

# Religious Consultation Report

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

Volume 9 No.2

## Calling All “Pro-Lifers”

Being a “compassionate liberal,” I like to help people. I’ve come up with an idea to help those who call themselves “Pro-Life.” They so need help. I want to restore their honor, spare them abuse, and permit them to truly call themselves “Pro-Life.”

Just think of the nasty things people say about them.

### THE ALLEGATIONS

Some call them *frauds* because they are obsessed with fetal life but support Republican cutbacks on aid to children and poor parents — especially sick poor parents and sick poor children who depend on Medicaid. (*Gosh, that criticism might be true!*)

Other critics say these people are *liars* since they didn’t care a whit about all the fetuses that got killed in Iraq and Afghanistan with our Shock and Awe Blitzkrieg — where no distinction was made between pregnant and unpregnant civilian victims. Come to think of it, Shock and Awe was feticide writ large! (*O.K., I concede. Those critics may be onto something, too, since in the last election, the “Pro-Lifers” voted for more war — and thus more feticide-by-war!*)

Still others say “Pro-Lifers” are not really in love with fetuses, *just afraid of free women* who refuse to be defined as brood mares. (*Oh, oh, those critics may also have a point!*)

Cruel critics say the only way to get away from all these self-righteous, self-designated “Pro-Lifers” is to go to a peace rally, attend a protest against capital punishment, or show up at a demonstration against torture or for clean air or water. (*Come to think of it, I guess I never did see any of them there!*)

However, in the cause of fairness, I am happy to report that one criticism against these people is totally unjust and absolutely false! People say that “Pro-Lifers” are *against choice!* Wrong! They are for choice! *They just want the government, not pregnant women, to have that choice.* So it is a mean-spirited calumny to say the “Pro-Lifers” are not for choice. It’s just when it comes to pregnancy, “Pro-Lifers,” *like the Chinese Communists*, trust the government’s choices more than women’s choices. (*Thank heavens! I finally found a false charge against these poor, pathetic people that I so want to help.*)



Global Warming by cartoonist Jim Morin of the Miami Herald, winner of the 2006 Population Media Center cartoon contest. Used with permission.

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## Calling All “Pro-Lifers”

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### A UNIFYING CAUSE

But enough of criticisms. I am, to use one of President Bush’s terms, “a unifier.” And hopefully, I can be better at it than our hapless president. There is one issue that should unify all of us on every side of every debate in our society. This one should unite Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, and it should be front-page news every day.

**The big melt is on.  
The oceans are coming!**

The Republicans are trying to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in order to speed up global warming. Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* says we may not need to fight about this issue since, according to Mr. Kristof, “the sad reality is that much of the Arctic plain will probably be lost anyway in this century to rising sea levels.”

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**“Pro-Lifers” are for choice! They just want the government, not pregnant women, to have that choice.**

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But isn’t this talk of global warming and melting ice just more nervous twitter from the tree-huggers? Seems not. In January 2006, six former heads of the Environmental Protection Agency, including five who served under Republican Administrations (where tree-hugging never caught on), met in Washington. Every one of them agreed that global warming is ongoing, and that people are a big part of the problem.

Optimists say that we have not yet reached the “tipping point” where huge inundations will occur, raising the ocean levels 23 feet by some predictions. Bye-bye, Manhattan when that happens. And bye-bye, Florida. And say “so long” to most Pacific islands. Welcome the shrinkage of all coastal states and nations.

The pessimists say we have already passed the tipping point, and we can now sit back and watch the “positive feedback loop.” That’s an easy-to-understand little phrase. It means that as ice melts, new bare ground is exposed, and this ground absorbs three times more heat than the ice and snow did. More heat and more melt lead to ... you got it, more heat and more melt. And here come the oceans!

### BANDING TOGETHER IN TROUBLED TIMES

Everyone says that there is a way we can slow down this process, even if the pessimists are right—as on this issue they have tended to be. But that would mean spending more on new energy sources than we now spend on war. *It would mean becoming “Pro-Life.”*

Sad to say, giving up wars and big cars sounds un-American. We may be too addicted to both, too shortsighted, too violent, too selfish, and too dumb to change.

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... huge inundations will occur, raising the ocean levels 23 feet by some predictions. Bye-bye, Manhattan when that happens. And bye-bye, Florida.

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As physics professor Marty Hoffert of New York University says: “It may be that we’re not going to solve global warming, the earth is going to become an ecological disaster, and somebody will visit in a few hundred million years and find there were some intelligent beings who lived here for a while, but they just couldn’t handle the transition from being hunter-gatherers to high technology. It’s certainly possible.” This long-gone species, they will say, was just not “Pro-Life.”

