

Religious Consultation Report

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

Volume 9 No. 1

How the Right-Wing grinch stole Christmas — the co-opted gospel

A devout atheist friend of mine often commented:
“Wouldn’t it be something if Christians really believed what they say they believe — that the poor are their prime concern and that ending poverty is their mission!”

My friend, warming to his topic, would continue his thought along these lines: The Bible says that the Christian gospel is ‘good news to the poor’ (Luke 4:18), that ‘the poverty of the poor is their ruin’ (Proverbs 10:15), and therefore ‘there shall be no poor among you’ (Deut 15:4) because the poor are the apple of God’s eye. (Ps. 72:14)

“If they believed that,” my friend would say, *“Christians would be a stupendously powerful lobby for the poor, and no politician would dare neglect ‘the least among us.’”*

The English writer, G. K. Chesterton, was just as damning when he commented that Christianity has not failed; it simply has never been tried. Actually, it has been tried in the past, and at times, it pushed parts of humanity into greater achievements of compassion, justice, and peace.

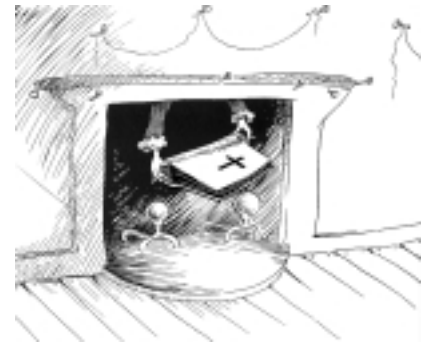
Modern Caesar & the poor

Lately, however, Christianity has been a scary thing for the poor — and for lovers of peace. Look at the United States, a country that is always God-blessing itself and compulsively stuffing Bibles in hotel drawers. In this country, Christianity has been largely co-opted as ideological cover for a mean-spirited Right Wing that is zealously transferring wealth from the bottom to the top of the economic food chain while exporting death in a string of senseless wars.

Lately Christianity has been a scary thing for the poor and for lovers of peace.

Modern Caesars have nothing to fear from this modern crowd of “Christians.” If Jesus were like them, Jesus would have died

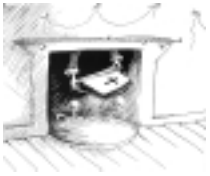
merrily in his bed at a ripe old age. Of course, Jesus was not like them. He fought against the Roman Empire, his time’s “last remaining superpower.” He championed a kind of non-violent resistance so threatening to Empire that the Romans killed him and many who joined him.



continued on page 2

— INSIDE —

How the Right Wing grinch stole Christmas	1-2
America, the hypocrite	3
Pro-Life abortions and morality	3
Pew poll results —taking America’s pulse on social issues	4
Sacred Choices video documentary available	4
The Religious Right ... They’re creeping into your bedroom	5
Women’s rights progress in Saudi Arabia	5
Update: Obstetric fistula — educating men in Niger ...	6
The legacy of John Paul II	7
Catholic theologian tells of Pro-Choice tradition	8
Is abortion murder?	9
Reversible birth control for men	9
Movers & shakers	10
Travels of a retired Participating Scholar	11
Book news	11
Feminists for Life — feminists for control	11



How the Right Wing grinchest stole Christmas

continued from front page

Theology & the military

Jesus didn't die to "atone for our sins," a lousy piece of theology, gorily indulged in Mel Gibson's blood bath. Rather, he died resisting an empire that was stomping on the poor — militarily and economically. Sorry, America, but he died fighting the likes of us.

From our founding, Americans fancied ourselves "The New Rome," and right we were, for such we have become. Like Rome, we topple governments (more than 25 since 1945) and spread 800 military installations over the world.

Stingy beyond belief

We also fancy ourselves the most generous people on earth, though we are among the stingiest. Empire is always animated by lies and hubris. American hubris is being undermined by embarrassing data. Of the 22 richest nations of the world, we are first in wealth and last in developmental assistance.

Among those 22 rich nations, the United States devotes a smaller percentage of national income to developmental assistance than nearly any other developed nation—less than one-tenth of one percent (.1%). Compare that to .97% for the Danes, .89% for the Swedes, .55% for the French, and .31% for the Germans.

Modern Caesars have nothing to fear from this crowd of modern "Christians." If Jesus were like them, Jesus would have died merrily in his bed at a ripe old age.

Even in absolute terms, if we exclude US aid to our two top recipients, Israel and Egypt [largely military aid often used in Israel to oppress Palestinians, and given to Egypt to suppress democracy, and none of which makes Israel or Egypt safer], the 265 million people in the US give less than Denmark's 5 million people.

Meanwhile, if you'll recall, we villainously squander 6 billion dollars a month making wars in the oil-rich Middle East, absurdly claiming, as empires always do, that we are there for the noblest of purposes.

