

Documentation

**Women
Religions
Europe**
Exploring an
intriguing
relationship

**Seminar
May 18th, 2007**

Kongresshotel am Templiner See
Am Luftschiffhafen 1
D- 14471 Potsdam



European Women's Lobby
Lobby européen des femmes



This event was sponsored by



Bundesministerium
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen
und Jugend

“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

Programme

- 11.00 – 11.20 Welcome**
by the President of the National Council of German Women's Organisations, **Brunhilde Raiser** and by EWL President, **Kirsti Kolthoff**
- 11.20 – 11.30 Introduction**
with regard to EWL's position paper “Religion and Women's Human Rights”, **Annette Lawson**, former EWL Vice-President
- 11.30 – 12.00 Presentation**
“The role of religions in Europe's development with a particular focus on the consequences for women”
Speaker: **Prof. Dr. Christina von Braun**, professor at Humboldt University in Berlin
- 12.00 – 13.00 Discussion**
Moderator: **Henny Engels**, Nat. Council of German Women's Org.
- 13.00 – 14.30 Lunch**
- 14.30 – 15.45 Session I “Religions, fundamentalism and women”**
Introduction: **Michèle Vianès**, Secretary General of Coordination française du Lobby Européen des Femmes (CLEF)
Moderator: **Margot Papenheim**, Consultant of the Evangelischen Frauenhilfe in Deutschland (EFHiD)
- 15.45 – 16.15 Coffee break**
- 16.15 – 17.30 Session II “Religions and stereotypes”**
Introduction: **June Jacobs**, Member of EWL Executive Committee, International Council of Jewish Women
Moderator: **Colette De Troy**, EWL
- 17.30 – 18.30 Final panel discussion**
“Securing Women's Rights in Europe –
with, without or against religions?”
Speakers: **Christina von Braun, Michèle Vianès, June Jacobs**
Kirsti Kolthoff, Brunhilde Raiser
Moderator: **Inge v. Bönninghausen**, Journalist, Bergisch-Gladbach



Adopted, 27 May 2006

Religion and Women's Human Rights

Position paper of the European Women's Lobby

The **European Women's Lobby (EWL)** is a non-governmental umbrella organisation (NGO) bringing together women's NGOs from 25 Member States of the European Union and accession countries, as well as from 18 European-wide and international organisations.

EWL's mission is to work together to achieve equality between women and men, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, to ensure respect for women's human rights and to eradicate violence against women. Hence EWL documents ways in which the achievement of these goals is impeded by any trends and calls for changes that will remove barriers to their achievement. *In particular, concerns expressed by EWL members about a perceived stronger influence on governments of religious argumentation with respect to women's role and gender equality has led to this position paper.*

Our task is to continue to name, expose and condemn those practices that violate women's rights and silence women's voices wherever they may be. EWL refers to those areas in which cultural and religious practices and in some instances, legal practices, continue systematically to discriminate against women and the girl child either directly or indirectly, excluding them from public and political life, denying them equal rights to economic independence, including in marriage, divorce and inheritance and denying women's rights to autonomy in matters of sexual and reproductive choice and health. All of these practices should be named for what they are, i.e. violations of women's human rights and should never be placed within a cultural context that at the end of the day conceals the reality under a cultural mask. In the face of this, the challenge is great but not insurmountable.

Growing importance of religious power in Europe

EWL observes that a more conservative political climate over the past decade in Europe and globally has led to a growth in the influence of religion – **all** religions – in Europe. EWL recognises the threat religions play in refusing to question patriarchal cultures which hold up the role of wife, mother and housewife as the ideal and refuse to adopt positive measures in favour of women, for example in parliamentary elections.¹ This is particularly marked however, in relation to two of the major religions – Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, but also more fundamentalist, protestant strands, and Islam.

EWL is not concerned with the faith to which any one may adhere and regards religious freedom as well as the freedom **not** to believe in any divine being as essential human rights. EWL acknowledges that many women find comfort and wisdom in their faith and would not wish to

¹ The Council of Europe has similarly drawn attention to this phenomenon – Doc. 10670, 16 September 2005 and 1464 (2005)

undermine this positive experience. EWL also recognises that religious influences may be progressive, for example when tolerance and equality are part of the teaching. And EWL is fully aware that traditions or cultural practices that are harmful or violate human rights have developed that are closely associated with religious commands but may not directly be attributable to them. None the less, EWL is concerned that religion is impacting on European and national level policies in ways which undermine equality between women and men, and curtails women's access to and enjoyment of their basic human rights.

Religion – used as justification for infringements of women's human rights

The argument is frequently made by religious authorities and by adherents that discriminatory actions are not to be found within the faith – that is, in the revered books, such as the Bible or the Koran. None the less religion is used to justify commandments directed only at women such as dress codes that render them invisible, that require the shaving of the head, that restrict the movement of women outside and inside the home, the holding of positions of authority within the churches as ministers or priests and outside in places of work and organisations and to deny them access to education or to work outside the home and to fulfil their potential in all walks of life.

The most painful violations occur often in relation to marriage and the family – especially a woman's rights to choose her own partner or not to choose at all, to bear or not bear children and to choose the number and spacing of them, to divorce or not, and on divorce, to enjoy the same rights and privileges as her husband. One example of the latter is the withholding of the certificate of religious divorce for women in orthodox Judaism. The divorcing husband is free to live his life while his wife remains tied to him and he may bargain for payments to be made to him before he will release her under Jewish law.

Indeed religions worldwide seek to control female sexuality and condemn women's expression and enjoyment of their sexuality routinely with much greater harshness than that of men. Most religions also condemn all sexual relationships except those between a woman and her husband – women in some societies may still be stoned for adultery and/or killed for so-called "honour crimes". And only heterosexuality is condoned.

Furthermore, doctrine in almost all religions is developed only by men so that:

“...half of Europe's population (the female half) has scant or no opportunity to influence religious doctrine. [Hence the] more religious influence we (...) allow to seep back into our societies and our political decision-making processes, the less representative and the less respectful of women's rights the resulting policies and practices will tend to be.”²

The Framework of Human Rights Instruments

EWL holds governments to the commitments made by all European and States Parties of the United Nations, in the Beijing Platform for Action, in Human Rights instruments globally and in

² Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly Doc. 10670 *Explanatory memorandum by Mrs Zapfl-Helbling*, para 36

the ECE region and especially in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). *At no time will EWL accept cultural relativism when the argument may be made that a violation of women's rights is decreed by faith and culture and is therefore exempt from human rights concerns.*³

In particular, EWL insists on a woman's right to bodily integrity and freedom from violence and on her right to reproductive choice, health care and services. *Her right to form partnerships and marry, to choose the timing and number of her children and to take steps to meet these goals may not be impeded.*

Actions needed to support the values and principles of the European Union for equality between women and men and global human rights including among NGOs

EWL and its members have become alarmed by the presence of certain ultra-conservative religious lobby groups, who may be identified as fundamentalists, seeking to exercise influence, for example within the EU and at the United Nations, especially targeting the annual Commission on the Status of Women, against rights won with great difficulty over time that enable women's equality and empowerment. Both moderate religious organisations and women's organisations seek to safeguard, not to undermine, policies and practice globally and within the EU that carry forward the mandate and implement intrinsic values of the Union for equality between women and men as well as enabling access to human rights.

EWL's support for the Council of Europe Report and Resolution

EWL therefore strongly supports the Council of Europe's report and resolution, **Women and religion in Europe**⁴. The resolution is given in Annexe to this paper.

In particular, EWL strongly supports the statement:

*"Freedom of religion cannot be accepted as a pretext to justify violations of women's rights, be they open, subtle, legal or illegal, practiced with or without the nominal consent of the victims – women."*⁵

EWL Demands

EWL consequently calls on EU Member States to:

- Implement the Council of Europe Resolution *immediately*
- Promote an inter-religious dialogue on all levels in order to create a common ethical platform honouring the basic principle of equality between women and men
- Condemn any form of religious practice that results in the violation of women's human rights.
- Identify and implement measures to assist and protect women who are victims of religious practice that violates their rights.

³ Also highlighted by the Council of Europe, Declaration of Messina, 12 November 2005, which recommends that all players in society should recognize that respect for cultural differences must not be allowed to serve as a pretext for justifying the violation of the rights of women and girls.

⁴ **Doc. 10670**, 16 September 2005 and 1464 (2005), *Text adopted by the Assembly on 4 October 2005* (26th Sitting). For resolution, see Annexe to this paper.

⁵ *Ibid*, paragraph 5

- Inform women who are victims of religious practice that violates their rights about these rights and put preventative measures in place.
- Prohibit and punish practices for which justification is claimed on religious grounds and which damage a woman's physical integrity and basic human rights, whether this practice takes place within the borders of the EU or in third countries.
- Condemn and punish genital mutilation, honour crimes and any form of violence, in particular domestic violence, carried out in the name of religion and enact legislation to prohibit and criminalize these practices.
- Within religious schools and where religious education is permitted in schools, ensure that this teaching is in conformity with gender equality principles.
- Guarantee, maintain and promote the sexual and reproductive rights of all women without religious or cultural distinctions; provide information about the risks of sexual diseases such as AIDS and detail every woman's right to the integrity of her own body.
- Ensure women are recognised as entitled to rights in their own capacity and not indirectly through their father, husband, other relative or any other person(s) – i.e. recognise the individualisation of women's rights in all areas.
- **Guarantee and facilitate political asylum in the European Union Member States for all women who are victims of or who are threatened with persecution linked to religious practice in their country.**
- Guarantee strong support for Women's NGOs fighting against religious oppression.
- Consider demonstrable respect for women's rights as a condition for aid in partner countries at international level and within EU foreign and development aid policies.
- Seek to guarantee the supremacy of basic freedoms and rights by ensuring a clear separation between Church and State.

