

Sacred Choices

Beyond pro-life vs. pro-choice—

"This project advances the religious conversation about contraception and abortion, highlighting the creative insights of each tradition and rescuing the debate from the traditionalists and modernists alike."

—Arvind Sharma
McGill University, author of *Women and World Religions*

Opening a new conversation about a conflicted and polarized area, ethicist Daniel Maguire taps the wisdom of ten world religions and finds in them a true religious awe at the sacredness of life, a genuine openness to sexuality as a dimension of the sacred, and "alongside the 'no choice' position . . . a 'pro-choice' position that is too little known, even by adherents to the religion."

"Those concerned with world population policy and women's reproductive rights often regard the world's religions as the enemy. In this accessible and important book ethicist Daniel Maguire discusses the views of major world religions—Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Native American—to show their openness to positive views on sexual pleasure and flexibility on birth control and even abortion."

—Rosemary Radford Ruether
Garrett-Evangelical-Theological-Seminary, author of *Sexism and God-Talk*

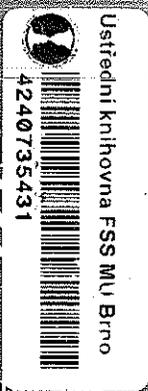


Daniel C. Maguire is Professor of Ethics in the Theology Department of Marquette University. He is also President of the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics. Among his many books are *Death by Choice* (1974), *The Moral Choice* (1975), *The Moral Revolution* (1986), and *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity* (1993).



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SACRED ENERGIES

Sacred Choices

The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions



Daniel C. Maguire

Yakovic
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Ústřední knihovna FSS MU Brno



SACRED CHOICES

“Dan Maguire has changed the debate over reproductive rights forever by conclusively demonstrating that there is a theological basis for the pro-choice position in ten world religions.”

—Rev. Stephen J. Mather, Member, Board of Directors
Planned Parenthood Federation of America

“*Sacred Choices* is the right choice for anyone who wants to explode the poisonous myth that the world’s religions oppose a woman’s right to reproductive freedom. . . . A breakthrough volume that is easily accessible and a delight to read.”

—Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Senior Rabbi, Emeritus
Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, New York, N.Y.

“What Dr. Maguire, with his scholarly guides, does so brilliantly is make the data accessible, lift the shroud of stereotype, and let the reader decide for her/himself.”

—Mary E. Hunt, Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics
and Ritual

“With all the shouting in the angry debate about abortion, you would think we possessed God’s full understanding about our creation. Clearly, we need a new conversation, and Professor Maguire could move us toward a more civilized, more Christian, discussion.”

—John P. Blessington, *American Catholic*

Titles in
Sacred Energies

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The Religious Consultation on Population,
Reproductive Health and Ethics

Sacred Energies:
When the World's Religions Sit Down to Talk about the
Future of Human Life and the Plight of This Planet
Daniel C. Maguire
(2000)

The Justice Men Owe Women:
Positive Resources from World Religions
John C. Raines
(2001)

Power, Pleasure, and Justice
Mary E. Hunt and Patricia Beattie Jung
(forthcoming)

SACRED CHOICES
The Right to Contraception and Abortion
in Ten World Religions

Daniel C. Maguire

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Further materials related to this project can be found at:
<http://www.sacredchoices.org>

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The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions

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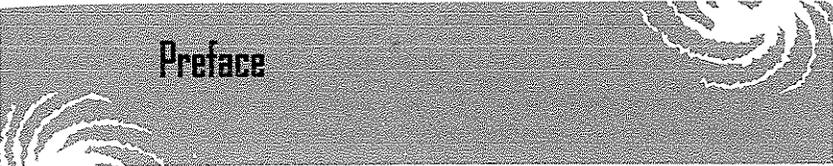
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Preface

CYNICS SAY THAT CONVENTIONAL WISDOM is always wrong. That is an overstatement, but there is one case in which it is clearly wrong. Conventional wisdom says that religions are invariably anti-choice when it comes to contraception with abortion as a backup when necessary. This restrictive viewpoint is indeed found in the world religions, and it is a perfectly respectable and orthodox position within those religions—but it isn't the only respectable and orthodox position within those religions. These traditions are richer, more sensitive, and more subtle than we might believe.

In this book, first-rate religious scholars gathered from around the world show that alongside the familiar *no choice* position, there is a solid *pro-choice* position in all these religious traditions. Thanks to a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health, and Ethics brought these scholars together for two long working sessions. I have gathered the fruits of their work in this book. The restrictive view on family planning has been well-published. This is the first time the other side has been heard on this scale.

Our goal as scholars is to change international discourse on the subject of abortion. The two sides in the abortion debate need not be so bitterly divided. There are things we could all agree on. We could all agree that there are too many abortions! We could also all agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies, since that is the key problem. We might further agree that in utopia, there

would be almost no need for abortion. And we could certainly agree that this world is not utopia. It is our hope that we all could endorse the moral freedom of women who must sometimes make this serious decision in an imperfect world.

This book shows that the right to an abortion is solidly grounded in the world's great religions. Governments that restrict that right are abusing the religious freedom of many—in some cases, most—of their citizens.

The world religions can be our guides. For all their imperfections, each of them is a classic in the art of cherishing. Each of them faces the fact that life is *the* good and the precondition of all other goods. But the life that is so good also bears the mark of the tragic. Sometimes the ending of incipient life is the best that life offers. Historically, women have been the principal cherishers and caretakers of life. We can trust them with these decisions. This book shows that the world's religions urge us to do so.

I. More People, Less Earth

WHEN I WAS BORN, only a little more than two billion people lived on Earth. Suddenly there are six billion, with another four or five on the way in the next fifty years. The experts say the population boom will then level off, but no one knows what that number will be. It is worrisome that we have on earth at this time the largest class of fertile persons in the history of the world. Half of the human family are under twenty-five. Depending on what these do, our numbers will peak at mid-century somewhere between nine and eleven billion. Put another way, there are more fertile young folks on planet Earth right now than there were people in 1950, and we have no guarantee about what they will do. World population now is like a triangle, with the reproductive young at the wide bottom and the infertile oldsters at the narrow top. Until this becomes more of a rectangle, with a balance between the young and the old, there will be growth.

There is some good news. Overall population growth has been dropping for years. In fact, some thirty-five nations have stopped growing, and some of these actually have declining populations. Even some poor states in India like Kerala and Goa have stabilized their populations. But world population still grows, because mortality is also declining. Sanitation, food, and medicine are all getting better, and more people are surviving. We're lucky to have been born at this point in history—at least those of us who live in the affluent parts of the world. Prehistoric people only lived for an average of eighteen years, factoring in