*By Daniel C. Maguire*

### 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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# Hoodwinking the People and Demolishing the Planet



The March 26th cover of *Time* magazine sounded a blare of verbal trumpets announcing the state of the earth: “Polar Ice Caps Are Melting Faster Than Ever... More And More Land Is Being Devastated By Drought... Rising Waters Are Drowning Low-Lying Communities... By Any Measure, Earth Is At ... The Tipping Point.” That same week, ABC News’ *WorldNews Tonight* unleashed nightly coverage on the planet’s disasters with footage of water running off glaciers like so many overflowing bathtubs.

## MISINFORMATION

On March 28th, WorldWatch Institute joined the voices that decried a planet coming perilously close to the point of no return. And in doing so, WorldWatch became yet another publication blowing the whistle on the Bush Administration, which “altered government studies and muzzled experts.” *WorldNews Tonight* showed scientific reports, rife with White House scribbles aimed at softening the scientific findings on global warming — the “editing” of Phil Cooney, chief of staff at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. A representative of Climate Science Watch called filtering scientific reports through the White House “scandalous.”

Equally scandalous is the 15-year campaign by the oil and coal industries to proliferate misinformation, to portray “uncertainties in climate science,” a move to make the average citizen distrust any dire predictions.

WorldWatch reported that many of those who express skepticism about the impending cataclysm “are funded by the fossil

fuel industry,” and “that oil company lobbyists have assumed key positions in the White House and government agencies in recent years.” One of the naysayers told *ABC WorldNews Tonight* that “the American people have just been bludgeoned with climate disaster stories for God knows how long, and they’ve just got disaster fatigue.” One wonders how the folks in New Orleans or northeastern Australia would respond to that statement.

## NEED TO ACT

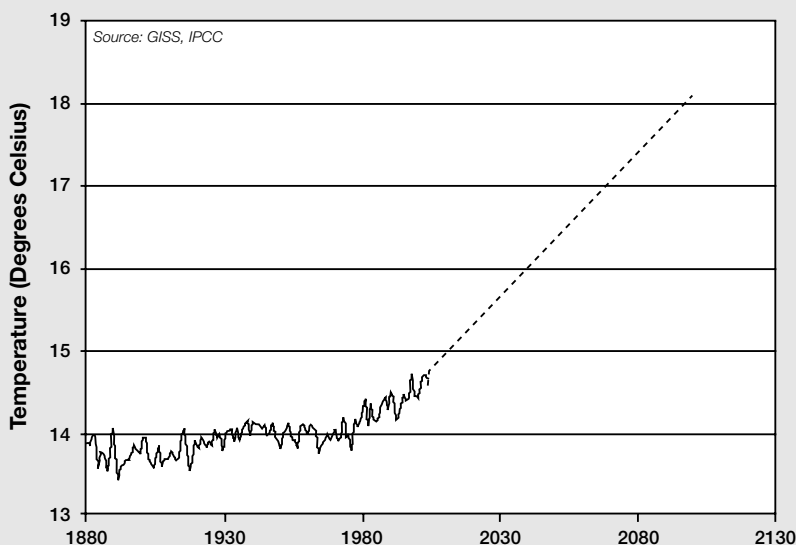
So now that most everyone agrees that the earth is in trouble, what can we do? Worldwatch says that the largest carbon-emitting nation, the US, must work closely with the world community — China and India in particular — to find ways to supply energy for everyone while moving away from fossil fuels.

Are we ready? Wind and solar power are growing 20-30% a year. According to WorldWatch, “increased policy support for renewable energy, together with high oil and gas prices, could provoke a true energy revolution in the next few years.” A Stanford University poll reports that 65% of Americans believe the government should do more to stop human-induced climate change. The Pew Research Center found that 82% of Americans support more federal research on solar and wind energy. It is time to realize that the defense budget should be halved and the remaining money diverted to environmental research. Such spending would really defend the nation and the world.

## The Big Melt — Tracking Global Warming

2005 was the hottest since recordkeeping began in 1880. In fact, the six hottest years on record have all occurred in the last eight years. Two recent studies report that the earth is warmer now than in any time in the past 1,200 years. Plus levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane are higher today than any time in the last 650,000 years. The 42 hurricanes of 2005 aside, rising temperatures can wreak havoc with the planet — from failing crops to infectious diseases and environmental changes.

Average Global Temperature, 1880 – 2005 with Projection to 2100



# Raise Your Voice against Torture

## National sign-on statement at Pax Christi web site

It has been two years since the revelations at Abu Ghraib prison. Yet ongoing allegations of torture continue in the so-called US War on Terrorism, prompting Pax Christi USA to issue a national sign-on statement. The online statement asks people to call for an end to torture: an affront to God and to human dignity.