* * *

Annexe

The Council of Europe resolution below was passed in October 2005:

Resolution 1464 (2005)¹

Women and religion in Europe

1. In the lives of many European women, religion continues to play an important role. Whether they are believers or not, most women are affected in one way or another by the attitude of different faiths towards women, directly or through their traditional influence on society or the State.
2. This influence is seldom benign: women's rights are often curtailed or violated in the name of religion. While most religions teach equality of women and men before God, they attribute different roles to women and men on earth. Religiously motivated gender stereotypes have conferred upon men a sense of superiority which has led to discriminatory treatment of women by men and even violence at their hands.
3. At one end of the spectrum lie the extreme violations of women's human rights such as so-called "honour" crimes, forced marriages and female genital mutilation, which – although still rare in Europe – are on the rise in some communities.
4. At the other end are more subtle and less spectacular forms of intolerance and discrimination which are much more widespread in Europe – and which can be just as effective in achieving the subjection of women, such as the refusal to put into question a patriarchal culture which holds up the role of wife, mother and housewife as the ideal, and the refusal to adopt positive measures in favour of women (for example, in parliamentary elections).
5. All women living in Council of Europe member states have a right to equality and dignity in all areas of life. Freedom of religion cannot be accepted as a pretext to justify violations of women's rights, be they open or subtle, legal or illegal, practised with or without the nominal consent of the victims – women.
6. It is the duty of the member states of the Council of Europe to protect women against violations of their rights in the name of religion and to promote and fully implement gender equality. States must not accept any religious or cultural relativism of women's human rights. They must not agree to justify discrimination and inequality affecting women on grounds such as physical or biological differentiation based on or attributed to religion. They must fight against religiously motivated stereotypes of female and male roles from an early age, including in schools.
7. The Parliamentary Assembly thus calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to:
 - 7.1. fully protect all women living in their country against all violations of their rights based on or attributed to religion by:
 - 7.1.1. putting into place and enforcing specific and effective policies to fight all violations of women's right to life, to bodily integrity, freedom of movement and free choice of partner, including so-called "honour" crimes, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, wherever and

by whomever they are committed, however they are justified, and regardless of the nominal consent of the victim; this means that freedom of religion is limited by human rights;

7.1.2. refusing to recognise foreign family codes and personal status laws based on religious principles which violate women's rights, and ceasing to apply them on their own soil, renegotiating bilateral treaties if necessary;

7.2. take a stand against violations of women's human rights justified by religious or cultural relativism everywhere in the world, including in international fora such as the United Nations or the Inter-Parliamentary Union;

7.3. guarantee the separation between the Church and the State which is necessary to ensure that women are not subjected to religiously inspired policies and laws (for example, in the area of family, divorce, and abortion law);

7.4. ensure that freedom of religion and respect for culture and tradition are not accepted as pretexts to justify violations of women's rights, including when underage girls are forced to submit to religious codes (including dress codes), their freedom of movement is curtailed or their access to contraception is barred by their family or community;

7.5. where religious education is permitted in schools, ensure that this teaching is in conformity with gender equality principles;

7.6. take a stand against any religious doctrine which is antidemocratic or disrespectful of human rights, especially women's rights, and refuse to allow such doctrines to influence political decision making;

7.7. actively promote respect of women's rights, equality and dignity in all areas of life when engaging in dialogue with representatives of different religions, and work on achieving full gender equality in society.

1. *Assembly debate* on 4 October 2005 (26th Sitting) (see Doc. 10670, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mrs Zapfl-Helbling).

Text adopted by the Assembly on 4 October 2005 (26th Sitting).

“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

Brunhilde Raiser

Brunhilde Raiser, born in 1953, studied German language and literature as well as Protestant theology and then worked as a teacher.

For over 25 years, she has been active in an honorary capacity for the Protestant Church, with her main focus on women's issues:

- Since 1979: active involvement in the field of women's aid, including joint programmes with women from Central and Eastern Europe
- Since 1996: Chairwoman of the *Evangelische Frauenhilfe Deutschland* (Federation of Protestant Women's Aid Organizations – EFD)
- 2000-2002: Acting Managing Director of the EFD
- Since 2000: Member of the Executive Committee of the *Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland* (National Council of Protestant Women's Organizations).

Brunhilde Raiser was elected President of the *Deutscher Frauenrat* (National Council of German Women's Organizations) in 2004, and has been a board member since 2000.

She is married to a minister, has three adult sons, and lives with her family in Mengen/Baden-Württemberg.

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Welcoming address given by Brunhilde Raiser, President of the *Deutscher Frauenrat* (National Council of German Women's Organizations)

Dear EWL President and Board Members, representatives of the *Deutscher Frauenrat*, and guests,

I am pleased to welcome you to our seminar here in Potsdam. Although Potsdam is not the capital of Germany, it is a wonderful city of such historical significance and so very close to Berlin that we can work to good effect here as well.

For many years now it has been a sound practice of the EWL Board to hold one of its seminars in the country which currently occupies the Presidency of the EU Council. We are therefore pleased and also a little proud to be able to continue this practice. At the beginning of the German presidency, namely, this did not appear possible. But thanks to some concerted efforts, as well as financial support from the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the combined forces of our offices in Brussels and Berlin, we have succeeded in carrying on this tradition.

- 1 Another sound practice is to hold the seminar on a major current issue also addressed at the EWL Board meeting. In May of 2006, the Board agreed on a position paper entitled "Religion and Women's Human Rights". This paper will form the basis for our discussion today.

Women – Religions – Europe: We wish to make progress in addressing this compelling and conflicted issue. Of course it will not be possible to illuminate it from all sides and thus to treat all aspects equally. I would ask you to keep this in mind – our speakers, and especially our main speaker Christina von Braun, also wanted this point to be emphasized in advance.

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As such, it is all the more important to proceed in a clear-sighted manner. Faiths, religions, denominations, registered religious organizations, and state-supported churches are not all the same. They have different perspectives and exert different influences – especially with respect to our topic, namely the human rights of women. It is important for us to listen carefully to each other, especially if our viewpoints or approaches differ from those of the speakers. This is the only way to acquire greater insight and the only way to identify the actual threats as well as obstacles and/or opposition to women's rights posed by religious communities – perhaps also by religions as such – and certainly by societies and decision-makers, both male and female, that use religion to justify specific policies.

A few words on the current significance of this topic:

In Germany we have launched a national "Integration Action Plan" which addresses, among other things, the influence of religion and culture on legislation. Debate over late-term abortion is constantly fanning the flames of the abortion issue as such. And we are also experiencing something close to a clash of cultures in the ideology-based controversy over state support for childcare facilities versus the call for mothers to stay at home with their children.

Directly or in many cases indirectly, all these questions are related to our topic today. Similar discussions – with the possible exception of the childcare dispute – are underway in other countries as well.

I therefore hope that we have a fruitful seminar that contributes to the work of the European Women's Lobby and the *Deutscher Frauenrat* in securing the rights of women as well as in forging the right alliances.

We will now hear from Kirsti Kolthoff, President of the European Women's Lobby.

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Kirsti Kolthoff

Started to work for equality between men and women 1967 - then elected to a position in the trade union for bank employees. Main issues: equal pay for men and women and to bring in more women in decision making on different levels. Held many high level posts within the trade union already as a young women with children and a husband then taking family responsibilities. Actively involved to raise awareness by arranging meetings, developing educational programs. From this time I called myself a feminist.

The professional career started 1962 in one of the biggest business banks in Sweden in the Foreign Affairs Department. Had a middle management position for several years. In 1976 employment as a Secretary (ombudsman) of the Financial Sector Union of Sweden with work including legal advising and consulting, training, organisation- and leadership development, negotiations, conflict resolutions with special responsibility for the managerial staff members. Participating in international work on the European level in Euro cadres and global levels in UNI.

Lives since 1995 in Stockholm after moving from Göteborg. Early retirement in 2003 to give more time to working for organisations as a volunteer as well as part time as a consultant in Communication, Conflict resolution and Creativity out from Women's perspective. Mother of two grown up boys, one lives in Stockholm and one is married and lives in Riga.

Studies in economics and finance management, several trade union training courses as well as University courses, such as labour laws, information technology, pedagogic, the European Community legislation and organisation, organisation psychology and management development. Trained trainer in processes, organisation and leadership development and university course in Conflict resolution, Democracy and Human Rights.

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Since 1983 involved in the peace movement being an active member in WILPF – Women's International League for Peace and Freedom with consultative status in the UN with members in some 40 countries throughout the world. Being engaged in the local, national and on the international level – see international commitments below.

In 1995 actively engaged in building a Swedish women's coordination and in getting Swedish women involved in the European work when Sweden became a member of the EU. A board member of the Swedish Women's Lobby, earlier Sams, since 2002 serving the third and last two-year period until 2008 – a prerequisite for being on the board of the European Women's Lobby. In 2002 elected as the Swedish board member to the European Women's Lobby's board - before that alternate - then elected to be the treasurer for the EWL for two years and after that the President, re-elected a 2nd term 2006 - 2008.

Since 2004 involved in the organisation Operation 1325 working with the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325:2000 nationally and internationally. Developed a training manual, given several training courses for example for Swedish Arabic speaking women in Sweden and in Sudan.

In 2006 I was elected for a three year period to the board of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Swedish section.

Current Commitments

EWL-board member and president	2004 -
Swedish EWL* board member and treasurer of EWL	2002 - 2004
Board member of the Swedish Women's Lobby	2002 -

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Board member and treasurer of Women's International League** for 2006 -
Peace and Freedom, Swedish section

Member of the WILPF Internat. Standing Committee of the Middle East 2004 -

Responsible for a educational and information project for The Swedish 2005 -
Women's Lobby together with the Umbrella organisation 1325 on the
Security Council Resolution 1325:2000

Establishing contacts with women's organisations in Sudan after a 2006 -
Bridgebuilding seminar held in Sudan in the first week of Nov.

Professional

Developed a training manual and programme for women relating to peace 2003 -
and security, conflict resolution

Trainer for women in Sweden including “Arab speaking women” 2003 -

Some of my earlier commitments

Chairwoman (representing WILPF, Swedish section) of the Swedish NGO- 2004 - 2006
network of the OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in
Europe

Swedish member of the WILPF International Executive Committee 2003 - 2004

Chair of WILPF's International Standing Committee of the Middle East 2001 - 2004

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Vice chair (representing WILPF, Swedish section) of the Swedish NGO- network of the OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe	1997 - 2004
International Vice President of WILPF	1998 - 2001
Alternate to the board of the EWL	1996 - 2004
Chairwoman of the National Council of Women of Sweden	1995 - 2004
WILPF Peace Train going from Helsinki to Beijing. Responsible officer in the steering committee of the Co-ordinator of a project: the Women's Treaty of Security and Democracy in Europe organising seminars on the train and in Beijing	1995
International treasurer of WILPF	1989 - 1998
Coordinator of WILPF, Swedish section, Women's budget	1988 - 1995
Coordinated also international workshops in Copenhagen and Beijing	1995
Representative of WILPF at the ILO	1984 -

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Introduction given by Kirsti Kolthoff, president of the European Women's Lobby

Welcome to this seminar Women – Religions – Europe: exploring an intriguing (challenging) relationship! Thank you Deutsche Frauenrat with especially Brunhilde Raiser and Brigitte Triems, who have been operational in organizing this event regarding planning as well as fundraising!