Christians cheering the lions

And the Christian Right cheers its new Caesar. They are, as George Bush says, his "base." They purr consolingly in his ear at prayer breakfasts, and they warm him at America-the-Beautiful spectacles at the National Cathedral.

In his powerful new book, **The New American Militarism**, Andrew J. Bacevich, a Catholic and a retired army officer, now professor at Boston University, notes how the Protestant Religious Right pushed for the American invasions of Iraq — and even pushed for the barbarism of "preventive" or preemptive war, a concept championed by Adolph Hitler.

Writing as "a Catholic author," Bacevich says that "the counterweight [to this action] ought to have been the Roman Catholic

Church...[which] was eminently well-positioned to put its stamp on public policy." It failed to do so. Bacevich puts major blame on the pathetic Catholic hierarchy. I put it on the all-too-mute American Catholic theologians who succor the military with their "just war" euphemisms. We can also direct the "j'accuse" at the seduced and so-called "Pro-Life" Catholic citizenry who gave Slaughtermaster Bush a solid majority of their votes in the last election.

... the 265 million people in the US give less [to developmental assistance] than Denmark's 5 million people.

Nothing more stirs the human will than the tincture of the sacred. The worst of madmen is a saint gone mad, said the poet, Alexander Pope. Wrap the sacred around evil policies, and you have added infinitely to their strength. And that is precisely the mission of the Protestant and Catholic Christian Right today. Their "piety" is their shame, and the poor and the peacemakers are their victims.

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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Contents of Religious Consultation Report

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America, the hypocrite

Americans bask in a marvelous self-image: a good and generous people, “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” “No,” says Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*. We are really the “land of penny-pinchers.”

Americans give 15¢ per day per person to help the poor of the world but spend 60¢ a day for soda.

Money is beautiful because of what it can do. Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University economist, estimates that spending \$2-3 billion a year on malaria might save more than one million lives each year — an amount that we spend in a couple of days on military kill-power. Says Professor Sachs, “*This is probably the best bargain on the planet.*”

Yet it is not a bargain that “America the Beautiful” is interested in. It is not a bargain the so-called “Pro-Life” people give a damn about.



Pro-Life abortions and morality

No decision for an abortion is moral unless it is Pro-Life. There are many life values, and sometimes other life values supersede the value of a fetus.

Cases from real life speak louder than books.

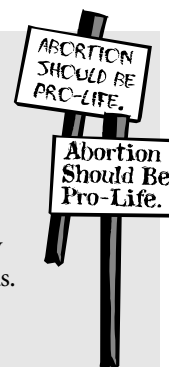
CASE # 1: A woman is two months pregnant when she discovers she has cancer and needs chemotherapy. The chemotherapy would be fatal to the fetus. She decides on an abortion. If you were this woman, or if this woman were your wife, your sister, or your daughter, would you be Pro-Choice for that abortion?

CASE # 2: A woman, in spite of her best contraceptive efforts, is pregnant. She has a serious heart condition, and two physicians tell her that continuing the pregnancy would likely cause her death. She chooses to abort. If you were this woman, or if this woman were your wife, your sister, or your daughter, would you be Pro-Choice for that abortion?

CASE # 3: A woman who suffers from a serious bi-polar condition discovers she is pregnant. The medicine she requires to function everyday would damage the development of the fetus. She chooses abortion. If you were this woman or if this woman were your wife, your sister, or your daughter, would you be Pro-Choice for that abortion?

If you were at the clinic when these women arrived for their abortions, would you join the pickets in insulting them and calling them murderers? Or would you see women who made serious decisions for Pro-Life abortions?

What it comes down to is this: if a woman is pregnant and wants to terminate that pregnancy for good medical, psychological, economic, or other reasons, should we force her to stay pregnant? Should we bring in the federal and state government to control her and her pregnancy? Neither Democrats nor Republicans should want that kind of coercion and governmental intrusion. In a fascist state, it would be understandable; not in a democracy.



PROGRESS REPORT: Participating Scholars gather at Villanova

The Consultation has two ongoing projects at this time:

- **The Religious Roots of Violence Against Women**
- **Heterosexism: Roots and Cures in World Religions**

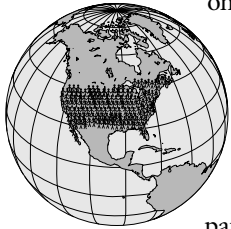
Both projects will look for cures to solve these problems in those same religions. Scholars from these projects came together last summer at the Villanova Conference Center at Villanova University to complete their plans for publication of their work.

Note: **The Violence Against Women** project has also received funding to film a one-hour video documentary. Filming has already begun in Thailand.



