top ten countries are USA, UK, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Netherlands, Japan, Mexico, and Austria. Although not a frequent visitor, the Holy See (Vatican City State) pays us calls, as do Cuba, Morocco, China, and Egypt.

What are people looking for? All pages are visited, but Dan Maguire's writings are always popular, with his excerpt from **Sacred Choices** on "Contraception and Abortion in Islam" ranking first. Next most popular pages are Riffat Hassan's articles on "Are Human Rights Compatible with Islam?" and "Gender Equality and Justice in Islam." Other frequently visited pages are Nelia Beth Scovill's "The Liberation of Women: Religious Sources," Nawal Ammar's "On Being a Muslim Woman," David Loy's "Religion and the Market," and Julia Ching's "Human Rights: a Valid Chinese Concept?"

Why so much interest in Islam? Great curiosity about Islamic issues and heavy international traffic make this topic popular.

How do visitors find us? Scores of other web sites link to us, and the most popular search engines (Google, Yahoo, AOL) "spider" us on a regular basis.

What are the most popular words searched for? Most searched for are "riffat hassan," "abortion in islam," "dan maguire," "david loy," "aborto," "stem cell article," "infanticidio," "islam population," "sacred choices," and "national catholic reporter."

Why is the TRC web site attracting so many visitors?

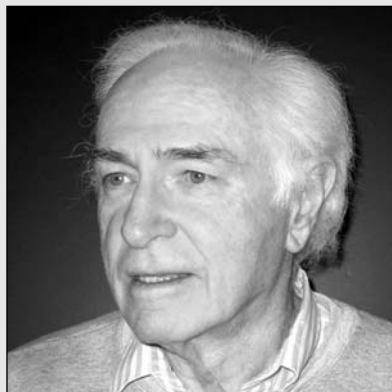
- Its rich content is constantly being updated. (It presently has 135 pages.)

- Its special features are well-focused: "**The President's Corner**" with Dan Maguire's latest writings (e.g. "Voice of the Faithful in a Clergy Dominated Church," and "Why Do Americans Hate Children?")... "**Scholars Forum**" with contributions from our experts... "**TRC News Tracker**" that offers fresh articles from the world's leading newspapers and magazines... a "**Non-English**" section with pieces in Spanish and Portuguese... a "**Radio and Video**" section... "**Population Issues**"... and a "**Special Interest**" section featuring such items as Mark Twain's "War Prayer," editorials from the *New York Times* and *National Catholic Reporter*, alerts from Planned Parenthood... and the on-line editions of the TRC Newsletter, past and present.

- Its archives feature books and articles by Participating Scholars, links to numerous sister agencies, and a *tour de force* of Dan Maguire's latest book, **Sacred Choices**, now in its second printing.

There are numerous other gems on the TRC web site just waiting to be discovered — like the provocative question at the bottom of the home page, "Did a Catholic Saint Approve Abortion?" Or the shocker at the top of the home page about a Catholic bishop in Mozambique who not only approved the use of condoms but blessed them at Mass. (Maybe that's why the Vatican is visiting!)

Your comments are always welcome. Send them to Ed Mitchell at ed@religiousconsultation.org.



Ed Mitchell, Webmaster

Muslim scholar takes Americans to task at National Call To Action Meeting

Participating Scholar Farid Esack spoke at the national Call To Action meeting held in Milwaukee last November. A progressive South African Muslim theologian, Dr. Esack talked to the audience about the Muslim reaction to 9/11.



Participating Scholar Farid Esack

Contrary to what Americans would like to believe, Dr. Esack said, most Muslims in the world “rejoiced” on 9/11 because they felt that the “bully on the block” was finally getting “a beating.” Dr. Esack explained that many Americans suddenly became interested in learning more about Islam after the disaster. He felt that American interest in the religion sprang from the hope that Muslims would be revealed as essentially peace-loving, and that the attacks were the acts of a fanatical fringe element.

What should have been happening, according to Dr. Esack, is that Americans should have been asking why the Muslim people would rejoice at such destruction. What does that say about the relationship between the two peoples? He believes that the Muslim reaction reveals a terrible pain. Dr. Esack suggests that it would be healthier to look at what lies beneath the action.