The **European Women's Lobby (EWL)** is a non-governmental (NGO) umbrella organisation representing civil society bringing together women's NGOs from 27 Member States of the European Union and accession countries, as well as from 18 European-wide and international organisations and we are very proud to address this issue. It is very important that we together learn more about the theme of the seminar and deepen our analyses so that we can actively raise our voices wherever we are as well as listen to the different points of views as also Brynhilde Kaiser pointed out in her welcome to us.

I wish to remind us that EWL's mission is to work together to achieve equality between women and men, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, to ensure respect for women's human rights and to eradicate violence against women. Hence EWL documents ways in which the achievement of these goals is impeded by any trends and calls for changes that will remove barriers to their achievement. In particular, concerns expressed by EWL members about a perceived stronger influence on governments of religious and cultural argumentation with respect to women's role and gender equality has led to adopt, in 2006, a position paper on **Religion and Women's human rights**⁶ a process that started some years ago. We will learn more about this in a little while.

⁶ See EWLs position paper

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Based on this position, EWL contributed recently to Council of Europe's consultation process to prepare a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and to organize a consultation process on this issue.

In our comments EWL had to regret that the paper **did not explicitly address gender-related** issues and concerns that result from fundamentalism, religion or culture. EWL considers it is essential to name, expose and condemn those practices that violate women's rights and silence women's voices wherever they may be.

EWL refers to those areas in which cultural and religious practices and in some instances, legal practices, continue systematically to discriminate against women and the girl child either directly or indirectly,

excluding them from public and political life, denying them equal rights to economic independence, including in marriage, divorce and inheritance and denying women's rights to autonomy in matters of sexual and reproductive choice and health.

All of these practices should be named for what they are, i.e. violations of women's human rights and should never be placed within a cultural context that at the end of the day conceals the reality.

EWL holds governments responsible for the commitments made by all European and States Parties of the United Nations, in the Beijing Platform for Action, in Human Rights instruments globally and in the ECE region and especially in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). **At no time will EWL accept cultural relativism when the argument may be made that a violation of women's rights is decreed by faith and culture and is therefore exempt from human rights concerns.**

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In particular, EWL insists on a woman's right to bodily integrity and freedom from violence and on her right to reproductive choice, health care and services. Her right to form partnerships and marry, to choose the timing and number of her children and to take steps to meet these goals may not be impeded.

EWL strongly supports the Council of Europe's report and resolution, **Women and religion in Europe, which was useful for us when working on our paper** in which EWL strongly supports the statement:

“Freedom of religion cannot be accepted as a pretext to justify violations of women's rights, be they open, subtle, legal or illegal, practiced with or without the nominal consent of the victims – women.”

Finally I would like to quote the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, Yakin Ertûk:

“Compromising women's rights is not an option. Therefore, the challenge that confronts us today is to respect and prize our diverse cultures while developing common strategies to resist oppressive practices in the name of culture, and to promote and uphold universal human rights while rejecting encroachments grounded in ethnocentric thinking.”

Now, I wish to welcome my friend and former colleague Annette Lawson who served as a vice president the previous period I was the president. She was instrumental in the process that ended up in our important position paper and she will tell you more about the process and the content. I wish us all a successful seminar!

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Annette Lawson

Ph.D. OBE

Annette Lawson is a sociologist, feminist scholar and activist. She has held leadership roles in women's campaigning and lobbying organisations in the UK and in the European Women's Lobby (EWL), working to improve the capacity of women's organisations and their members to enhance the status of women and empower them everywhere. She is a committed European and works to ensure gender equality is at the forefront of change in the Union.

While serving as representative from the UK on EWL's Board and elected Vice-President, Annette Lawson led the Lobby's Delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. She also was influential in drafting the Lobby's position paper on Religion and Women's Human Rights, and worked internally on policy-development processes.

In the UK, Annette Lawson led NAWO (the National Alliance of Women's Organisations) with its partners through the implementation of an EU-funded project: *Women Engage: Civil Dialogue in the New Europe*. She currently chairs the Gender Expert Group on Trade in the UK's Department of Trade and Industry, seeking to implement gender mainstreaming throughout policy in World and European trade matters.

Annette Lawson is also the founder with her brother of a small family foundation called the Judith Trust, named for her sister, which seeks to improve the lives of those with both learning disabilities and mental health needs. She chairs this group which commissions and funds research with policy outcomes.

Annette Lawson is a frequent speaker and advisor on gender issues. She is the author of several books and papers including *The Recognition of Mental Illness; Adultery: an*

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Analysis of Love and Betrayal, and The Politics of Pregnancy. She believes that we will never have a more peaceful or just world – nor one without violence against women – unless we change the balance of power in relations between women and men, and hence achieve greater equality.

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Talk given by Annette Lawson: “Religion and Women’s Human Rights”

Process

- Began as somewhat philosophical/academic paper
- Focussed on fundamentalisms
- No agreement in Board about how to proceed. Focus on patriarchy?
- Consultation produced great lack of clarity
- Maybe with Council of Europe’s work not necessary at all?

EWL – the need to remember OUR goals and what we are NOT

- A feminist organisation: always a focus on women’s needs and concerns. Therefore:
 - challenge any and all undermining of women’s rights – focus generally on Europe
 - attend to concerns of its members
 - seek to achieve consensus on disputed problems
 - arrive at policy and practical outcomes
 - lobby for change
 - disseminate outcomes

Why should EWL examine religion?

Not an academic but an action body

- Member-led
- increasing belief and concern that religion was playing a more powerful role in European political life (special clause in draft constitution for example)
- EWL supportive of everyone’s right to worship and recognises the importance faith/action within ‘churches’ plays in the lives of many. Equally recognises the right of others not to adhere to any religious belief.

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- Therefore NOT a concern about individual belief or about any one religion; or even about fundamentalisms but all patriarchal religions in their institutional structures and practices that fail to promote women's equality and discriminate against them

Religion as progressive

- EWL recognises that religious teaching can encourage tolerance, respect and love for others
- EWL recognises that the disempowering and discriminatory actions of religious institutions may not be based on revered texts but is concerned to challenge the actions taken in the name of religion – developed and ‘taken-for-granted’ as religious imperatives

Harm to women - ‘religious influence seldom benign’ (ref: Council of Europe)

- Access to positions of power blocked/ not permitted at all
- Required roles narrowly conceived within families
- Dress codes imposed on women, not men
- Mobility restricted
- Access to education restricted
- Women seen as polluting

More harm...

- Religions seek to control women's sexuality (male fear of women)
 - Men's need to be sure of paternity
 - Sex for procreation
 - Control of own bodies and choice re abortion not tolerated
 - Laws relating to marriage and divorce deeply disadvantageous to women
-

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Human Rights – European values

EWL seeks to support all human rights instruments and cannot accept Cultural Relativism (‘honour’/shame crimes; forced marriage/genital mutilation etc.)

‘At no time will EWL accept cultural relativism when the argument may be made that a violation of women’s rights is decreed by faith and culture and is therefore exempt from human rights concerns.’

Council of Europe also deeply concerned and writing own report at the same time (2005)
Women and Religion in Europe (doc 10670)

- EWL supportive of Council of Europe conclusions and petition
- Calls for same/similar outcomes

Some recommendations

- Called for immediate implementation of CoE resolution
- Condemnation of practices damaging to women and preventing them from accessing their rights
- Dialogue and information dissemination to be promoted
- Treat women as citizens in own right

More recommendations

- Guarantee strong support for Women’s NGOs fighting against religious oppression.
- Seek to guarantee the supremacy of basic freedoms and rights by ensuring a clear separation between Church and State.

“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

Prof. Dr. Christina von Braun

Cultural theorist, author, film maker

Christina von Braun was born in Rome in 1944 and was educated in Germany, England and the USA. From 1969 to 1981 she worked as an independent author and film maker in Paris. Starting in 1988, she held visiting professorships at German, Austrian, French and American universities in philosophy, theatre studies, education and literature. From 1991 to 1993, she was a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study of the Humanities in Essen (KWI). In 1994 she was appointed Professor of Cultural Studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

She has made over fifty film documentaries and television shows on topics in cultural history, and authored numerous books and essays on the interrelationship of gender roles and the history of ideas. Her research focuses on gender theory, media theory, contemporary religion and the history of anti-Semitism.

Christina von Braun is a member of the Executive Committee of the Goethe Institute, a founding and board member of the *Grüne Akademie* at the Heinrich Böll Foundation, director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at the Humboldt University (2005-2007), coordinator of the graduate programme in "Gender as a Category of Knowledge", co-founder and director (1996-2002) of the Gender Studies Department at the Humboldt University in Berlin, member of the Executive Committee of the *Evangelischer Kirchentag* (Protestant Convention), board member of the Federation of Film and Television Directors (1990-1998), co-publisher of *Metis*, a journal of women's and gender history studies (1990-2000), and a member of the Advisory Board of the *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung*.

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Talk given by Christina von Braun: “The role of religions in the development of Europe, with particular attention to their impact on women”

Symbolic gender relations as a reflection of religious content

Each of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, stands in reference to the other two. This is also true of the oldest of them, Judaism, in historical if not theological terms. By living among adherents of other religions in the Diaspora – usually as a minority – Jewish communities and scholars were repeatedly confronted with the developments undergone by the other two religions. This in turn affected how they interpreted their own faith, as is especially clear in the secularization process that proceeded from Christian society and which in Jewish society led on the one hand to orthodoxy, yet also to a new definition of non-religious identity which the historian Yerushalmi describes as that of the "Psychological Jew".⁷

The two younger religions each confronted their counterparts in both theological and historical terms. While Christianity viewed itself as the 'New Covenant' that superseded the 'Old Covenant' between God and the people of Israel, Islam regarded Judaism and Christianity as 'forerunners' of the 'true religion' represented by itself. Despite reference to a common origin – and despite the fact that all three religions arose in the eastern Mediterranean (although Christian theology then developed to a large extent in the western Mediterranean) – sharp demarcations were drawn between the three religions which are evident not only in their respective messages of salvation but also in their different rites and their portrayals of the relation between the earthly and the divine. Gender relations have played a recurrent and significant role in these encounters. From the perspective of the three religions, one of the main functions of symbolic gender relations appears to be the way in which they reflect the relation between God and man.

⁷ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991) p. 10.

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That is, the symbolism in gender relations is derived less from the biological features of male and female bodies – for if that were the case, it would hardly differ among the various religions – than from its function as a reflection.