Pew poll results — taking America's pulse on social issues

As nominees for the Supreme Court appeared in the news, they once again enlivened the American conversation. At issue: human rights and personal freedom. The legality of these issues teeters precariously as the makeup of the Supreme Court changes. The greatest fear? That the new court will base its decisions on the political climate or religious ideology rather than the Constitution and the intent of the law.



Last July, two Pew Research Center for The People & The Press polls gathered some interesting numbers on how Americans felt about the big issues that Supreme Court nominees stir up. Here is what those who participated in the Pew poll said:

ABORTION. Views have not changed much. A majority of Americans (65%) still support a woman's right to end a pregnancy. People support the *Roe v. Wade* decision, but nearly 75% believe some restrictions should apply. For example, large majorities of all religiously affiliated respondents and approximately two-thirds of those who do not attend church felt parental consent must be obtained for girls under the age of 18.

68% of white evangelical Protestants reject abortion. They maintain it should be allowed only in situations of rape, incest, or where the procedure will save a woman's life.

THE MORNING-AFTER PILL. 52% are in favor of women being able to purchase a morning-after pill without a prescription. 37% are opposed.

GAY UNIONS. Slightly more than half (53%) of Americans support civil unions as a means to give gay couples the legal rights afforded married couples. However, these same respondents still oppose sanctifying these unions in marriage.

STEM-CELL RESEARCH. Support is growing. 70% of Protestants, 61% of white Catholics, and 77% of those who do not attend church are in favor of the research. Among evangelical Protestants, however, only about one-third favor stem-cell research.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE. Slightly more than half of Americans (51%) agree that the law should allow doctors to give terminally ill patients a means to end their lives.

END-OF-LIFE ISSUES. 74% of respondents said that the Congress should not have become involved in the Shiavo case. Even 69% of white evangelicals, 68% of conservatives, and 65% of Republicans said that this is not a Congressional matter.

ISSUES IMPORTANT TO LIBERALS. The threat to abortion is the most important issue that liberals fear as the Supreme Court changes.

ISSUES IMPORTANT TO CONSERVATIVES. Political conservatives and white evangelicals have two concerns that rank nearly as high as their concerns about abortion: court rulings on the rights of detained terrorist suspects and the right to display religious symbols on government sites.

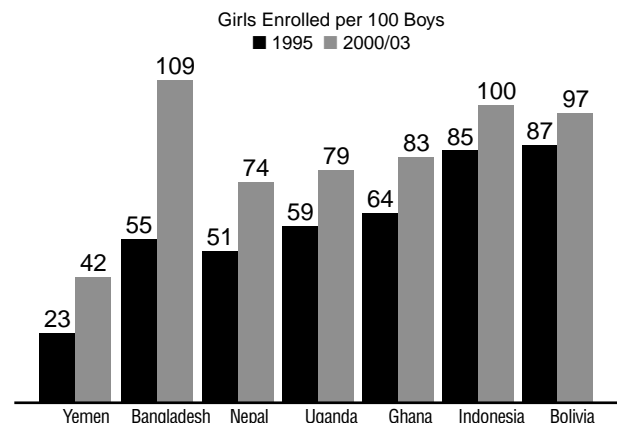
Sacred Choices video documentary available

The Consultation has produced a 55-minute video, **Sacred Choices and Abortion: Ten New Things to Think About.** It is available on request for \$10.00 in DVD or VHS formats, in English or in Spanish. To order, phone the office at (414) 962-3166, email us at orders@igc.org, or fax (414) 962-9248.



In 10 insightful segments, the video explores "the big lie"... that religion is opposed to a woman's right to choose. The video, made possible by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, reframes the debate over reproductive rights within the context of the world's religious cultures.

The Gender Gap in Secondary Schooling Is Closing in Many Countries



Note: Figures for 2000/03 are those of the latest available year.

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Database; UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1996.

The Religious Right...They're creeping into your bedroom

As the names and faces change in the Supreme Court, there are those who warn that Americans should be worrying about more than abortion rights. The Religious Right is beginning to infiltrate the nation's bedrooms, denying a citizen's right to privacy.

These Rightists are unimpressed with the fact that 94% of Americans consider contraception a moral act. They ignore the fact that Emergency Contraception prevents unwanted pregnancies and thus prevents abortion. Still, the Religious Right doesn't like it, and, fascists that they are, they want to prevent all American women from using it. According to **A Clinician's Guide to Providing Emergency Contraceptive Pills**, these pills "prevent pregnancy by delaying ovulation, inhibiting fertilization and/or preventing implantation." They are most effective when taken within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse. The sooner the better. They are not abortifacients. "They will not be effective if a pregnancy is already established."

Cynthia Tucker, the Editorial Page editor of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports that Emergency Contraception (EC) has been studied and proven to be safe and effective in preventing pregnancy. Yet the Food & Drug Administration has refused to approve EC as an over-the-counter device, to be purchased like condoms. Those who support EC argue that it should be taken as soon as possible after sexual intercourse. Seeing a doctor and getting a prescription might not be feasible.