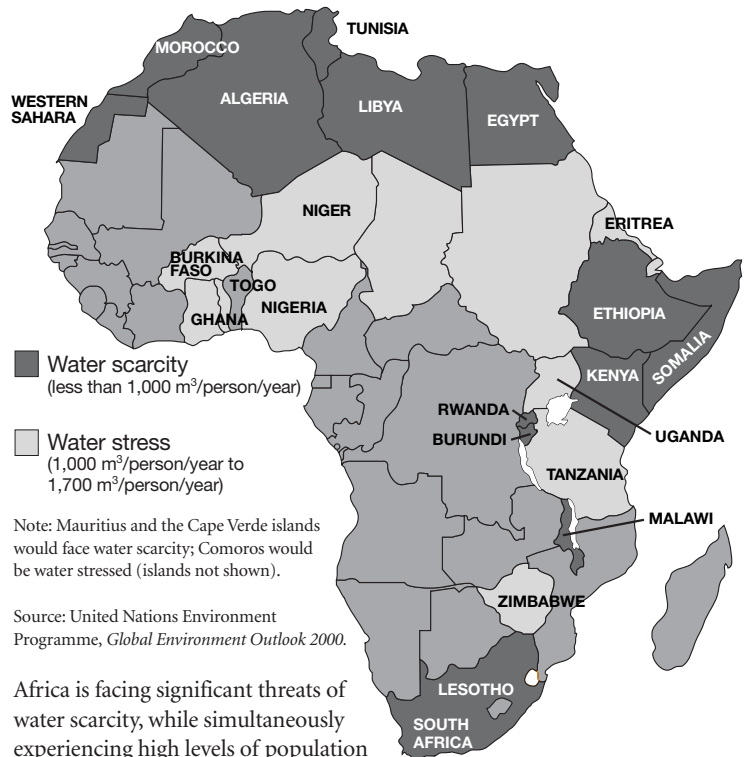
“We need to be mirrors into each other as part of a struggle for justice.” He has little patience for simply going through the motions of interfaith dialogue where people share their religious beliefs and then return home to feel self-satisfied with their tolerance of others. The goal should be to care more about self-transformation than world transformation. “Through real self-examination, we come closer to God.”

Which came first? Poverty or the baby?

A compelling body of scholarship now shows that although people who become parents as teenagers will eventually be poorer than those who do not, a very large proportion of that difference is explained by pre-existing factors. Well over half of all women who give birth as teenagers come from profoundly poor families, and more than one-fourth come from families who are slightly better off but still struggling economically. Taken together, more than 80% of teenage mothers were living in poverty or near-poverty long before they became pregnant. Teenage parents are not middle-class people who have become poor simply because they have had a baby; rather they have become teenage parents *because they were poor to begin with.* [italics added]

From *Dubious Conceptions The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, Kristin Luker, Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 107–108.

25 African countries will face water stress by 2025



Abortion & Common Sense

It has been called *Timely... Practical... Important... A Voice for Reason*. A "must read" for health professionals, educators, social workers, and lawmakers. **Abortion & Common Sense** (ISBN: 1401059546) cuts through the rhetoric and misinformation surrounding the abortion debate to look at the facts. Four of every 10 women in the US will have at least one abortion in their lifetimes. Worldwide, an estimated 46 million women terminate their pregnancies every year, some safely, some dangerously.

The book is full of such statistics and interesting facts. It explores the private issues that women face and the more public debates involving laws and the medical profession. The authors are Ruth Dixon-Mueller and Paul K.B. Dagg.

Ruth Dixon-Mueller is a former Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Davis. Paul K.B. Dagg is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons (Canada), and an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Ottawa, as well as Director of Clinical Services at the Royal Ottawa Hospital.

New Fundraising Idea —

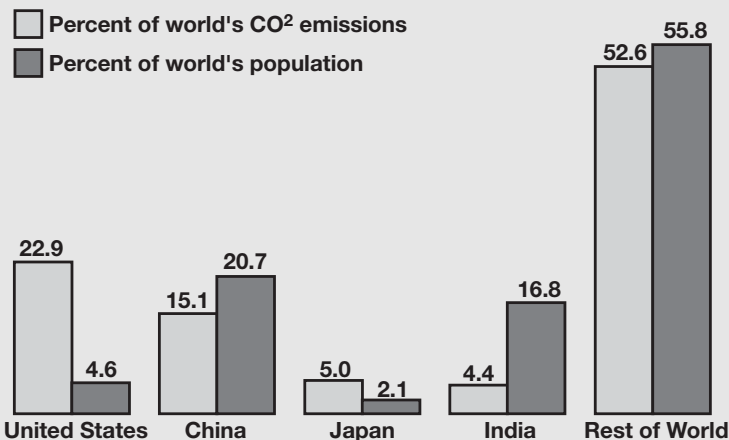
Pledge A Picket Plan

26 pickets lined up outside the Planned Parenthood event as Dan Maguire spoke in Stuart, Florida. The picketers were later surprised to read in the newspaper that they had unwittingly become part of Planned Parenthood's *Pledge-a-Picket* plan.

Those attending the Planned Parenthood event are told how many pickets are outside — the more the better — and then attendees are asked to pledge a certain amount for each picket. Many pledged a dollar a picket. Thus, the event raised a tidy sum.

Of course, pickets are not all fun. Some are lethal, so three police cars were on hand as long as the pickets were there.