Social relations – or how gender relations are actually lived – are of course also influenced by regional, historical and economic factors and conditions which often give rise to a completely different social 'reality' and sometimes even affect the respective theologies. For example, when a universal literacy campaign was introduced in Russia in the 19th century, which meant that girls too were to have access to education, many Jewish girls were keen to enter the state-run schools. Excluded from religious instruction in their villages, they hoped to acquire the benefits of education in this way. Secular thought thus filtered back into Jewish communities and helped set the process in motion that led to Reform Judaism in the latter part of the 19th century. This in turn led not only to new theological interpretations in the 20th century, but also to women being admitted to rabbinical training. That is one example of how social relations and/or historical events can have a reciprocal impact on theology itself.

In discussing the symbolic gender relations in the three religions of the book below, I will be treating these religions as characteristic types. It is beyond the scope of this talk even to attempt to address regional and cultural differences and the many theological differences within these faiths.

Gender relations in Judaism do not display the condemnation of sexual gratification that has dominated Christian thought in many eras. In David Biale's laconic formulation in *Eros and the Jews*, "Jewish culture gives no merit badges for celibacy".⁸ Sexuality is regarded as part of the *conditio humana*. As a necessary condition for procreation (and

⁸ David Biale (paraphrasing Lenny Bruce), *Eros and the Jews. From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) p. 217.

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thus solely with reference to heterosexuality), it offers a means to counter the sting of death. In the Kabbalah and Hasidic teachings, it even becomes one of the 'gateways' to encountering God and the sacred. "In my flesh I shall see my God," is how a Hasidic text describes the man who delves into the study of the Torah. The same passage goes on to expressly compare coitus, "the greatest of all pleasures", with intensive study of the holy text.⁹

On the other hand, however, sexuality is also that which *differentiates* man from God. Sexuality is considered a symptom of human imperfection and of the difference between man and God. According to Jewish studies expert Tikva Frymer-Kensky, the God of Israel "is only male by gender, not by sex. He is not at all phallic, and cannot represent male virility and sexual potency. Anthropomorphic biblical language uses body imagery of the arm, right hand, back, face and mouth, but God is not imagined below the waist. ... God is asexual, or transsexual, or metasexual (depending on how we view this phenomenon); but he is never sexed."¹⁰ Nor does God behave sexually. Although "God is the 'husband' of Israel in the powerful marital metaphor", this sexual metaphor refers to his relation to the community – Israel as 'God's bride' – not the individual. The fact that Hasidic Jews can compare their study of Torah to sexual practice demonstrates the positive associations of sexuality, not the crossing of a boundary from human corporality to divine immortality. Because God "does not model" human sexuality, adds Frymer-Kensky, the rituals also feature a strict separation between the sexual and the sacred, which is anchored in religious law and requires e.g. that believers wash themselves after sexual intercourse before entering the house of God.¹¹ In other words, the purity and

⁹ Jacob Joseph von Polonnoye (Korets 1780), cited in Mendel Piekarz, "Hasidism as a Socio-religious Movement on the Evidence of *Devekut*", in *Hasidism Reappraised* (London: Vallentine Mitchel & Co., 1996), p. 225-250, here p. 225.

¹⁰ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible", in Jonathan Magonet (ed), *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality* (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), pp 3-16, here p. 4.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

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ritual laws of Judaism have the function of maintaining the strict separation between divine eternity and human mortality.

If the difference between God and man in Judaism is reflected in the fact that God appears as 'metasexual', the 'imperfection' of mortal man finds its expression in the *emphasis* on sexual difference. The repeated ritual and cultural prominence accorded to sexual difference *emphasizes* the strict separation between man and God. Circumcision serves to symbolically inscribe male incompleteness and vulnerability into the male body, while the laws of *niddah* concerned with female blood (menstruation and post-partum bleeding) stress the exceptional status of the female. Both fundamentally emphasize the difference between the sexes. The term *niddah* means 'extinguished', but has the same root as *nadad*, which has the meanings of 'removed' and 'separated'.¹² The laws of *niddah* are often translated as purity regulations and interpreted as disparaging the female body in menstruation and after parturition. It makes no sense, however, to assume that a religious tradition in which offspring and reproduction are among the greatest goods (in the orthodox interpretation, at least, unmarried men are not allowed to exercise rabbinical or liturgical functions in the synagogue) would attach negative associations to precisely those moments when women have given birth or when their bodies display the ability to bear children. The fact that married men live by the rhythm of female separation and that rabbis are intimately familiar with the functions of the female body has prompted the American Jewish studies expert Susannah Heschel to ask, "Whose vagina is it? Or is the vagina to be understood as a sign, perhaps in parallel to the phallus, namely a sign laden with the emotional significance that shapes gender

¹² Hannah Rockman, "Sexual Behaviour Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews: A Review of Laws and Guidelines" in Magonet (ed.), *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995) pp. 191-204, here p. 195.

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identity? [...] The laws of *niddah* make the vagina into a transcendent sign of gender identity and Jewish status."¹³

Symbolic gender relations in Christianity are based on quite different premises. Because the Christian god assumed a human body in his son, the difference between God and man is *lifted*. This is the Christian message of salvation, which is solemnly celebrated in the Eucharist, i.e. in the union of the divine and human body at the Last Supper. This doctrine was only established gradually, in parallel to the divine status of Jesus, which was not accepted until the third century. With the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215, the host and the wine, which were initially considered symbols of the Savior's body, became the 'actual' body and blood. This was accepted by Luther as well. By the time of Zwingli and Calvin, however, the reformed Church had replaced the literal understanding with a more symbolic approach.

The message of the Christian Eucharist was in turn reflected in gender relations. By becoming man and flesh, the Christian god also took on a sex – or more precisely two of them, with the female sex representing human mortality and the male sex representing the triumph over death. Before describing the dispute between the medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum and the art historian Leo Steinberg on the 'sex of Christ', I will first address the general symbolism of the cross in order to elucidate their arguments. The cross is found as a symbol in all religions. Generally speaking, it represents the encounter or intersection between the here and the hereafter, the worldly and the transcendent. Christians hesitated for a long time before accepting the cross as the symbol of their faith because it was the most shameful form of execution, used almost exclusively on rebellious slaves. It was not until the fourth century, after Constantine the

¹³ Susannah Heschel, "Sind Juden Männer? Können Frauen jüdisch sein? Die gesellschaftliche Definition des männlich/weiblichen Körpers", in Sander Gilman, Robert Jütte, Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz (eds), *"Der schejne Jidd". Das Bild des "jüdischen Körpers" in Mythos und Ritual* (Vienna, 1998), pp. 86-96, here p. 95 (trans. for this paper).

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Great abolished this form of execution, that the symbol became established – in parallel to acceptance of the theological concept of the divinity of Christ. One does not find any portrayals of the crucifixion in early churches, only the simple cross – which symbolized both death and resurrection. This conflicting symbolic content is known as the 'paradox of the cross'. Gradually, portrayals of the crucifixion also became established – with an ever greater focus on the suffering and corporality of Christ. This in turn led to a development that I would like to illustrate via the dispute between the two American scholars. It shows that the image of the Christian savior – in contrast to that of the god of Israel – by no means comes to a halt at the waist.

In a series of images from the Middle Ages, Bynum shows that the crucified body featured the full insignia of femaleness. The sacrificial blood was shown as a female lactating breast. Such images corresponded to statements by cloistered nuns such as Catherine of Siena, who wrote that "we must do as a little child does who wants milk. It takes the breast of its mother, applies its mouth, and by means of the flesh it draws milk. We must do the same if we would be nourished. We must attach ourselves to that breast of Christ crucified, which is the source of charity, and by means of that flesh we draw milk."¹⁴

In many images, the wounds of Christ also took the form of a bleeding vulva. The crucifixion was presented as the moment of parturition, in which the self-sacrifice of Christ becomes a delivery. Thus Marguerite von Oingt could write, "My sweet Lord, ... are you not my mother and more than my mother? ... For when the hour of your delivery came you were placed on the hard bed of the cross ... and your nerves and all your veins were broken. And truly it is no surprise that your veins burst when in one day you gave

¹⁴ Cited in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) p. 96.

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birth to the whole world.”¹⁵ The figure of Jesus was therefore accorded the female/maternal abilities to give birth and reproduce.

By contrast, the art historian Leo Steinberg presents numerous images of the crucifixion that emphasize the *maleness* of the Savior. These accentuate the genitals. The further the story of the Passion progressed, the more clearly did these images display the male 'potency' of the crucified one. Steinberg speaks in this context of an equation between 'erection' and 'resurrection'.¹⁶ He concludes that these images transfer the significance of the phallus in antiquity – as a symbol of power, fertility and postmortem revival – to the figure of the Christian savior,¹⁷ albeit in altered form. On the one hand this was a matter of the spirit overcoming the body; whereas on the other, the image of sexual potency also served to show a generative power of the spirit which could overcome death itself.

These two interpretations of the gender symbolism in crucifixion images are in principle irreconcilable. Yet if viewed from the perspective of the paradox of the cross, it is clear that a split has taken place. Death, mortality, suffering, and the wound are associated with femaleness, whereas resurrection and the overcoming of death are viewed as a sign of male potency. The two sides find expression in the figure of the Savior, and complement each other.

Like in Judaism, this means that a sharp demarcation has been drawn between the sexes. Yet instead of reflecting the difference between God and man, here it reflects an ideal union in which divine eternity and human mortality enter into a symbiosis. Paul expressly compares the relationship between Christ and the Church with that of the institution of marriage. As Christ is the head of the Church and the believers are its body,

¹⁵ Cited in Bynum, *ibid.* p. 97.

¹⁶ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Random House, 1983), here 2nd ed. (Chicago, London: Univ. Chicago Press, 1996), p. 83.

¹⁷ Steinberg, *ibid.* p. 46.

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so the man forms the 'head' and the woman the 'body' in marriage: "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself."¹⁸ There is hardly a clearer statement of the law of the indissolubility of marriage – found in Christianity alone among all the world's religions – than the image of a head that marries its own body.

The elevation of marriage to a sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage in the Catholic Church, the Pauline metaphor of marriage with the Church as the bride of Christ – these are expressions of the mutually reflective nature of religious content and gender relations, as Paul also writes in one of his letters. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he calls for women to cover their heads when in church (Christianity, by the way, is the only religion to have ever made this type of demand), and justifies it by saying that the man need not cover his head "forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man."¹⁹ This type of relation between the original and the copy also presupposes a symbiotic relationship in which the religious content reflects a union between the transcendent and the earthly. Like in the Kabbalah, religiosity acquires a quasi-sexual charge in Christian mysticism as well. Yet while the texts of the Kabbalah and Hasidism and the Song of Songs proceed from worldly sexual relations that can lead to God, religious experience as described by Meister Eckhart, for example, is that of an encounter with God presented by means of sexual images. As the mystic describes the sacrament of holy communion, "For in Him will you catch fire and burn, and in Him will you be sanctified and with Him alone will you be joined and united...; and strengthened by His body will yours be renewed..., so that what is His will be ours and all that is ours will be His, our heart and His are to be *one* heart, and our body and His *one* body."²⁰ Meister Eckhart's accounts of marriage and love between the sexes clearly indicate that

¹⁸ Eph. 5:28.