### THE CATHOLIC STANCE

Said Pope John Paul II: "The thought of Jesus being stripped, beaten and derided until his final agony on the cross should always prompt a Christian to protest against similar treatment of their fellow beings. Of their own accord, disciples of Christ will reject torture, which nothing can justify, which causes humiliation and suffering to the victim and degrades the tormentor." *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* supports these words, prohibiting torture "as a principle which cannot be contravened under any circumstances."

### US LAW

Despite US laws banning torture, the reports from Abu Ghraib describe water-boarding, beatings, pouring chemicals on inmates, and unleashing attack dogs on prisoners. The Bush Administration is clearly trying to circumvent national and international laws that prohibit the use of torture under the cloak of "national security." According to Pax Christi, evidence also exists of the Bush Administration's use of *rendition outsourcing*, a practice which "involves other countries implementing policies of torture under the direction of the US government."

Additionally troubling is the recently passed McCain bill, which bans cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners, but at the same time, provides legal defenses that shield those who command or commit torture.

### THE PETITION

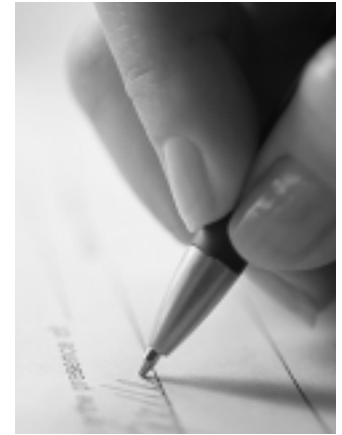
Pax Christi exhorts the Bush Administration to —

- cease justifying torture in the name of national security;
- publicly reaffirm US support for the UN *Convention on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*;
- institute as a national policy that no exceptional circumstances whatsoever may be invoked to justify torture;
- follow the recommendation from the United Nations that the US shut down the Guantanamo Prison in Cuba.

Furthermore, Pax Christi calls upon the US Congress to —

- establish an independent commission to publicly investigate the reports of abuse in US detention centers worldwide;

- pass legislation to uphold US and international law against "extraordinary rendition," banning the transferring of a detainee to a country with a history of torture;
- investigate ongoing reports of torture by Iraqi officials and hold accountable any US citizens associated with conceiving, directing, supporting, or acquiescing to this use of torture.



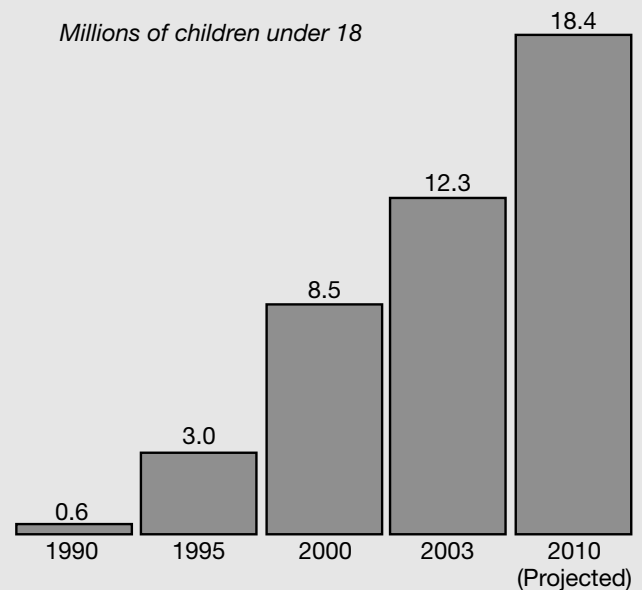
### HEARTFELT DETERMINATION

As part of the petition, Pax Christi also offers sincere and heartfelt apologies to "our sisters and brothers in the Middle East, Iraq, Latin America, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and throughout the world who have been victims of torture. We pledge that we will do everything necessary in our country to abolish torture and to hold all offending parties accountable for this affront to God and human dignity."

If you are interested in adding your voice to *A Christian Call to Stop Torture Now*, go to <http://calltostoptorture.kintera.org/>.

### Increase in Children Orphaned by AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-2010

Millions of children under 18



Note: Estimate of children who lost at least one parent to an AIDS-related cause.

Source: UNAIDS, UNICEF, and US Agency for International Development (USAID), *Children on the Brink 2004* (2004).

# Many States Obstruct National US Initiative to Lower Unintended Pregnancies

**T**he *Washington Post* quoted Sarah Brown, director of the nonpartisan National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: “The most powerful and least divisive way to decrease abortion is to reduce unintended pregnancy. If we can make progress reducing unintended pregnancy, we can make enormous progress reducing abortion.”