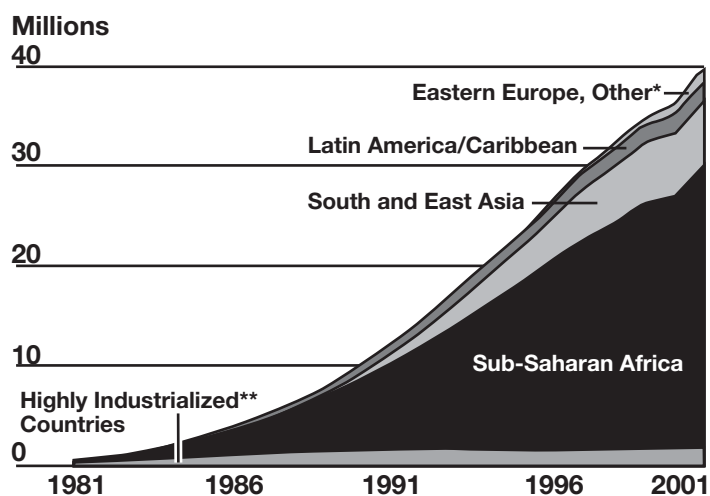
Four Countries Account for Almost Half of Global CO² Emissions



Source: Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, U.S. Department of Energy, as cited by World Bank, *World Development Report 2001*.

In the late 1990s, the United States, home to only about 5% of the world's population, was responsible for roughly one-fourth of global carbon dioxide emissions. Less developed countries, however, are releasing a growing percentage of global carbon dioxide emissions.

People Living With HIV/AIDS by World Region 1981-2001



*Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa.

**North America, Europe (except Eastern Europe), Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

Source: UNAIDS, "Twenty Years of HIV/AIDS: Fact Sheet" (2002), and unpublished data.

Riffat Hassan draws large audiences in talks about feminism and Islam

On October 23 and 24, 2002, more than 800 people attended two Planned Parenthood-sponsored talks by Participating Scholar, Riffat Hassan. The presentations took place in Rochester and Syracuse, New York. Dr. Hassan's topic was *Feminism and Islam*.

In her talk, Dr. Hassan says that the "havoc the media has played with Islam [since 9/11] is unbelievable." Ignorance and misinterpretation — some deliberate — have demonized Islam. Dr. Hassan explained that while all of the major religions are patriarchal, contrary to press accounts, the Qur'an protects the rights of *all* people, both men and women.

Why, then, is it that Muslim women do not enjoy the same rights as Muslim men? Dr. Hassan traces the problem back to the years following the Iranian Revolution in 1970 — when the process of *Islamization* began in Muslim countries. The aim of Islamization is to make Muslim societies *more* Muslim because they were viewed as not being Muslim *enough*. The Taliban represents Islamization in its most extreme form.

Women became the chief focus of Islamization. To conservative Muslims, women belong in "private space" (the home). Public space belongs to men. As long as each stays in their place, everything is fine. Women who enter public space must be faceless, nameless, and voiceless. The conservative Islamic thinking about women in public places agrees with St. Augustine, who said, women "*cause erections even in holy men.*" Dr. Hassan thinks that such a reaction is a male problem — and men should do something about it.

The concepts of women as inferior and women as temptress are reinforced by the Christian story of Adam and Eve and The Fall in Genesis. Yet Dr. Hassan has been intensely studying the Qur'an since 1974, and she says that the Qur'an tells a different story. In the Islamic version of creation, there is only an earth creature, no man or woman, and no one was created first. The Qur'an does not subjugate women, but protects them.

Early in her research into the Qur'an, she realized that there was a big discrepancy between what the Qur'an says about women and what was happening to Muslim women. She believes that Muslim women need to be educated about their religious rights.

Those conservatives who oppress Muslim women, seeing women as "physical" and men as "spiritual," take pieces of the Qur'an out of context to use them to further their own purposes. Dr. Hassan maintains that the intent of the Qur'an, to make man and women equal, has been subverted. Both policy-makers and Western feminists wrongly attempt to change Islamic societies by *eliminating* Islam. Not so, says

The Mahatma Gandhi found great wisdom in the Qur'an. In 1941, he wrote in a forward to *The Sayings of Muhammad*, "I have read ... the sayings of the Prophet with much interest ... They are among the treasures of Mankind, not merely Muslims."

Dr. Hassan. "If the laws are to be challenged, they must be challenged within the Islamic perspective." Islam can be used to empower women. Muslim women do not want to become Western women. They want to maintain their Muslim identity.

The Golden Rule Poster supports Interfaith Dialogue

Scarboro Missions of Toronto has developed a poster featuring the Golden Rule in the sacred writings of 13 religious traditions. Each religious symbol is accompanied by its scripture. Lesson plans for elementary and high school curricula are being developed and will be commercially published. A study guide for adult audiences is also in the works. A documentary about the poster has been aired on a national TV broadcast, and the poster is now on permanent display at the United Nations in New York.

To learn more about Scarboro Missions, go to www.scarboromissions.ca.



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