Why would the FDA refuse to approve this "safe and effective" contraceptive as an over-the-counter product? Because groups like Stop Planned Parenthood allege that this contraceptive is "designed to kill human beings." That may be their opinion, but it's not science.

Yet this distorted mix of wrong-headedness and Right-Wing religious zeal is finding supporters and spreading to other areas of birth control. Ms. Tucker writes that women are beginning to report that some pharmacists are now refusing to fill perfectly legal prescriptions for contraceptives. Women say that they have been interrogated as pharmacists try to ascertain facts that would sanction the purchase: for example, whether or not the woman is married. If the customer passes the test, proving herself a "legitimate" user of the prescription — whatever that may be — the transaction is completed. Essentially, in these instances, a woman's right to fill a prescription comes down to her making a good enough impression on the pharmacist. It's a game of chance.

This intrusion into a woman's privacy is bad enough. But now this concern for guarding a woman's moral welfare is being taken on by a government agency. The FDA is supposed to base its decisions on data. Instead, it seems, the FDA's decisions are being influenced by extremists whose ideological agenda seems to outweigh the results of scientific testing.

It's a dangerous and slippery slope we're on. Cynthia Tucker likens the movement to a US Taliban, a group who wants to impose on others their harsh 10th-century philosophy.



Women's rights progress in Saudi Arabia

The religious authorities in Saudi Arabia have declared that the practice of compelling women to marry against their will is "not permissible" under Islamic law. Saudi women have long been coerced into marrying men chosen by their fathers. A woman's wish to marry a man not chosen by her father has held no sway.

Fact: Nearly half of Saudi marriages ends in divorce. Arranged marriages are thought to contribute to this high divorce rate.

With this new decision to honor a woman's wishes, fathers who attempt to coerce their daughters into marriage will now be jailed if the law is observed. They will not be released until they agree to respect their daughter's views.

This new mandate is a major step for women's rights in a country where a conservative interpretation of Islamic Sharia law

has imposed a variety of restrictions. Saudi women must wear a veil. They are not permitted to travel alone. They cannot be in the company of men other than their relatives. Until 2001, women could not own an identity card. Now they may file for such a card, but only if a male relative permits the application. Women are barred from voting or holding public office. (Saudi Arabia is lucky that the US doesn't invade countries for reasons like these.)

However, there is another sign of the progress of women's rights in the Saudi kingdom: In June, the ban was lifted on working in most jobs outside the home.

Source: *Saudi Arabia Bans Forced Marriage*, BBC News, April 12, 2005



Update: Obstetric fistula — educating men in Niger

Several issues ago (Volume 7, No.1), this newsletter covered the widespread problem of obstetric fistula in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some glimmer of hope seems to be emerging in Niger.

The problem

Young girls, victims of their culture and powerless to reject their father's or family's will, are forced to marry. When they get pregnant, it's a case of children having children. The bodies of these young girls are too immature to manage a successful labor. Their pelvises are too small, and so the baby cannot pass through the birth canal. Other factors — like large or poorly positioned babies — can further complicate the labor

As a result, the obstructed labor stops the blood supply from reaching the vagina, bladder, and/or rectum. The tissue dies and rots. The mother is left with an uncontrolled flow of urine and feces.

Their babies dead, the girls now must live with the stench of their wrecked bodies. Abandoned by husbands, ostracized from villages and families, the girls find themselves outcasts. Socially repugnant and uneducated, they have nowhere to go.

The culture

Early pregnancies and home births are not the only causes of obstetric fistula. In Niger, as in other African nations, the culture dictates that very young girls marry — and that frequently, they marry much older men. Many girls meet their husbands



at the marriage ceremony. Some girls are married off because now that they are menstruating, "it's time." For other girls, their families marry them off early so that the girls do not get pregnant out of wedlock. For still others, families wish to rid themselves of the economic burden of daughters.

Although Islam does not encourage early marriage, many Muslim leaders continue to influence communities in that direction. Moreover, when a girl is married, Islam considers the marriage valid even if she has not yet reached puberty.

Working for change

While the United Nations Population Fund and other NGOs have begun programs to care for girls with obstetric fistula, Niger has begun a grassroots movement to *prevent* the condition, rather than try to fix it. The aim is to overcome poverty and ignorance by educating men — fathers and potential husbands — about the appropriate ages for girls to marry.

The Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger established The National Forum on Early Marriage in Niger. The United Nations Children's Fund helped orchestrate this meeting.

