

## Women in Islam: Sydney Women Speak

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**Abstract:** Interfaith dialogue in the public domain has up till now been dominated by male religious leaders and their concerns. Yet when women are allowed to speak from their own space, rather than have male professionals speak *for* them, an entirely other world of experience may be identified. Vatican and Muslim leaders plan to establish a historic new body called the Muslim-Catholic Forum which will meet in Rome in November 2008. However, Catholic and Muslim women have been meeting for interfaith dialogue in Sydney for more than ten years. Through interviews with Muslim and Catholic participants this article surveys the dialogue which had been taking place in Sydney, along with the women's perspectives and themes.

### INTRODUCTION

FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS NOW Muslim and Catholic women in Sydney have enjoyed each other's company socially in a relaxed way, for example, at "Food and Friendship" gatherings which each group has taken a turn in hosting. They have organised and participated in mosque visits, usually accompanied by meals of Middle Eastern cuisine. Catholic and Muslim women speak regularly together on the same platform, for example at lunchtime public forums such as "Christians and Muslims – People of Faith", held in a city church, and at "Spirituality in the Pub" gatherings. They have also provided speakers for Public Peace Forums in cooperation with local Municipal Councils in Sydney. Many other meetings and gatherings also request speakers representing a Muslim and a Christian perspective, especially in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001.

Interfaith dialogue between Australian Muslim and Catholic women, which was already occurring in many ways at an informal level in the

context of daily life,<sup>1</sup> received a new impetus in 1997 with the establishment of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, a work of the Missionary Society of St Columban in Australia. The Centre soon established relationships with Sydney-based Muslim women's organisations such as the Muslim Women's National Network Australia (MWNNA) and the Muslim Women's Association (MWA) – associations which were already in existence to represent Muslim women's interests to government and society in general. The dialogue also received the moral support of the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese's Commission for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, and the Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. This interaction over the years, at both formal and informal levels, has built up relationships of understanding and trust.

Because the Muslim population in Australia tends to be concentrated in the larger cities and because of the large geographical distance between these urban centres, interfaith dialogue in Australia tends to be focused in the capital city of each state. A significant feature of women's interfaith dialogue is its informal and unstructured nature. Women's dialogue, on the whole, is not part of the "official" dialogue between religious leaders who are nearly always male.<sup>2</sup> Nor do women generally have access to the kind of financial, secretarial and other resources available to official religious leaders for their meetings. Consequently, there has been little, if any, formal documentation of women's interfaith dialogue. In 2006 I conducted a study as part of a doctoral research project among a dispersed, yet identifiable, network of Catholic and Muslim women who have been involved in interfaith dialogue in the Sydney region. It aimed to discover the impact of the dialogue on the women's understanding of their own tradition as well as their understanding of what it meant to be a woman in the other tradition.

#### THE WOMEN'S DIALOGUE

For this qualitative study sixteen women (eight Muslim and eight Catholic) were asked to respond to the following key questions:

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1. Muslims make up about 2% of the Australian population generally (2006 ABS census figures), though some urban areas such as Auburn in Sydney have a much higher concentration (24.8%).

2. An example, unfortunately not atypical, is the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference day-long Congress held at NSW Parliament House on 2 May 2007. This brought together "key people from the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious traditions for two groundbreaking events focusing on understanding and achieving Peace in the Middle East". There were only six women present among more than 90 invited guests. The panel consisting of three speakers and a chairperson was entirely male.

- As a woman committed to your religious tradition (Christian or Muslim) what do you find in it most empowering?
- As a Muslim or Christian woman, what in your own religious tradition do you find most disempowering?
- While you have been engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue what have you learnt that is significant for you about the treatment of women in the other religious tradition?
- What have you learnt that is significant for you about your own religious tradition?
- As a Christian / Muslim woman what would you most like to see changed in the interpretation / application of your own religious tradition?
- What issues do you see as important for Christian-Muslim women's inter-religious dialogue?

Participants were also asked to list a number of common dialogue topics in relative importance.

The women of both groups covered a range of ages from "under 30" to "over 60" with more women in the upper age ranges than the lower. Both groups consisted of women who were fully committed to their own religion and its practices of prayer and religious observance, whether Catholic or Muslim, but were not uncritical of its teachings and lived reality. Most were extremely active as volunteers at many levels of civil society, as well as being engaged in paid work. Altogether, the sixteen women interviewed were active participants and leaders in over forty-five different community organisations and groups, with Muslim women being involved in a slightly greater number. Some of the Catholic women belonged to Catholic religious congregations of sisters. All women, except one Muslim woman who had converted some decades before, had been born into and raised in generally Catholic or Muslim family environments. Socio-economically, the women, whether Muslim or Catholic, could generally be said to be "middle-class" or "lower-middle-class". They tended to be well-educated, with nearly all holding tertiary qualifications and professional qualifications as lawyers, teachers, economists and accountants, psychologists and theologians.

The main differences between the Muslim and Catholic women, as a group, were that the Muslim women were mostly first- or second-

generation Australians, having been born in Australia of immigrant parents, or having migrated to Australia as young children. The countries-of-origin of the Muslim women included Afghanistan, Egypt, Fiji, Lebanon, Palestine and Turkey. The Catholic women were more likely to be third generation or older Australians. The cultural origins of the Catholic women, then, were mostly Anglo-Celtic, but also included some with cultural backgrounds in Bangladesh, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Although nearly all the women in the Christian-Muslim dialogue belonged to officially-recognised Muslim or Catholic organisations (for example Muslim Women's National Network Australia [MWNNA], Catholic offices or Catholic religious sisters' congregations), the women did not represent or speak for any of these institutions. Therefore, I have given them the following pseudonyms. The Catholic women are named: "Frances", "Helen", "Jasmine", "Justine", "Katherine", "Margaret", "Maureen", and "Shanti". The Muslim women are named: "Aysha", "Durrie", "Fadwa", "Mahasin", "Nazeera", "Samira", "Sarah-Louise", and "Yildiz".