## TAKING THE WRONG DIRECTION

It’s a logic that should appeal to Pro-Life and Pro-Choice camps. Yet the Guttmacher Institute, a research group with a focus on sexual health and family issues, reported in late February that 33 states have made obtaining contraceptives more difficult or more expensive for poor women and teenagers — actions that violate common sense. These states cut funds for family planning, passed laws that restricted access to birth control, and placed tight controls on sex education, often offering abstinence as the only option.



improve women’s health if they are to meet the goal of reducing unintended pregnancy.”

To see how your state ranks, go to [www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/ccfs.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/ccfs.html).

Says Camp, “For every state that has invested in reproductive health care or passed laws permitting pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception without a prescription, another state has moved in the opposite direction.” What’s more, “It’s not only that at least half of the states are not doing many things they could do to reduce unintended pregnancy — some are making contraception less easy for women and men.”

Every \$1 spent on family planning saves \$3 in health care costs related to pregnancy.

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Unintended pregnancy in the United States is twice as high as in most of Western Europe. As a direct result, abortion rates are twice or three times as high as European countries.

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Guttmacher President Sharon L. Camp explains the consequences: “Unintended pregnancy in the United States is twice as high as in most of Western Europe. As a direct result, [US] abortion rates are twice or three times as high as European countries. There is no reason why abortion rates need to be as high as they are.”

Guttmacher reports that among the 6 million pregnancies that occur among American women each year, nearly half are unintended — resulting in 1.4 million unplanned births and 1.3 million abortions annually.

## NATIONAL INITIATIVE

In 2000, the federal government set a public health goal of reducing unintended pregnancy by 40% by 2010 and to recognize family planning as key to achieving that objective. In February, the Guttmacher Institute assessed each state’s efforts in improving access to contraception and ranked them accordingly.

California, Alaska, South Carolina, Alabama, and New York rank highest in their efforts. Nebraska, North Dakota, Indiana, Ohio, and Utah are, in the words of a Guttmacher Institute press release, “failing the women who live there.” The report continued to say that policymakers in these states must take “bold new steps to

## South Dakota — The Badlands for Women

**S**outh Dakota’s governor signed a sweeping ban — the nation’s most stringent — on nearly all abortions in the state on March 6. On March 7, Kate Looby, state director of Planned Parenthood, which operates South Dakota’s only abortion clinic, said: “We fully intend to challenge this law. It’s just a question of how.”

The bill would make it a crime for doctors to perform an abortion unless necessary to save the woman’s life, without exceptions for cases of rape or incest.

About 10 states, led by Mississippi, are considering laws similar to South Dakota’s.

Source: Communications Consortium Media Center, [www.ipsnews.net](http://www.ipsnews.net).

# Soap Operas That Carry Social Messages and Change Lives

The power of drama to make us think, to see life differently, and ultimately to act in new ways has been recognized since Sophocles. It is this power that explains the tremendous success of soap operas in educating people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with support from the US-based Population Media Center. PMC uses story lines rich in romance, suspense, betrayal, vengeance, and murder to promote family planning, reproductive health, and the elevation of women's status in developing countries.

PMC's strategy is sound — succeeding in places where more conventional efforts have failed. Consider the case of Ethiopia. During the two-and-a-half year run of *Yeken Kignit* (Looking Over One's Daily Life) and *Dhimbibba* (Getting the Best Out of Life), the dramas produced 900 letters a day from listeners. Amazingly, these programs riveted *nearly half* of Ethiopia to their radios and, more to the point, persuaded many listeners to change their lives.

- Demand for contraceptives soared, rising 157%.
- Male listeners sought HIV tests 4 times more often than non-listeners.
- Using family planning grew 52% among married women listeners.

The challenge of the programs, says Miguel Sabido, who pioneered this concept in the 1970s in Mexico when he was vice president of the broadcasting network, Televisa, is to keep the episodes steamy and suspenseful enough to captivate the audiences. Then, the underlying messages — the need for literacy, family planning, empowering women — reaches huge numbers of people. Without great ratings, the social benefits disappear along with the audiences.

Epilogues follow most broadcasts, providing resource information to help correct the social problems seen in the dramas.

People are using the resources. More than 15,000 fan letters have flooded The National Office of Population in Ethiopia, all telling stories about how soap-opera plots have changed the lives of families.

One of the soaps that Sabido helped develop in the late 1970s promoted literacy, motivating more than 800,000 Mexicans to enroll in adult education classes — more than 250,000 in a single day after a particularly poignant episode. During the decade that his five soap operas explored family planning issues, the country's population growth dropped 34%, earning Mexico the United Nations Population Prize in 1986.