¹⁹ I Cor. 11:7.

²⁰ *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, ed/trans. by J. Quint (Zürich 1979) p. 83ff (Eng. trans. for this paper).

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the parallels drawn between the union of man with God and the union of the two sexes are deliberate. "For love by nature arises and flows from two quite simply as one. Never in twain: for as two love does not exist! Yet two as one yields love innately and inexorably, full of passion and fervor and desire."²¹ Even the Scholastics (whom Meister Eckhart opposed) underscored the analogy between sacred and earthly 'communion'. It was right, said Thomas of Aquinas, for the woman to be made from a rib of man, for this signifies the unity of man and woman.²²

Symbolic gender relations in Islam reveal some aspects that also characterize the other two religions of the book. Like in Judaism, the emphasis is on difference – as manifested in the call to preserve modesty between the sexes, for example, which the Qur'an requires no less from men than it does from women.²³ Yet while in Judaism the difference is inscribed in the body itself – via circumcision and the laws of *niddah* – Islam has an 'extra-corporeal' separation between the sexes symbolized among other things by the veil. The word for veil – *hijab* – actually means curtain. The symbolic significance of the veil is no less powerful than an inscription in the body. At the same time, however, it is clearly also a *symbolic* gender code, as opposed to the quasi-biological variant that crystallized in the thought of the West.

Ludwig Ammann interprets the segregation or separation of women in Islam as having declared the female body a 'sacred space'.²⁴ The harem and the veil are expressions of the sacred quality ascribed to the female body. Following this interpretation, the basic difference between Islamic and Christian gender relations could be described as follows: In Christianity, *marriage* is elevated to a sacrament – and in Islam the female body is

²¹ Meister Eckhart, *Schriften* (Düsseldorf, Cologne: 1959) p. 271 (trans. for this paper).

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, part I, question 92.3.

²³ Sura 24:30.

²⁴ Ludwig Ammann, "Privatsphäre und Öffentlichkeit in der muslimischen Zivilisation", in Ludwig Ammann and Nilüfer Göle (eds.) *Islam in Sicht* (Bielefeld, 2004) p. 87. Cf. forthcoming English translation *Islamic Visibilities in Public Spaces*.

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rendered sacred (whereas it has anything other than a 'sacred' status in Christianity). The sacred nature of marital union in Christianity would later give rise to the ideals of 'marriage for love', symbiotic union between the sexes, and the Western notion of the nuclear family, which we continue to view as sacred today without recognizing their lengthy Christian prehistory.

Segregation of the sexes in Islam draws on a completely different justification than it does in Judaism, and its connection with social order – in law as well as in urban architecture – also explains the fact that Islam gave rise to not only a religious but also a political community from the very start. This was Muhammad's express aim – and in later eras of Islam the political has often assumed a higher profile than the purely theological perspective. According to the historian Leila Ahmed, "There appear... to be two distinct voices within Islam, and two competing understandings of gender, one expressed in the pragmatic regulations for society..., the other in the articulation of an ethical vision."²⁵ With respect to gender relations, therefore, conflict can easily arise between the law and the religious message contained in the Qur'an. Many passages in the holy text display an egalitarian notion of gender, such as sura 33:35 in which women are addressed on an equal basis with men as the vanguard of the faith. As Ahmed notes, "The unmistakable presence of an ethical egalitarianism explains why Muslim women frequently insist, often inexplicably to non-Muslims, that Islam is not sexist. They hear and read in its sacred text, justly and legitimately, a different message from that heard by the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam."²⁶

This variant reading of Islam, which is needed for a new exegesis of the Qur'an and Islamic doctrine, derives from accounts of the religion's inception. The pre-Islamic period known as *jahilia* is usually considered a time of ignorance, darkness, falsehood and

²⁵ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992) pp. 65-66.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 66.

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impurity. Yet others see *jahilia* as the precursor to a brief, 'true' age of Islam. In the pre-Islamic period, Arabia formed "the last remaining region in which patrilineal, patriarchal marriage had not yet been instituted as the sole legitimate form of marriage."²⁷ There were many different variations of gender relations, such as matrilineal (genealogy defined by the maternal line) or uxoriocal (the family lives with the wife's tribe of origin). Some men had multiple wives, but conversely, "some wives might have been visited by different husbands."²⁸ Examples of polyandry are known from both Mecca and Medina. In general, the children belonged to the tribe of the mother. This 'sexual permissiveness' for women, which later became equated with 'whoredom' in Islam, did not necessarily mean that women had more power. But the variety of ways of conceiving the institution of marriage do "correlate with women's enjoying greater sexual autonomy than they were allowed under Islam."²⁹

In light of these structures, the Scottish scholar Montgomery Watt, who devoted a long period of study to early Islam, reached the conclusion that paternity was of little or no significance in pre-Islamic society in Arabia.³⁰ Both marital partners could request divorce, and both divorce and re-marriage occurred frequently. Women also participated in public life, including the waging of war.³¹ But Watt also notes that the increasingly prosperous Arab society was undergoing a transition from matrilineal to patrilineal at the time of Muhammad, and that some of Muhammad's laws mitigated the associated drastic consequences for women's rights.³²

It was not until the formulation of an 'Islamic codex' – i.e. a political interpretation of the Qur'an – that women's rights were substantially restricted. During the actual formative

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁰ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford 1956), pp. 272-273.

³¹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 42.

³² William Montgomery Watt, "Women in the Earliest Islam" in *Studia Missionaria*, 40 (1991), p. 162-173.

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period of Islam, conditions were different. Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, was a wealthy widow who dictated her terms of marriage to Muhammad including the condition that he not take a second wife or concubine as long as she lived. The high estimation accorded Muhammad's later wives after his death, including the much younger Aisha, also attests to a different role for women than that which subsequently became established in Islam. Aisha and the other widows received considerable monetary support from the community and were viewed as authorities – more of the 'authentic transmitted accounts' in the *hadith* come from Aisha than from any of the Prophet's other companions. Muhammad was buried in Aisha's room, in which she continued to live.³³

These structures were already changing during Muhammad's lifetime, for part of Islam's message was "the institution of a type of marriage based on the recognition of paternity."³⁴ Because of the difficulties in demonstrating paternity, this meant introducing strict monogamy (for women) and monitoring their sexual activities. Although Muhammad did away with all other forms of marriage,³⁵ this does not necessarily imply that women were oppressed or excluded from society. Under Muhammad there were female imams, and he even called one to his own home. After his death, Aisha and Umm Salama, another wife of the Prophet, also acted as imams. Aisha's father made her responsible for the distribution of his property after his death.³⁶ Such functions indicate a role for women that can hardly be reconciled with the ensuing gender hierarchy in Islam.

In brief: Islam, too, lends itself to a strict segregation of the sexes. And here too this segregation reflects the strict delineation between man and God. Like the god of Judaism, the god of Islam is invisible and may not be portrayed. Like the god of Judaism, his name may not be spoken out loud. There is no bodily contact between God and man.

³³ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 58.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 74.

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And this strict separation finds expression in the segregation of the sexes. Yet the fact that segregation does not necessarily entail oppression or disparagement is shown by Judaism. The combination of segregation and discrimination against women is a product of political Islam.

We thus have three different types of symbolic gender relations in these three religions, which are irreconcilable if only for the reason that they are much more than social structures, namely, they reflect different religious content. But if that is so, it would stand to reason that secularization is the solution for peaceful coexistence in Europe. Unfortunately, however, the answer is not that simple. It was not a coincidence, after all, that the process of secularization arose from Christian society. Why was it not a coincidence? Because the doctrine of incarnation – the doctrine that Christ is 'God become flesh' (which is reflected in the ideal of symbiotic union between the sexes) – is inherent to the Christian religion as such and implies less a turning away from Christianity than a turning toward the world, or secularization.

I can only present a sketch of this thesis here in conclusion. I will try to explain it by once again using the example of the cross. The symbol of the cross, which is the basis for the self-empowering paradigm of overcoming the body, was shifted from the realm of faith to that of secular authority as far back as around 1000 AD. "The capacity to rule and triumph is based on the power of the cross"³⁷ – and the cross became the emblem of power. Monarchs' crowns, kings' and nobles' coats of arms, and the emperor's scepter all featured crosses, and in general rulers were legitimized by recourse to Christological concepts.³⁸ The cross was soon transferred to armor and arms – especially those of the

³⁷ Otto Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell* (Jena 1938), cf. also *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)*, p. 740.

³⁸ See the study by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Die zwei Körper des Königs. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters*, trans. by Walter Theimer and Brigitte Hellmann (Munich 1990).

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Crusaders. It later became a standard for missionaries,³⁹ and was used to mark conquered territories: Wherever the *conquistadores* landed, they erected a cross. At the same time, the cross appeared in courts. People swore by the cross. When judges passed sentences, the cross stood before them on their tables. The cross represented secular power, and its transcendent symbolism legitimized the secular administration of justice.

So it is no surprise that the cross also survived the Enlightenment in strictly secular contexts: in the Paris Commune, national forms of anti-Semitism, and racist anti-Semitic doctrine). And of course in Nazism as well. Without the history of paradoxical empowerment via the suffering symbolized by the cross, it would be nearly impossible to imagine the fascination and power exerted by the symbol of the swastika. Back in the 1930s, Eric Voegelin was already describing Nazism as a 'political religion'. Moreover, his description matched National Socialism's view of itself. I will show you a short film sequence with citations from Hitler:

Film sequence:

All Nazi ceremonies distinctly transferred the symbolism of the cross to a secular level: Hitler kissed the Blutfahne ("Blood Banner") just as a devout Christian kisses the wounds of the Savior. In the cult of the 'martyrs', those who died in Hitler's attempted coup of 1923 were honored in front of Munich's Field Marshals' Hall every November 9 – 'resurrected' by the choir amid the amassed companies. In a statement recorded by Hermann Rauschning, Hitler explicitly referred to the Christian heritage: "Easter is no longer the resurrection but rather the eternal renewal of our People. Christmas is the birth of our Savior: the spirit of heroism and freedom of our People. They will replace the cross with our swastika. Instead of the blood of their former Redeemer, they will celebrate the pure blood of our People. They will receive the German fruit of the field as

³⁹ TRE, p. 751.