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The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that meeting the contraceptive needs of these 201 million women would prevent —

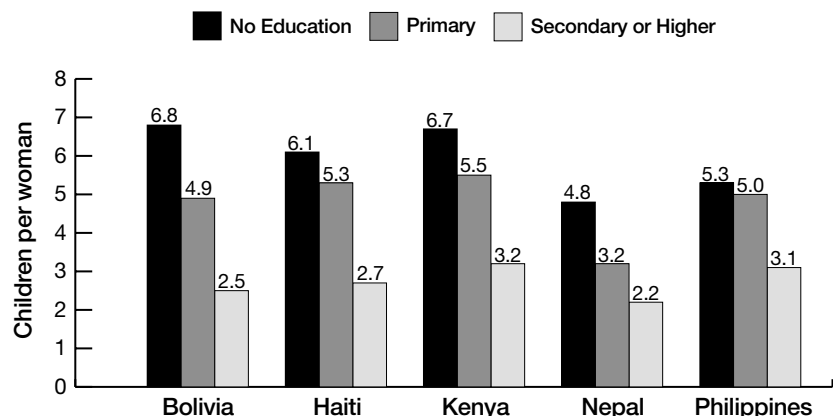
- 23 million unplanned births
- 22 million induced abortions
- 142,000 pregnancy-related deaths
- 1.4 million infant deaths

Providing family planning services is a simple and effective way to improve the lives of women and children everywhere.

Source: Population Connection, Sept. 2005

Average Number of Children per Woman by Educational Level

Source: Demographic and Health Surveys 2000-2003.

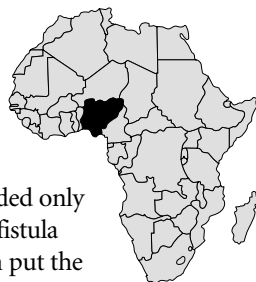


At the end of the gathering, the group decided to call upon the traditional broadcasters in Niger to carry the group's message across the land. These broadcasters included traditional storytellers, Islamic religious figures, blacksmiths, hairdressers, and butchers. Observers are guardedly optimistic because, in some places, the message is being accepted. What could it mean?

- Fathers who stop pressing early marriages, understanding that such unions expose their daughters to risk.
- Fathers who, therefore, might keep their daughters in school instead of marrying them off. A trend that could immeasurably improve the country in many ways.
- Girls who may, for the first time, have the opportunity to get an education. Currently 50.1% of boys attend primary schools vs. only 33.3% of girls.
- Future husbands who might postpone marriages to spare their wives the risk of fistula.

Prevention is the key, says doctor in neighboring Nigeria

Caesarian sections, surgical procedures that have eradicated fistula in wealthy countries, are out of the question in impoverished African nations. Two years of fundraising by the United Nations Population Fund has yielded only \$11 million to grapple with the obstetric fistula problem. The World Health Organization put the number of untreated fistulas in Sub-Saharan Africa at 2 million, and that was 16 years ago. Nigeria alone claims 400,000-800,000 — and those are only the *reported cases*.



One Dutch physician, Dr. Waaldijk, who toils nine months a year in rural Nigeria, has single-handedly repaired 15,000 fistulas in 22 years. Nigeria (population 137 million) has eight fistula repair facilities. Dr. Waaldijk has trained 300 physicians for these centers. However, once trained, many of the doctors leave Nigeria to find better pay in wealthier nations. In Mozambique, three surgeons repair fistulas in a population of 17 million.

Without prevention and male education, even those girls who are lucky enough to have their obstetric fistulas repaired run the risk of tearing holes in their bodies again with another pregnancy.

As Dr. Waaldijk says, *“To be a woman in Africa is a terrible thing.”* To learn more about Dr. Waaldijk and the story of Nigerian women, see nytimes.com, September 28, 2005, *Nightmare for African Women: Birthing Injury and Little Help* by Sharon La Franiere.

“Approximately 201 million women around the world would like to delay or avoid having a child, but lack the effective contraception.”

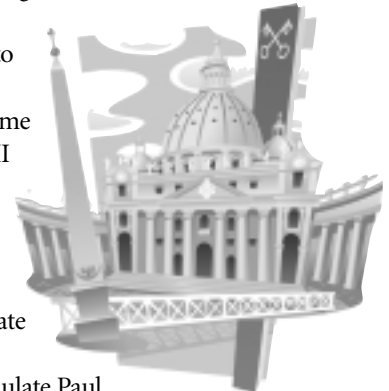
Source: Population Connection, Sept. 2005

The legacy of John Paul II

Thomas Cahill, well-known author, posted a powerful OP-ED column in the *New York Times* on April 5, 2005. The article, *The Price of Infallibility*, reviewed Roman

Catholic papacies over the ages. Here are some highlights of Mr. Cahill's observations with regard to John Paul II.

Despite taking the name of John Paul I, John Paul II shared little with his predecessor. John Paul I congratulated the parents of the first test-tube baby — hardly something the late pope would do.