And it's not too strong a statement to say that soap operas are saving lives. In Ethiopia, as well other countries, condoms are preventing the spread of AIDS.

In Tanzania in the 1990s, a plot about a married truck driver, a womanizer who contracts AIDS, prompted 82% of listeners to change their behavior to reduce the risk of contracting HIV. During the first year of the soap opera, condom distribution rose 153%. The cost of reaching those listeners: about 80¢ per person. *"That data made me see the worth of forming an organization to take this program globally,"* says PMC president, Bill Ryerson.

Today, PMC introduces young playwrights and scriptwriters around the world to Sabido's method. They research the important issues within each culture and then create gripping dramas; many become the most popular programs on the air. Programs are broadcast only where infrastructure already exists to deliver services that address the problems the soaps explore.

In the meantime, Sabido's concept is being incorporated into graduate level entertainment-education courses at universities in the US, the Netherlands, and South Africa. Currently, the United Nations Population Fund is working with PMC on broadcast

## Health and Economic Indicators in Countries with High Unmet Need for Family Planning

Country	Unmet Need for Family Planning (%)	Adult HIV Prevalence Rate (%) <sup>5</sup>	Maternal Deaths Per 100,000 Live Births 2000 <sup>6</sup>	Gross National Income Per Capita (US\$) <sup>7</sup>	Value of Donated RH Supplies Per Capita (US\$)
Rwanda	35.6	5.1	1,400	\$1,290	\$3.36
Ethiopia	35.2	4.4	850	\$710	\$5.82
Uganda	34.6	4.1	880	\$1,440	\$12.79
Togo	32.3	4.1	570	\$1,500	\$16.07
Pakistan	32.0	0.1	500	\$2,060	\$1.11
Cambodia	29.7	2.6	450	\$2,060	\$0.80
Malawi	29.7	14.2	1,800	\$600	\$5.89
Burkina Faso	28.8	4.2	1,000	\$1,180	\$6.09
Mali	28.5	1.9	1,200	\$960	\$9.82
Nepal	27.8	0.5	740	\$1,420	\$13.05



ventures in Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Rwanda. Programs are also being considered for China and Vietnam.

These soap operas help effect large scale change, too. Many Ethiopians now publicly decry the formerly pervasive practice of taking a bride by means of abduction and rape. Today, such action now carries a minimum sentence of 10 to 15 years in prison. Says PMC's Bill Ryerson, "Entertainment media is an unusual way to address a serious problem, but it's the most effective thing we can think of to do to change the global situation." For more information: [www.populationmedia.org](http://www.populationmedia.org).

## The Bible v. The US Constitution

**March 1st, 2006, Annapolis, Maryland:** At a hearing on the proposed Constitutional Amendment to prohibit gay marriage, Jamie Raskin, professor of law at Annapolis University, was requested to testify.

At the end of his testimony, Republican Senator Nancy Jacobs said: "Mr. Raskin, my Bible says marriage is only between a man and a woman. What do you have to say about that?"

Raskin replied: "Senator, when you took your oath of office, you placed your hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. You did not place your hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible."

The room exploded with applause.



## Jet Trails and Global Warming

**W**hen we think of pollution and global warming, we often concentrate on cars, trucks, and smokestacks belching out gases. However, those are the gases that we see on the ground. What about the jet tails that streak the skies?

These white "tails," known as *contrails*, are the product of jet fuel combustion, which emits soot and volatile molecules, such as sulfuric acid. Water in the atmosphere surrounds these particles and freezes, and what we see as a contrail is a line of crystals in the sky.

### LIKE CIRRUS CLOUDS

Scientists are beginning to regard contrails as a form of cirrus cloud cover. Cirrus clouds warm the surface of the earth, trapping heat instead of reflecting the sun's radiation. Contrails could be worsening global warming.

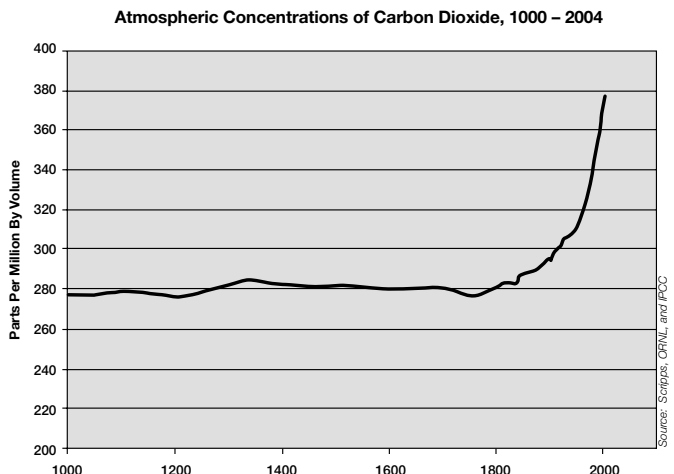
The flying moratorium imposed after September 11th helped two scientists, geography professor Andrew Carleton of Penn State and David Travis of the University of Wisconsin, advance the contrail theory. During this three-day no-fly period, the scientists were given the unprecedented opportunity to record temperatures without contrails and compare them to temperatures when the skies are crisscrossed with contrails.