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a holy offering and eat it as the symbol of the eternal community of the Nation, as they have until now savored the body of their God. And then, when this has come to pass, the churches will become full again. If we so desire, so it shall be; if it is our faith that is observed there.”⁴⁰

In short: We can thank the process of secularization for many developments such as social justice, a belief in science, and economic progress. First of all, however, we should not forget that each one of these advances can always turn into its converse: social justice can turn into totalitarianism; a belief in the power of science can lead to biological racism, weapons of mass annihilation, and destruction of the environment; and economic progress can become faceless and merciless capitalism. Secondly, we also should not forget that secularization is a product of Christian theology, and that its message of salvation – which lifts the boundary between the transcendent and the worldly – had less to do with turning away from God than with God turning into the world. Whatever one's position here may be – precisely this concept is not merely alien to the other two religions of the book but diametrically opposed to them. Under these circumstances, is coexistence possible at all?

The answer to this question will depend not least of all on the influence of women. The Jewish religious community has responded to the pressure placed on it by the Christian process of secularization by developing its own, worldly form of Jewish identity. This will presumably also be the case for Islam, which currently finds itself in a similar situation to that of Jewish communities in the early 19th century. Yet a transformation has also taken place in the religion itself. There were female rabbis even before the Protestant Church

⁴⁰ Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (New York, 1940) p. 51. Rauschning did not transcribe his conversations with Hitler, but rather wrote them down afterwards from memory. Nevertheless, historians use them as a reference work because they capture Hitler's mode of speech and are also substantiated by many of his recorded statements. Parts of his accounts of religion, in particular, are essentially identical with the *Tischgespräche* (*Table Talk*), a notebook of Hitler's conversations recorded for posterity by his secretaries Heim and Picker as ordered by Martin Bormann.

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ordained its first female ministers. Female imams are currently being trained in Morocco and Egypt. Religions refer to a transcendent, eternal truth – yet it appears they still have the ability to move with history.

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Henny Engels

Henny Engels, born in 1949, was trained as a bookseller and then studied social work, political science, sociology, and Catholic theology (religious education).

She directed the Cologne archdiocese chapter of the *Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend* (German Catholic Youth League – BDKJ) for six years, and served for two years as Deputy National Chairwoman of the BDKJ. She worked for ten years as a general policy advisor for the *Katholische Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands* (Catholic Women's League in Germany).

Henny Engels has been Managing Director of the *Deutscher Frauenrat* (National Council of German Women's Organizations) since 2001. In this capacity she is also a member of the Coordinating Committee of the Human Rights Forum, the Coordinating Committee of the National Network for Civil Society (BBE), and the Board of Trustees of the European Academy for Women in Politics and Business (EAF).

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Michèle Vianès

Author of «Les 10 mots qui font la France/ Comprendre la citoyenneté pour vivre ensemble dans la République» (The Ten Words that Make up France / Understand the Citizenry to Live Together in the Republic) DVD and accompanying book published by *Regards de Femmes* in 2007.

Author of «Un voile sur la République» (A Veil Over the Republic) Stock (January 2004) and *Les islamistes en manœuvre Silence, on manipule»* (The Islamists on a Silent Mission, One Manipulates) Editions Hors Commerce (November 2004).

Contribution to the collection « L'Islam en France » (Islam in France) collection Cités, special edition, under the direction of Yves Charles Zarka, PUF (March 2004) Article: «Offensives contre la laïcité : attaque contre la République et régression des femmes» (Offensives Against Laity: Attacks on the Republic and Repression of Women)

Hearing with the ministers for equality and professional equality, for justice and foreign opportunities in the report (March 7, 2003) «Femmes de l'immigration. Assurer le plein exercice de la citoyenneté à part entière, à parts égales» (Immigrant Women / The Complete and Equitable Exercising of Citizenship)

Numerous articles regarding laity and the equality of men and women (columns in print publications *Le Monde*, *Volksrant*, et cetera, online newspapers *Europe&us*, *respublica*, et cetera), regarding communitarianism (defined by seven criteria), regarding school systems in terms of the ethnicizing of social relationships, et cetera

President of *Regards de Femmes*, association, which is dedicated to equality for men and women under the law. (www.regardsdefemmes.fr)

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The most recent actions of *Regards de Femmes* include:

- Presentations in France and abroad about «The Laity: An Essential Area for the Equality of Men and Women», in the universities, high schools and leading schools, in the social centers, the local companies, in the Senate, the French embassy in Amsterdam on the occasion of the hundred year anniversary of the French law of separation of Church and State, the Alliance française, et cetera.
- Coordination of the association in France to support the associations in Ontario which are rebelling against arbitration by Islamic courts for family disputes under civil law and have levied a laicistic demand: the separation of religion and politics.
- Assertion of an ancillary suit against the Imam Bouziane, who justifies violence against women using the Koran.

General Secretary of the *French Drop-In Center of the European Women's Lobby* Association, law of 1901, with a consulting function in the economic and social committee of the United Nations. Participated in the 51st Commission of the United Nations for the Status of Women in the Fight against Discrimination and Violence against Girls in 2007.

Deputy city councilor for the equality of man and women in Caluire et Cuire (Grand Lyon).

Member of the Administrative Board of the *CIDFF* (Information Center for Women and Families of the Department of Rhône).

Sponsor of *Ni Putes ni soumises* (Neither Whores nor Subjugated) and founder of the local committed NPNS in Grand Lyon and in the Department.

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Exposé de Michèle Vianès: «Religions, Femmes et Fondamentalismes»

Partout, dans l'espace et dans le temps, on observe les rapports de hiérarchie patriarcale et d'assujettissement des femmes. Quel est le poids des religions, clé du symbolique, dans la formation et le maintien de cette hiérarchie ?

Les religions ont été fixées par des hommes, pour les hommes. Les textes sacrés, transcrits, étudiés, commentés le furent aussi par ces mêmes hommes qui pendant des siècles eurent le monopole de l'accès à la culture. Les femmes constatant aujourd'hui que leur place dans les religions est secondaire par rapport aux hommes, alors que leur rôle dans la transmission est primordial, expriment la volonté soit de s'émanciper des religions soit de réinterpréter les textes afin de mettre en place un partage égal du masculin et du féminin dans les institutions, les rituels, les enseignements et la parole théologiques.

Il n'est pas question ici de faire un état comparatif des religions et encore moins leur exégèse, mais simplement de dégager les constantes misogynes qui ont abouti à la discrimination des femmes dans toutes les religions et d'étudier la manière dont les hommes et les Etats utilisent les religions pour posséder le corps et l'esprit des femmes. Pour apporter des éléments de réponse, je vais organiser ma contribution en 3 parties

Construction de la hiérarchie patriarcale

Comment et pourquoi se sont construits ces rapports hiérarchiques? Pourquoi les femmes les ont-elles acceptés ?

Emancipation des femmes

Comment de manière individuelle puis collective cette hiérarchie a-t-elle été dénoncée ? Les combats des féministes au XIX^e et au XX^e siècle vers l'émancipation des femmes

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leur indépendance par rapport au cléricalisme, la femme devient une personne dont le consentement importe.

Instrumentalisation des religions par les fondamentalistes

Les tentatives de régression des droits des femmes en instrumentalisant les religions pour conserver les 3 sanctuaires religieux, politique et militaire du pouvoir masculin.

1) Construction de la hiérarchie patriarcale

Les religions depuis les origines de l'humanité ont mis en place la hiérarchie hommes/femmes. Les hommes ont cherché à expliquer la création du monde, à proposer des réponses à la question fondamentale : Pourquoi les femmes ont-elles le pouvoir exorbitant de donner naissance aussi bien à des filles qu'à des garçons, pourquoi les hommes doivent nécessairement passer par une femme pour se reproduire à l'identique. ?

Pour que la race des hommes se perpétue, les H. doivent avoir à leur disposition une femme qui leur donnera des fils. Le désir d'immortalité les conduira à rendre un culte à leurs aïeux, de père en fils, donc de contrôler que leurs fils soient bien les leurs.

Des philosophes grecs ont théorisé l'infériorité des femmes, le droit romain a légalisé la subordination des femmes.

Toutes les explications avancées montraient la nécessité de s'approprier des femmes et de pouvoir les maintenir à disposition dans leur fonction de reproduction. La femme n'est qu'un réceptacle. Pour Aristote, « un rapport est réussi si la semence impose le masculin ». Donc la naissance d'une fille signe l'échec de l'homme. Voilà pourquoi la valorisation de l'homme s'est imposée, voilà pourquoi encore aujourd'hui on observe les infanticides concernant les petites filles.

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La place des femmes dans les discours philosophiques grecs : classer la différence sexuelle en rapport avec d'autres types de différences, pour mieux relever les incapacités des femmes. En Grèce, à Rome, les femmes sont des « mineures sous la tutelle d'un maître » (Maurice Sartre). L'incapacité des femmes à transmettre la légitimité, l'ordre successoral est premier par rapport à toutes les incapacités féminines. L'exclusion de la fonction à délibérer au nom d'autrui et pour les autres, donc l'exclusion de la représentation de l'universel, a exclu les femmes du pouvoir politique. Le code Napoléon n'a rien inventé ! A Rome, l'incapacité des femmes à sacrifier, le refus de la visibilité des femmes aux côtés des dieux, interdiction des lieux sacrés sous prétexte d'impuretés a entraîné la diabolisation et les tabous qui ont justifié l'exclusion des femmes du pouvoir religieux.

Les grandes religions monothéistes font de la hiérarchie H/F l'ordre d'une Nature voulue et créée par Dieu. Comment les femmes peuvent accoucher de cette perfection humaine qu'est le spécimen mâle de l'humanité ?

Mais cette infériorité ne se constate pas seulement dans le monde méditerranéen. Traditions et religions ont « expliqué » les incapacités des femmes en faisant appel à la Nature. Elles ont interprété des faits biologiques, le premier d'entre eux étant le sang menstruel. Là va s'ouvrir le registre du pur et de l'impur, permettant de jouer sur toute la gamme du licite et de l'illicite, du permis et de l'interdit.

Pour le bouddhisme, menstrues et sang de l'accouchement condamnaient les femmes à tomber dans un enfer spécifique : l'Etang de Sang dont elles ne pouvaient échapper qu'après certains rites exécutés par des prêtres, moyennant finances.

Les femmes vont être dans le même temps intellectuellement stérilisées par une masse d'obligations ridicules et tatillonnes (interdits alimentaires, tâches domestiques ritualisées, etc. ;).