Nor did this pope emulate Paul VI, who, “though painfully cautious, allowed the appointment of bishops (and especially archbishops and cardinals) who were the opposite of yes men, outspoken champions of the poor and oppressed and truly representative of the parts of the world they came from.”

True, John Paul II may have been a powerful political figure who sallied forth into the world and battled Communism. However, John Paul II was not anything like John XXIII, a pope who tried to drag the church into the modern world and undo the antiquated and backward papacies that preceded him. John XXIII, like Peter in the early church, was inclusionary — celebrating all God's children.

John Paul II found reasons to exclude the voices of those groups within the church whose beliefs or behaviors did not follow party lines. Says Cahill, “John Paul II's most lasting legacy to Catholicism will come from the episcopal appointments he made. In order to have been named a bishop, a priest must have been seen to be absolutely opposed to masturbation, premarital sex, birth control (including condoms used to prevent the spread of AIDS), abortion, divorce, homosexual relations, married priests, female priests and any hint of Marxism. It is nearly impossible to find men who subscribe wholeheartedly to this entire catalogue of certitudes; as a result the ranks of the episcopate are filled with mindless sycophants and intellectual incompetents.”

But popes who are hard-line disciplinarians don't want participation or group effort. They prefer obedience and a solid, albeit small, core of extremely loyal of followers. And now former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the new pope, selected from John Paul II's closely selected minions will continue the legacy: a tight-fisted adherence to rules and exclusion.

THE IRISH TIMES

MAY 27, 2005

WWW.IRELAND.COM

Catholic theologian tells of Pro-Choice tradition

CHRISTINE NEWMAN

The Catholic Church has a little-known, strong Pro-Choice tradition on abortion, a leading US theologian said in Dublin yesterday.

Dr Daniel C. Maguire, a Catholic theologian and professor of moral theological ethics at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, said the Roman Catholic position on abortion was pluralistic.

He said it had a strong Pro-Choice tradition and a conservative anti-choice tradition. Neither was official, and neither was more Catholic than the other.

In an interview with The Irish Times ahead of giving an address on The Hidden Tradition of Abortion last night, Dr Maguire said all the world religions had Pro-Choice and no-choice views.

“What would be very good for the US and for Ireland would be to get this abortion bone out of the Catholic throat, and realise that Jesus did not found an organisation to condemn contraception, abortion and stem-cell research.”

That was not the definition of the Jesus mission. In fact, those issues were totally unmentioned and were not part of the tradition whatsoever.

He said the Bible did not condemn abortion, and scriptures did not touch it at all.

Abortions were going on since the foundation of the church. St Antoninus was the first Catholic to write extensively on abortion. He was Pro-Choice for early abortions where necessary to save the woman's life. There was a large acceptance of this. There was no hubbub, and he was considered a very holy man.

St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas both held that the early embryo foetus had the moral status of a plant, a vegetative soul, and then as it developed it had an animal soul. They did not know when the soul was there but the common view was when there was quickening.

“The idea of a little cluster of stem cells being a person goes against the longest Christian tradition in existence, and makes no sense at all.”

Things began to change to a stricter regime in the 19th century as the Church began to realise that its world view was collapsing around it. There was more communication, other viewpoints and the solidities were disappearing.

Recently the Vatican and conservative Muslims were “buddy-buddy” in the UN on one issue,



Reporter Christine Newman and theologian Dan Maguire

abortion. “My analysis, fallible as it is, is they're not suddenly worried about foetuses; it's a different threat and that is liberated women. I think the liberation of woman poses a threat to these two patriarchies.”

He said fundamentalism in any religion was always misogynistic. It feared mutuality between the genders.

Dr Maguire said women who have had abortions should not feel they were no longer good Catholics. The killers of the species have been mainly men.

“It's good news. I'm not here to promote irresponsible sex, but to promote respect for women and respect for their choices.”

Is abortion murder?

Murder is the unjust killing of a person.

So can you murder a fetus?

Not unless it is a person.

The longest view on this issue in the Christian tradition is that the fetus is not a person until it is fully “formed.” St. Augustine held that, early on, the fetus has the moral status of a plant.

St. Thomas Aquinas said all life has a soul. According to Aquinas, the early fetus has a vegetable soul; when the fetus develops a bit more, it has the moral status of an animal. Only when it is “formed” could God infuse a spiritual soul. When is that?

Catholic philosophers Daniel Dombrowski and Daniel Deltete from the Jesuit Seattle University say that modern science would put a fully formed fetus at around six or seven months. Religions hold similar views. (See *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*, Oxford University Press, 2003 and *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*, Fortress Press, 2001.)

The modern argument is often heard that the fetus is “potential life.” That’s wrong.

The fetus is real life. It just has not reached personal status. The fetus is potentially a person, but the potential is not actual. After all, gentle reader, you and I are potentially dead but would not like to be treated as if that potentiality were fulfilled. Personhood was potential in the early evolutionary process. Even if some extraterrestrial being killed one of the highly developed species that predated humans, the act may have been wrong, but it was not murder.