### THE FINDINGS

Contrails seem to lower daytime maximum temperatures and raise nighttime low temperatures. Just as cirrus clouds,

contrails block solar radiation during the day and insulate against heat loss at night.

Jet tails appear where the upper atmosphere is humid and cold, mostly over the Midwest and Northeast US. The presence of contrails in these regions could further decrease daily temperatures and evaporation, affecting trees, plants, or insects sensitive to changes in temperature and moisture.





## Brazil Finds Its Own Way to Combat AIDS — Prostitutes as Educators

**T**he UN has named Brazil's AIDS prevention and treatment programs the most successful among developing countries in the world. Today, 600,000 Brazilians are infected with HIV, but 600,000 is only half the number predicted a decade ago. In the 1980s, experts viewed Brazil's AIDS problem as identical to Africa's, but Brazil's efforts have thwarted those projections.

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Today, 600,000 Brazilians are infected with HIV, but 600,000 is only half the number predicted a decade ago.

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However, in February, Brazil received a letter from USAID announcing that Brazil was not eligible to renew its \$48 million AIDS prevention grant. To receive AIDS funding from the US, countries must formally state that prostitution is dehumanizing and degrading. Last year, Brazil, the largest bastion of Catholicism in the world, refused to comply — the only funding recipient to take such a stand. In Brazil, sex workers take pride in their work, and they play a significant role in the government's campaign to prevent AIDS.

### PREVENTION

True, Brazil's approach is unorthodox. Prostitutes carry government-supplied condoms which they give to customers along with an explanation on how condoms prevent sexually transmitted diseases. The women get their information by attending state-funded educational workshops. For many of their young customers, this lesson about using condoms is the first they've heard. Essentially, the Brazilian government is providing information and resources, and prostitutes are distributing both.

In Rio De Janeiro at Carnival, Brazil's version of Mardi Gras, the government's goal was to distribute 25 million free condoms during these uninhibited festivities. At celebrations in the northeastern city of Salvador, local newspapers reported that health officials planned to pass out morning-after pills.

### TREATMENT

About two-thirds of Brazil's annual AIDS budget, more than \$400 million, purchases antiretroviral medications, which are offered free to those infected. As a result, Brazil has been a leader combating pharmaceutical companies who hold the patents and demand high prices for AIDS medications. Brazil (and other countries) wants to break the patents on these medications,

thereby enabling governments to produce the drugs at a decidedly lower cost.

The United States resists such action. According to the US, patent protections provide the financial resources that enable manufacturers to research and develop medicines. Plus, profits provide incentives.

Brazil has been threatening to forge ahead with its effort to break patents, hoping to use the threats to pressure manufacturers to lower prices. Many other countries are closely monitoring these negotiations and their outcome.

### HOME-GROWN SOLUTION

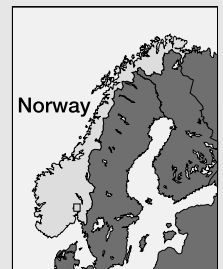
While the potential loss of US funding would affect Brazil's AIDS programs, the country has hit upon a way to manage the cost of condoms and keep them plentiful: manufacture its own supply. The state plans to operate a condom factory in the city of Acre in western Brazil. The factory would take advantage of the latex supply, a product of the region's plentiful rubber trees.



It is an inspiration that seems to underscore Brazil's attitude toward combating AIDS — the country will find its own way, one that fits its culture.

## Norway Bucks the US Stand on Abortion

**D**efying US policy, Norway has pledged at least \$1.5 million per year to support the International Planned Parenthood Federation's new Global Safe Abortion Fund. *"There is no reason to hide that we have the absolute opposite view of this than the Bush administration,"* said Norway's Minister of International Development Erik Solheim. *"For Norway, it is important to increase international attention to a problem that has been neglected and intentionally suppressed by the United States for a long time."*



Source: Communications Consortium Media Center.