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Femmes impures, femmes domestiques, femmes tentatrices : il va falloir cacher la femme. La matérialisation d'espaces séparés est également une constante : espace privé dévolu aux femmes, espace public aux hommes, mais également séparation (*sexe* et *section* appartiennent à la même famille de mots) dans les espaces communs : *mehitsah* : rideau dans le grand temple de Jérusalem, *hijab* séparation entre les femmes de Mahomet et les solliciteurs venus demander conseil au prophète ou sur elle-même dans l'espace public le voile afin que même dehors, elles soient dedans.

Séparer, rendre invisibles les femmes, mais les louer en tant que mère ou épouses vertueuses, et surtout en faire des servantes obéissantes. Toutes les religions considèrent que les hommes subviennent aux besoins matériels de ces pauvres femmes en échange de services domestiques, sexuels et maternels.

2) Emancipation des femmes

Des hommes et des femmes ont dénoncé cette sujétion, de manière singulière d'abord puis collective.

Deux grands courants fondateurs de l'émancipation des femmes :

2.1) La Réforme

L'espace ouvert par la Réforme préconisant la lecture individuelle de la Bible, a été une première bouffée d'oxygène grâce à l'alphabétisation des filles, l'accès direct aux textes fondateurs, à la connaissance et à la réflexion.

Les femmes des pays protestants d'Europe du Nord ont initié la longue marche vers l'égalité hommes/femmes. C'est paradoxal par rapport aux théories traditionalistes misogynes de Luther et Calvin, mais l'ouverture du protestantisme à la parole des femmes, les différentes fonctions dévolues aux femmes des pasteurs vont permettre la naissance du féminisme protestant au XIX^e siècle.

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Démontrant *a contrario* les paroles de Paul de Tarse « Que les femmes se taisent dans les Assemblées ». Dès que les femmes ont pu parler dans les assemblées, elles n'ont plus accepté d'être « soumises à leurs maris », comme le préconisait Luther.

2.2) La Révolution française

Héritière des Lumières, « la révolution est le moment historique de la découverte par la civilisation occidentale que les femmes peuvent avoir une place dans la cité, et non plus simplement dans l'ordre domestique » Elisabeth Sledziewski.

Affirmer que le passé n'est pas immuable et l'avenir différent du présent légitime un espace de revendications pour celles qui refusent d'être soumises parce que femmes. Reconnaître le statut d'individus aux uns entraîne qu'il le soit à tous « quels que soient leur religion, leur couleur ou leur sexe » (Condorcet).

Condorcet affirme, (1790) que l'instruction doit être commune aux hommes et aux femmes, publique, laïque et gratuite. Et surtout que les hommes ne peuvent être libres et égaux si la moitié du genre humain n'est pas libérée de ses entraves séculaires. Il dénonce le rôle des prêtres: en soumettant la sexualité et l'esprit des femmes à une autorité qu'on ne leur demande pas de comprendre, ils les préparent à la servitude forcée ou volontaire.

Les lois de Septembre 1792 établissent la laïcisation de l'Etat civil et le divorce : la femme peut choisir son mari et le quitter, les deux époux sont traités à égalité. La femme de lettres britannique Mary Wollstoncraft publie en 1792 « Défense du droit des femmes », sur la situation des femmes en France. Les femmes sont devenues des individus.

Mais l'immense majorité des Révolutionnaires est prise de vertige devant l'émancipation civile des femmes, peur des régressifs : la Convention ferme les Clubs de Femmes le

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30 octobre 1793. Les françaises sont renvoyées dans les bras des prêtres, leurs directeurs de conscience. Il a fallu un siècle pour que les grands républicains (protestants ou époux de protestantes, le pouvoir occulte des femmes) réalisent l'erreur. *Pour Jules Ferry « celui qui tient la femme tient tout, c'est pour cela que l'Eglise veut retenir la femme, et c'est aussi pour cela qu'il faut que la démocratie la lui enlève ».*

La création de l'Ecole laïque pour les deux sexes (loi du 2 mars 1882) est une première clé qui va permettre d'ouvrir aux filles l'accès à l'égalité des chances.

Une génération après, le 9 décembre 1905 loi de séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat. La séparation est indispensable : la religion qui relève de la foi n'a pas à inspirer les lois ni exercer de contrôle sur le politique.

L'être humain, homme ou femme, est un être libre grâce à l'usage de sa raison et de son esprit critique : c'est l'idéal laïque.

La laïcité, séparation et non sécularisme, organise l'espace politique qui repose sur la liberté de conscience, l'égalité en droit des options philosophiques et des croyances religieuses, la fraternité républicaine, envers l'autre. Tenir les trois en même temps n'est ni naturel ni inné, mais construit et acquis. Permettre à des citoyens et des citoyennes - c'est-à-dire des hommes et des femmes émancipés par une éducation à l'autonomie rationnelle de jugement- de vivre ensemble, dans le respect réciproque des convictions et croyances de chacun.

Pour cela la neutralité de l'Etat est indispensable. Ce n'est pas l'indifférence, mais l'impartialité dans la garantie pour toutes les confessions de pouvoir exercer librement leur culte, sous réserve de ne pas attenter aux libertés d'autrui, ni troubler l'ordre public.

L'Etat reconnaît des droits fondamentaux à chaque individu, indépendamment de leur origine, sexe, opinions. Il reconnaît à chacun la même dignité, et la liberté de croire, de

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ne pas croire, de douter ou de changer de religion. Il n'exige nulle dévotion en contrepartie mais l'adhésion librement consentie à un contrat et à des devoirs de la part de consciences autonomes et libres, c'est-à-dire éclairées, aptes à juger et capables de vouloir.

Partout dans le monde, en suivant des cheminements différents, les femmes vont s'affranchir du poids des religions par les revendications de disposer librement de leur corps, de leur esprit et d'avoir la maîtrise de leur désir d'enfant. Au milieu du xx^e siècle, l'avancée des droits des femmes était visible dans tous les pays du monde.

Orientation sociale décisive, l'émancipation féminine a largement infléchi le rapport des femmes à la religion. Son incidence a pris des formes variées, voire opposées, entre progressisme et intégrisme qui troublent profondément l'ordre ancestral, supposé naturel et surnaturel. Toutes les religions voient s'opposer les femmes : les traditionalistes, gardiennes de l'orthodoxie, se considérant comme les seules conformes aux prescriptions de leur Dieu, fidèles et fécondes pour transmettre aux nouvelles générations la foi des anciens jours. Et un courant libéral, pro-choice admettant les mariages interconfessionnels, la maîtrise du désir d'enfant, la prêtreise, les sexualités différentes.

3) Instrumentalisation des religions par les régressifs

La maîtrise par les femmes de leur désir d'enfants, de leur autonomie financière, de leur corps et leur esprit a paniqué les machocrates qui ont appelé à leur secours les religions.

Les fondamentalismes religieux, ou prétendu tels, considèrent l'émancipation de la femme comme la cause de tous les fléaux de la société, maux qui disparaîtraient si l'on revenait aux conceptions théocratiques patriarcales de domination des hommes et à l'acceptation par les femmes de leur soumission.

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Fondamentalisme : concentration homogène doctrinale et disciplinaire entre les mains de chefs religieux qui réclament une obéissance sans limite. Ils considèrent les objections de la raison comme des tentations du démon et veulent convaincre que le monde serait perdu s'il ne rentrait corps et âme dans le cadre serré des traditions autoritaires. Tous les fondamentalismes sont englobant, règlent la vie quotidienne dans les moindres détails afin de toujours penser à Dieu (nourriture, repas et achats, vêtements, loisirs, vie sexuelle) Ils nécessitent claustration intellectuelle et crédulité.

Ils s'opposent à un clergé moderniste dont la pensée alimentée à d'autres sources, en particulier aux découvertes scientifiques, tend à élargir les horizons de la vie religieuse

Bouddhistes, catholiques intégristes, hindouistes, islamistes, juifs orthodoxes, protestants fondamentalistes, sectes même objectif : maintenir les femmes dans leurs obligations : reproduction de la famille et gratification sexuelle du mari. Les tenants de l'islam politique vont, en plus de la peur de l'autonomie des femmes, utiliser la haine de l'Occident pour obtenir l'asservissement volontaire des femmes.

Deux types de discours, soit un discours hypocrite de protection des femmes, soit un discours d'intimidation : la menace de punition sur terre ou au ciel, c'est-à-dire éternelle si les femmes n'obéissent pas aux traditions, sont toujours tenus pour convaincre des femmes de revenir aux schémas patriarcaux théocratiques, la soumission à dieu se matérialisant sur terre par la soumission aux hommes.

La mainmise sur la fécondité et la sexualité des femmes a été et reste le moteur de l'oppression. Les votes conjoints du Saint Siège, de la Pologne des fondamentalistes protestants américains et des Etats musulmans dans les conférences internationales contre l'accès des femmes aux droits à disposer de leur corps en sont la preuve. Ils ont été rejoints par la Russie lors du vote de la résolution de l'ONU qui interdit la diffamation de l'islam. L'attaque se porte sur les esprits, avec la confusion volontaire entre la

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diffamation qui concerne les personnes et la religion qui concerne les idées, ce qui a bien été rappelé par l'intervenante Allemande. **L'activité de la pensée est exclue du champ de la loi.** Aucune conviction ou croyance n'est supérieure à celle des autres.

Les tentatives de régression vont donc cibler prioritairement l'autonomie financière en particulier possible grâce au travail salarié des femmes et la maîtrise de leur désir d'enfants.

3.1) Tentatives des catholiques intégristes pour revenir sur le droit à l'IVG, de manière insidieuse et sournoise

Tentatives de régression sur les droits à la contraception, à l'Interruption volontaire de grossesse, à la procréation assistée, se multiplient, soit par des lois contraires aux droits des femmes, soit de manière insidieuse et sournoise.

Les campagnes de dénonciation des pilules contraceptives, inscrites par le CIRC dans les substances cancérigènes. Or les études sont des synthèses d'étude de différents pays, qui ne portent pas sur les mêmes prescriptions, donc n'ont aucune valeur. Bénéfices / risques pour les femmes : entre l'accroissement minime des risques de cancer du sein, le bénéfice du suivi des femmes, il n'y a pas photo. On n'observe pas de décès dus au cancer du sein qui se sont manifestés à la suite de prise de pilules.

3.2) Le ventre des femmes comme source de supériorité numérique

Le prédicateur Tarik Ramadan n'est pas contre la pilule à condition que la femme ait déjà donné à la communauté de croyants, l'Oumma, le nombre d'enfants nécessaires à cette supériorité numérique par rapport aux mécréants.