There exist serious and justifying reasons for ending pre-personal fetal life. The decision on that belongs naturally to the woman who carries that life. Women have a far better track record than men when it comes to cherishing and protecting life. Let’s leave abortion decisions up to them.

Reversible birth control for men

A way for men to help out with birth control.

The IVD, the Intra Vas Device, is the first implantable — and reversible — male contraceptive. In a seven-minute procedure, which takes place in a doctor’s

office and uses a local anesthetic, surgeons make a small opening in each vas deferens tube, the duct that carries the sperm from the testicles to the male urethra. The tubes are then capped shut using 2.5 cm hollow silicone plugs. The plugs block the flow of sperm from the testicles to the penis.

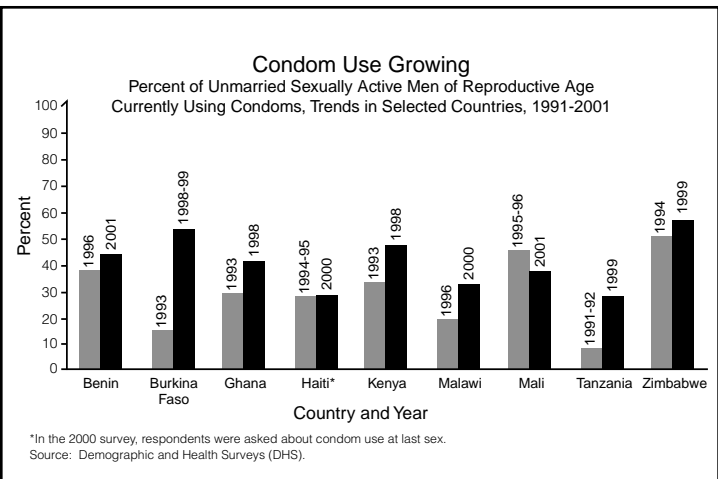
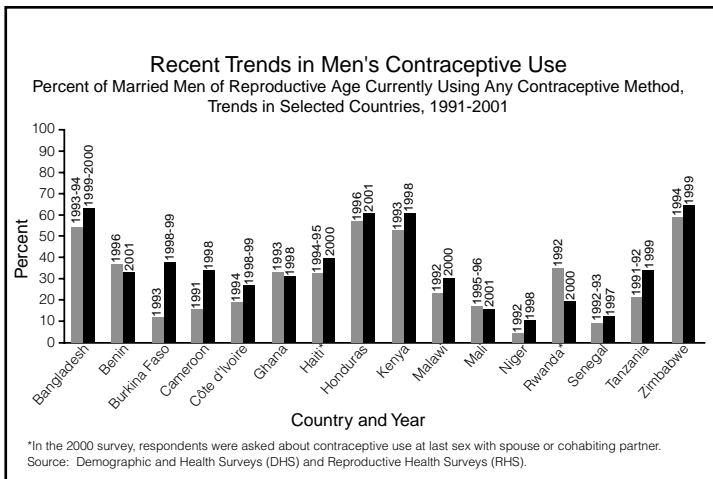


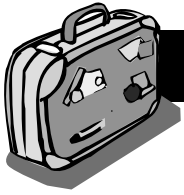
Vasectomies cut and cauterize the vas deferens tubes, permanently damaging them in most cases, resulting in permanent birth control. Not so with the IVD. These plugs can be removed, restoring the sperm flow.

So far, the IVD has succeeded in two primate studies and preliminary human trials. While removing the device has proved successful in primates, similar research on removal in humans has yet to be completed.

Shepherd Medical, the US company that owns the patent on the IVD, has been awarded a \$1.4 million grant from the US National Institutes of Health to perform clinical trials this year. The tests will take place in Seattle for 18 months under FDA-approved conditions.

If all goes well, the data may open the door to European, US, and Canadian markets. Scientifically, the IVD could prove a gigantic step in the area of family planning.





MOVERS & SHAKERS ...

Activities of our Participating Scholars



Kelly Brown Douglas has written a new book, *What's Faith Got to Do With It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005.

Hsiao-Lan Hu. Her recent book, *Taoism*, has been published by Chelsea House Publications (January, 2005).



Ben Hubbard has written an article, *The Impact of Religion on Western Culture: A Mixed Legacy in Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism*: 6 (2005), pp. 55-66. After serving for 15 years as chair of the Department of Comparative Religion at California State University-Fullerton, Ben has stepped down.

Mary E. Hunt and **Radhika Balakrishna**, co-editors of *Good Sex: Feminist Wisdom from the World's Religions*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) are celebrating the third printing of the book.



Patti Jung was promoted to full professor last spring and was recently appointed co-editor of the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*.