# China's Quandary with Population

China began its one-child policy more than a quarter-century ago to prevent a population explosion the country could not support. Today, China's population growth rate of .6% per year is one of the lowest among developing nations and on par with some wealthier ones. Without its one-child policy, Beijing maintains that 400 million more Chinese would be now draining the country's resources.

Some population experts say that the one-child policy can be credited with improving the standard of living and educational opportunities in modern China.

## CONSEQUENCES

But a smaller population has also created serious problems. China's population is expected to reach an all-time high of 1.5 billion in fewer than 30 years — then begin to decline. At that time, 20% of China will be older than 65, compared with only 7% now.

How will the country care for huge numbers of elderly while the workforce shrinks? Says Wang Feng, who specializes in Chinese population issues at the University of California-Irvine, *"The increase of labor force supply will stop by 2013 and will start instead to decline."* Yet the Chinese economy, like the economies of other countries, depends upon a young, skilled labor force to fuel its success within the global economy.



Another consequence of the one-child policy centers on a gender issue. China is a society that values sons over daughters, which has driven sex-selective abortion and female infanticide. However, by 2020, the paucity of women will leave about 40 million Chinese men without brides. Sociologists fear a dangerous scenario that includes kidnapping and trafficking in women.

## REVERSALS?

Experts say that the trend can be reversed but the government must act now. To rectify the gender problem, the government has launched a program to change attitudes toward girl babies.

However, with regard to the numbers problem, China's Population Ministry is unrelenting, saying the one-child policy will continue, with the goal of maintaining the population at 1.37 billion in 2010. Yet even if the Ministry would lift the one-child policy, modernized Chinese couples would not return to large families.

Modernization is bringing changes to Chinese thinking. As more people move to the cities, the former practice of producing children to run the farm is disappearing. In addition, many couples prefer to have only one child: raising children is expensive, and many couples have developed busy modern lifestyles.

As in Japan, Singapore, and many other countries around the world, the wealthier couples become, the fewer children they have.

# A Trend — Countries Relax Restrictions on Abortion

According to the World Health Organization, 19 million women, most of them in the developing world, undergo unsafe abortions each year at the hands of unskilled "practitioners" or due to procedures performed under substandard sanitary conditions. As a result, 600,000 of these women die from complications.

In the last 10 years, however, 15 countries have relaxed abortion restrictions. Among them are Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali.

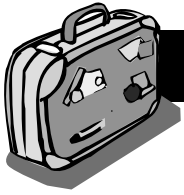
Nepal, which had staunchly prohibited abortion for any reason, legalized the procedure in 2002 without restrictions

during the first three months of pregnancy. Later abortions are allowed only to protect a woman's life.

Most European countries allow abortions with some limits. Portugal, a country with one of Europe's most restrictive abortion laws, is holding a referendum to glean public opinion for on-demand abortion through the 10th week of pregnancy. It's an attempt to loosen the restrictions.

While much of the rest of the world is moving to make abortions more available, the US is moving in the opposite direction. (See *States Obstruct National Initiative*.)





## MOVERS & SHAKERS ...

### Activities of our Participating Scholars

**Christine Gudorf** was elected Vice-President (President-Elect) of the **Society of Christian Ethics** at the annual meeting, January 7, 2006, in Phoenix.

A member of the **Human Genetics Policy Committee of the National Council of Churches 2004-2006**, Christine completed a draft of a new policy on human genetics in August 2005, which she presented to the General Assembly in November 2005.

She has also written "Abortion," her contribution to the **New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible** (Abingdon, 2006).



**Tavivat Puntarigvivat** is Secretary of the **Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards Committee**. He has helped organize these awards ceremonies for the last 5 years.

The women honored have included monastics as well as laywomen from around the world. The most recent event held at the United Nations in Bangkok, celebrated the **UN International Women's Day** and honored 18 women from eight countries — including a Princess from Bhutan — who work on behalf of children's and women's rights.

Tavivat is also Director of the Institute of Research and Development at the **World Buddhist University**, in Bangkok, Thailand.



**Ann-Marie Hsiung Hsien-kuan** has edited **Gender and Boundary**. The book will be out this month, co-published by Nanyang Technological University and Global Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., Singapore. In late May, Ann-Marie will be attending an international conference, **Cultural Politics and Taiwan Cultural Policy: After 1990**, organized by National Sun Yat-sen

University in Taiwan as an invited scholar. Her conference paper is titled, *The Myth of Sanmao: An Analysis of Sanmao's Daydream*.

**Sa'diyya Shaikh's** new article, *In Search of al-Insan: Sufism, Islamic Law and Gender*, should be out in a few months. It will appear in **Islamic Feminism and the Law**, ed. by Qudsiya Mirza (London: Cavendish Publishing, 2006). Sa'diyya is a member of the steering committee of the newly formed **Contemporary Islam Consultation at the American Academy of Religion**.