3.3) Les attaques des fondamentalistes islamistes

Les atteintes à l'égalité en droit, en Europe, des femmes et de fillettes de filiation musulmane sous prétexte de traditions religieuses, imposées par leur mari ou père, leur

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famille, le voisinage se multiplient. L'enfermement des femmes de confession musulmane, l'apartheid sexué, les mariages sous contraintes, forcés, la répudiation, la polygamie, école de la haine pour les enfants des différentes épouses (30 000 familles polygames en France), les violences psychologiques et physiques dues aux traditions religieuses entraînent des troubles de l'ordre public, allant jusqu'au crime d'honneur et font que toutes les femmes en Europe n'ont pas les mêmes droits !

Le voile islamiste n'est pas une tenue folklorique traditionnelle. Il a été inventé dans les pays arabo-musulman d'abord, puis dans le reste du monde par les tenants de l'islam politique pour montrer leur capacité d'occuper les espaces et les esprits. Ce n'est pas un bout de tissu quelconque. Des femmes qui refusent de le porter sont fouettées, égorgées, lapidées. Dès que les intégristes prennent le pouvoir dans un pays, leur première mesure va être de voiler les femmes de la manière la plus claustrante possible.

En France les jeunes filles de filiation musulmane réussissait à l'école, lieu d'émancipation et devenait ensuite autonome, elle risquait même d'épouser un non-musulman. Cette peur panique a amené les prédicateurs salafistes à voiler leur fillette pour d'une part les enfermer dans le rôle traditionnel assigné et d'autre part les présenter comme victimes de ces enseignants laïques qui veulent apprendre à leurs élèves à réfléchir, c'est-à-dire selon la définition d'Alain « dire non à ses propres croyances ».

Le conditionnement des enfants par l'éducation familiale se fait dès le plus jeune âge, pour que soit intégrée la subordination des filles et l'obligation de virilité agressive des garçons. Les fillettes sont préparées à une servitude qu'elles penseront volontaire, à être séparées du reste de la société, des hommes, mais aussi des femmes qui n'ont pas la même pratique religieuse.

Cela engendre des représentations des femmes, aussi bien par les filles que par les garçons, totalement contradictoires avec le principe d'égalité en droit entre les hommes

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et les femmes. De nouvelles frontières sont érigées entre les hommes et les femmes, avec le risque de fragmentation de la société. Comment discerner clairement un « nous » dans l'espace civique qui est un besoin psychique fondamental. Intégration psychologique préalable à toute intégration.

Aujourd'hui : des jeunes filles assimilent les schémas patriarcaux que nous pensions archaïques, en particulier leur infériorité par rapport aux garçons. La non-intégration psychologique empêche l'intégration sociale.

L'accusation d'ethnocentrisme proférée par ceux qui veulent enfermer les femmes dans les traditions patriarcales a un impact sur les benêts compassionnels. Des personnes (hommes ou femmes) considèrent que l'égalité en droit, principe universel, ne concerne que les Occidentaux et acceptent séparation et inégalité hommes/femmes pour celles qu'elles considèrent définitivement comme « non-occidentales », même s'ils et elles vivent en Occident depuis plusieurs générations !

Le relativisme culturel est du racisme puisqu'il interdit à des personnes de jouir des droits fondamentaux universels.

L'argument : C'est ma foi, c'est mon choix donc c'est mon droit n'est pas acceptable. La liberté a des limites. Une liberté sans limites engendre la loi du plus fort, du plus riche, du plus vociférant, du plus manipulateur. Dans la devise républicaine, la liberté est associée à l'égalité et à la fraternité parce que la fraternité républicaine empêche la liberté d'engendrer des privilèges et l'égalité d'engendrer l'oppression.

C'est à chacun et chacune d'entre nous de ne pas abandonner les enfants de filiation musulmane à des traditions religieuses contraires au droit universel, sans crainte d'être accusé de « racisme »

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C'est à chacun et chacune d'entre nous de dénoncer auprès des institutions chaque fois qu'il ou elle observe des atteintes à la dignité et à l'intégrité des êtres humains et en particulier des mineurs. Toutes les personnes qui vivent sur le territoire ont droit à la protection de l'Etat et doivent obéir aux lois qui permettent de vivre ensemble dans le respect mutuel des différences. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'association que je préside Regards de femmes a déposé plainte contre un imam qui justifiait lors d'une interview dans un magazine, de battre sa femme au nom du coran. L'imam a été condamné à de la prison avec sursis et à une amende. Aucune justification religieuse ne permet de ne pas obéir à la loi du pays.

Conclusion

Préconisations du Conseil de l'Europe du 4 octobre 2005 : « Garantir la séparation nécessaire entre les églises et l'Etat pour que les femmes ne soient pas soumises à des politiques et à des lois inspirées de la religion (par exemple dans le domaine de la famille, du divorce et des lois contre l'avortement) » (article 7.3).

Ne pas être dupe ou complice du discours englobant, négation de l'autonomie de l'individu, des fondamentalistes religieux. Pour cela :

1. Affirmer les principes universels d'égalité de dignité des hommes et des femmes.
2. Toutes les femmes et jeunes filles dans un pays ont les mêmes droits. Refuser toute justification religieuse d'atteinte aux droits des femmes.
3. Ne pas s'enfermer dans des discussions sur les interprétations des textes religieux, dans l'exégèse, mais rester dans le domaine du droit positif.
4. Dénoncer l'argument du relativisme culturel qui permet aux fondamentalistes religieux d'opprimer leurs coreligionnaires, à commencer par les femmes.

TOUTES LES FEMMES DOIVENT AVOIR ACCES AUX DROITS FONDAMENTAUX UNIVERSELS DE LA PERSONNE HUMAINE.

“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

Margot Papenheim

Margot Papenheim, born in 1956, studied German language and literature as well as Catholic theology.

From 1981 to 1988 she worked as a special advisor for the archdiocese of Berlin, focusing on adult education within the Church. From 1994 to 2000, she was a special advisor for international and ecumenical relations at the *Bundesverband der Katholischen Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands* (National Federation of Catholic Women's Organizations), which included participation in the World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Since 2000 she has been a advisor on ecumenical issues and an editor for the *Evangelische Frauenhilfe in Deutschland* (Federation of Protestant Women's Aid Organizations in Germany).

She has two children (18 and 19 years old).

“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

June Jacobs

June Jacobs, born 1930, is member of

- EWL Executive Committee (since Oct. 2006)
- Women's National Commission and International Working Group
- Black Jewish Asian Forum

She further is

- Life President of the Jewish Child's Day
- Imm. Past Chair and a trustee of the Kessler Foundation
- Charity allocation arm of the Jewish Chronicle
- Vice President of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture
- Chair of Nahum Golmann Fellowship Committee
- British Friends of Peace Now Trustee
- Immediate Past President (1996-2002) of the International Council of Jewish Women, representing them at the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York

and

- On International Council and Grants Committee of the New Israel Fund
- On the Board of PAIDEIA, the centre for Jewish Studies in Europe (Stockholm)

Some of her past activities:

- First woman Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews
- Attended the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi 1985 and the Beijing+5 UN conference in NY in 2000

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- A founder and Executive member of the International Centre for Peace in the Middle East and Chair of UK branch
- Founding Member of the Jewish Palestinian Dialogue Group In UK

June Jacobs lives in London, she is a widow, and has 3 children and 3 grandchildren.

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“Women – Religions – Europe: Exploring an intriguing relationship“

Talk given by June Jacobs: “Seeing behind the Veil: Religious Stereotypes”

Stereotypes influence us

- What people think
- What people do
- What effect on public policy?

What people think

- Religion can lead to extremism or terrorism
- It creates allegiances to foreign powers (e.g. the concept of Zionism; the Caliphate)
- Religion can be seen as patriarchal and removing women's rights

But at the same time, religion can be seen as a force for social cohesion, enforcing a common morality.

What people do

- Assume men in religious communities can speak for women
- Accept male interpretations of religious ideology, e.g. that Islam accepts domestic violence
- Ban the wearing of religious symbols e.g. crucifixes, in school, at work
- Violence against hijabis/grows

What does this mean for public policy?

- Need to see that religion can be a proxy for race, migration status, political allegiance, and extremism
- Conflation of religion with race can drive racism e.g. anti-Semitism
- Particular issues for women –the major religions being patriarchal
- Protecting and privileging religion and religious leaders can lead to counter feminist policy

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Colette De Troy

Colette De Troy is working at the European Women's Lobby (EWL) Secretariat in Brussels as coordinator of the EWL Policy Action Centre on Violence against Women.

Sociologist and criminologist by profession, Colette De Troy is involved in gender issues for some 20 years. She has worked on the legal system and penal institutions in Belgium and in Montreal (Canada), has been involved in grassroots actions with migrant women and girls in Brussels, in European research and has been co-director of a women's cooperative on research and information for women. She has been involved in the V-Day movement and is a member of the Board of Equality Now.

She is with the EWL since 1998, coordinating the work of EWL on European and international policy on Violence against Women, including trafficking and prostitution, and on Women's Human Rights.

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Dr. Inge v. Bönninghausen

Dr. Inge v. Bönninghausen, born in 1938, started her career as an independent journalist after studying history and German language and literature.

From 1974 to 1999 she worked as a television editor for *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, primarily directing and moderating *Frauen-Fragen* (*Frau-TV* as of 1997), a show on women's issues.

In 1987 she co-founded the *Journalistinnenbund*, a Germany-wide network of women in media. She is a member of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT). Her extensive international experience includes numerous women's media conferences in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as coverage from Cairo (UN World Conference on Development and Population) and Beijing (1995 World Conference on Women).

In 1996 she received the German Order of Merit (*Bundesverdienstkreuz*).

Inge von Bönninghausen is a board member of both the *Stiftung Archiv* (German women's movement archive) in Kassel and the *Lobby für Mädchen* (lobby for girls) in Cologne.

She was President of the *Deutscher Frauenrat* (National Council of German Women's Organizations) from 2000 to 2004. Since leaving that office, she once again works as an independent journalist and moderator.



European Women's Lobby
Lobby européen des femmes

***European Women's Lobby –
Lobby européen des femmes***

18 rue Hydraulique
B-1210 Bruxelles
Tel. : +32 2 217 90 20
Fax: +32 2 219 84 51
ewl@womenlobby.org
www.womenslobby.org



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Bundesvereinigung von Frauenverbänden und
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Axel-Springer-Str. 54a
D-10117 Berlin
Tel.: +49 30 204569-0
Fax: +49 30 204569-44
kontakt@frauenrat.de
www.frauenrat.de

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