She has also published, *The Call to Wed: A Catholic Case for Same-Sex Marriage, Liturgy*. Volume 20, no. 3, 2005: 31-42.

In addition, Patti's book, *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), was translated and published in Portuguese as *Diversidade Sexual e Catolicismo*. Adail Ubirajara Sobral, Trans. Sno Paulo, Brazil: Ediçes Loyola, 2005.



Paul Knitter's essay won the Catholic Press Association's "Best Essay/Scholarly Journal" award in May 2005. The essay: *The Vocation of an Interreligious Theologian: My Retrospective on Forty Years in Dialogue*, *Horizons*, 31/1 (2004) 135-49.

In September, Orbis Books published *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, which Paul edited.

The book gathers the best papers from an international/interreligious conference at the University of Birmingham, which Paul organized together with John Hick. The book shows that there are resources in all the religious traditions to move beyond claims of any one religion being "the one and only" or "the best."

Judith Plaskow has published *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics 1972-2003* (Beacon Press).



Liu Xiaogan has just completed the manuscript of his book *The Laozi from the Ancient to the Modern: Comparative Studies of the Five Versions, including Introductory Analyses and Criticisms (with Comparative Concordance)*, which is prefaced by Ying-shih Yu, Donald J. Munro, and Lao Sze-kwang. The book is in press by the China Social Sciences Publisher (Beijing). Liu is the founding director of the **Research Centre for Chinese Philosophy and Culture** in the Department of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The research centre was inaugurated in May this year. It organizes and promotes exploration and research in new issues and new methods in the study of Chinese philosophy and culture.



Notes from Knitter



Travels of a retired Participating Scholar

While Participating Scholar Paul Knitter is officially “retired,” he doesn’t seem to have slowed down much. Here’s a quick update on Paul’s most recent activities.

Dateline: Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. From June 23 to July 10, Paul participated with seven other US scholars in a State Department-sponsored visit to Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The trip was part of an exchange program intended to promote a conversation, rather than a clash, of civilizations between Muslim leaders from South Asia and Christians and Jews from the USA.

Paul reports that in all conversations, their group heard comments that South Asian participants deeply appreciated that the American government would support a program intended to listen to what Muslims have to say. Yet at the same time, attendees expressed consternation and anger at the policies of the Bush administration, especially in Iraq. “Your government is turning many in the Muslim world against the United States!” was the repeated message.

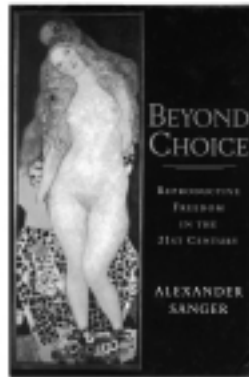
The visiting Americans were able to console their South Asian Muslim friends with the fact that a large and growing number of US citizens agree with such criticism of Bush policies.

On Roman Catholicism: September 7-17th found Paul meeting with about 15 Roman Catholic theologians in Bangalore, India. Funded privately and meeting independently of the Vatican, the group has gathered annually over the past three years seeking to reach a consensus on a Catholic theology of religions that would support an authentic dialogue. The group — representing all points on the spectrum of Roman Catholic theology from the most conservative (mostly from Europe) to the most progressive (mostly from Asia) — was not able to attain a consensus. “For the moment,”

Paul concluded, “the practice of interreligious dialogue within the Catholic local communities is way ahead of the official theology of religions of the Magisterium.”



BOOK NEWS



Beyond Choice

In the tradition of his grandmother, Margaret Sanger, Alex Sanger is challenging us to look in a new way at a woman’s reproductive freedom. **Beyond Choice** contends that the Pro-Choice movement must re-think its message

if it is to have political success and then gives a thorough outline of why and how to change the rhetoric. Well researched and readable, **Beyond Choice** should be required reading for both Pro-Choice and Pro-Life supporters.

– Governor Christine Todd Whitman

Feminists for Life = feminists for control

The *Nation’s* Katha Pollitt was accused by Feminists For Life of saying that a feminist cannot oppose abortion.

Pollitt’s response: “*Actually what I said was that a feminist could not force another woman to bear a child. A feminist can certainly oppose abortion for herself, and probably many do. The question is whether a feminist can favor substituting her will and beliefs and judgment in this most personal matter for that of the woman who is actually having the experience and must bear its consequences. Can a feminist say, ‘You must have that baby no matter what you want, and I’m devoting myself to making sure that if you do abort, it will be as dangerous and humiliating as possible?’*”

“*Can a feminist say that to a 12 year old? A rape victim? A woman in poor health? A woman who already has all the kids she can manage? A woman who feels with every fiber of her being that she is not able or ready to be a mother? That doesn’t sound like sisterhood to me.*” (*The Nation*, October 10, 2005, p. 25)

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