**David Loy** has been asked by the **World Health Organization's Department of HIV/AIDS** to write a short paper offering a Buddhist perspective on the concept of "decent care." It will be part of a consultation on Decent Care to be submitted to the **International AIDS Society Conference** in Toronto in August 2006. The paper is titled, *"He Who*

*Attends on the Sick Attends on Me: Buddhist Reflections on Decent Care.*"

In January, David began his tenure as **Best Professor at Xavier University** in Cincinnati, Ohio.



## Explosive Results for Bush Decision

**T**he Bush administration intends to cut by one-fifth the US funding of international family planning. Martha Campbell and Malcolm Potts of the *San Francisco Chronicle* report on the link between high birth rates and terrorism and violence:

"For those of us who are interested in looking 15 to 20 years ahead, this [Bush decision] is the dumbest action possible.

The September 11th commission report is explicit: ... 'a large, steadily increasing population of young men without any reasonable expectation of suitable or steady employment (is) a sure prescription for social turbulence.'

Every day, on TV, we can see that ... predominantly young men ... join extremist groups, burn embassies, and plant roadside bombs. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria, the mean age of the population is between 18 and 19; in the United States, it is over 35."

POPLINE, March-April 2006.

Over the past 20 years, international family planning funding has fallen in real dollars by more than \$206 million in 1995 dollars. At the same time, the number of women entering reproductive age has increased.

Jennifer Seltzer Stitt, POPLINE, March-April 2006.

# Mortality in Asia-Pacific Region

**A**nwarul Chowdhury, the UN's Undersecretary-General for Less Developed Countries, announced that people in the 14 less developed Asia-Pacific countries still have comparatively short life expectancies.

In affluent countries like Japan, life expectancy is in the 80s. Ten years ago, among the 50 Less Developed Countries in the world, some areas were struggling with life spans of about 35 years. Today in Afghanistan, the life expectancy at birth is 41-43 years. In Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, and Laos, life expectancy from birth is in the 50s to early 60s. Chowdhury calls these numbers "very disturbing" in an age when medicine has the ability to extend and save lives.

## CHILD MORTALITY

More distressing are the child mortality numbers. The United Nations Development Program projects that 2 million Asian-Pacific children under age five will die in 2015 in less-developed countries. Chowdhury warns, "In Cambodia, the infant mortality rate actually increased from 80 to 96 per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2002. If current trends persist, 311,000 children will die within the first year of their life in 2015."



A recent study identified three factors that, taken together, shorten the lives of children and mothers:

- inadequate reproductive health services
- the increasing spread of HIV/AIDS
- widespread malnutrition that leads to under-five mortality

# Supporting an Aging Europe

**E**urope's birth rate is declining, and in economic terms, falling birthrates will shrink the European workforce. Currently, the ratio of retired adults to working-age adults is 1 to 4. By 2050, the pensions and health care of each retired adult will be supported by only two working adults. At a time when workforce strength may jeopardize the productivity and earning power of a country, its government may be shouldering an unprecedented fiscal burden.

To try to raise birth rates, countries are trying everything from tax and cash incentives to generous maternity leaves and state-subsidized child care. It remains to be seen if such pro-natal policies will be persuasive.

# How the GOP Became God's Own Party

By Kevin Phillips of the Washington Post

**N**ow that the GOP has been transformed by the rise of the South, the trauma of terrorism and George W. Bush's conviction that God wanted him to be president, a deeper conclusion can be drawn: The Republican Party has become the first religious party in U.S. history.

We have had small-scale theocracies in North America before — in Puritan New England and later in Mormon Utah. Today, a leading power such as the United States approaches theocracy when it meets the conditions currently on display: an elected leader who believes himself to speak for the Almighty, a ruling political party that represents religious true believers, the certainty of many Republican voters that government should be guided by religion and, on top of it all, a White House that adopts agendas seemingly animated by biblical worldviews.



To read this entire article which appeared in the Sunday April 2, 2006 *Washington Post*, B03, you can go to [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/01/AR2006040100004\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/01/AR2006040100004_pf.html).

## Stabilizing the European Population

2.1 children per woman are needed to maintain population level. Here are the current averages.

Ireland . . . . .	1.99
France . . . . .	1.90
Norway . . . . .	1.81
Sweden . . . . .	1.75
UK . . . . .	1.74
Netherlands . . . . .	1.73
Germany . . . . .	1.37
Italy . . . . .	1.33
Spain . . . . .	1.32
Greece . . . . .	1.29

Source: Eurostat 2004 [www.ipsnews.net](http://www.ipsnews.net).

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