The interviews with the women reflected their concerns about the effects on women of fundamentalist religious teachings and practices which diminished them. They also recognised that alternative models, inclusive of women, were possible and that their respective religious traditions contain the spiritual, historical and theological resources needed to reshape and renew these traditions. In meeting together they were aware that they were learning the value of being in solidarity with women of another religious tradition in addressing many of these concerns which they discovered were held in common. They were united in their belief that women's full human development is intrinsically linked with the full flourishing of humanity living in respectful relationships with each other and with all of creation.

**The women of both traditions, without exception, said they found their religious belief to be an integrating and empowering experience:**

*Aysha (Muslim): My religion gives me purpose, a sense of direction in life which is higher than anything at this world level, and that is God, and a direction to that God. That frees me from the constraints that I might be in at a social or other level..., in the multiplicity that is around me, it frees me from worrying so that I don't have to go and satisfy every expectation there is, and every demand that there is. I am in connection with the Divine...*

*Justine (Catholic): The notion of human dignity – being aware that every human being is created by God and has innate worth – I find that really*

*empowering. I find that awareness of that changes the way that I interact with people and changes my whole approach to life.... And connected to that, the belief that we are created by God and that God lives in us through the Holy Spirit. I find it extremely empowering – to know that I'm connected with the divine mission....*

**But they also openly acknowledged that they experienced their religion as disempowering of women:**

*Margaret (Catholic): I experience a sense of exclusion. There is no forum for women's voices to be heard, unless one creates it.... And there is a reliance on tradition that says things like "We have never done it, so we can never do it" and then that's used as absolute black and white evidence that it's not acceptable.*

*Justine (Catholic): The institutional barriers (for women) are disempowering. The obvious one is the barrier to ordained ministry. I find it quite confusing, because you attempt to be open to what God is calling you to, and to do that within this limited parameter, can be quite confusing when you're trying to work through your calling in life. Also some of the language around it really frustrates me.... There was an advertisement in the World Youth Day diary that said "Are you one of the Pope's men?" I'm not one of the Pope's men, so I ripped that page out of my diary. It's stuff like that.... I remember a ministry talk by a priest, who talked about his own vocation in coming to realise he was being called to the priesthood. The way he expressed it was that he had realised how committed he was to God, and that this was the best way he could show his commitment, because he loved God so much he wanted to become a priest. I remember feeling extremely agitated. Because in those kind of terms, if being a priest is the way you best express your love for God, what about the rest of us, who feel an equivalent love for God and yet are not allowed to show it in that way?*

*Mahasin (Muslim): The misinterpretation of verses or injunctions in the Qur'an and the misapplication of shari'a law affect women. We have scholars who give correct interpretations, but there are others who don't have enough knowledge of the Arabic language, who follow a narrow interpretation. Certain people prefer to follow fabricated hadith that are weak and inauthentic, that put women down. But the purpose of shari'a law<sup>3</sup> is to regulate and organise life to protect society from certain*

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3. *Shari'a* is the system of Islamic religious law within which both public and private aspects of life are regulated. It is based on the *Qur'an* (the religious text of Islam), *hadith* (sayings and doings of Muhammad and his companions), *ijma* (consensus), *qiyas* (reasoning by analogy) and centuries of debate, interpretation and precedent.

*individuals and to protect individuals from the injustice of rulers or the majority.*

**The women appreciated that they had come to learn much about the other religious tradition:**

Durrie (Muslim): *[I learnt that] it has been as much of a struggle [for women in Christianity] as it has been for women in all traditions. I haven't yet heard any of verses from the Bible that you turn to in order to reaffirm the status of women, and that concerns me. And also it very much tied in with modern times. The movement towards parity for women in Western culture only occurred in the last century. It's only in modern times that the status of women has improved for Christian women. The status of women was that women were the property of men, so to speak, and you had to be looked after. You were not able to do that in your own right. Rights for Christian women have only come as part of modern life, whereas Muslim women can look back to earlier times. With the separation of Church and state, I see that Western and secular culture has been more supportive of Christian women who are in that culture, who have been able to enjoy the rights given to them in secular society. It hasn't been so much of a cultural struggle for Christian women. But modern times have been worse for women in Muslim countries.*

Katherine (Catholic): *What I've found most significant is that women's treatment in other religious traditions parallels my own. One of the things I've learnt in dealing with Muslim women is that the Qur'an shows greater respect for women's role in that it parallels duties for males and females and rights for males and females. It recognises women's rights in a way that Christian tradition doesn't – for example, inheritance, divorce – even though this is not lived out in reality, it's in the tradition. Negatively, I've learnt that in the Muslim tradition while many beautiful things are said about women's role and women's place and women's equality, this is not lived out in practice. The other thing I've learnt is that – and this may be a cultural thing – but on the whole Muslim women don't seem to respond in anger and frustration to the same degree as Christian women. They appear more accepting of secondary roles particularly in regard to the sacred, to worship.*

**Both Catholic and Muslim women reflected on the significance of control of space and dress, and control of women:**

Frances (Catholic): *Women are facing the same ferment: a patriarchal society that demeans women by subtly and not subtly – outrightly – subjugating women. By subtly I mean, rather, forms of dress that keep*

*them identified and in place and unable to develop independence. They are more pronounced in some societies than others, I think. I find that some of the responses of women to this are to (become) spiritualised. I find Christian women have done it in the past and are doing it today quite unknowingly. It's part of the way that women survive. Some Muslim women do the same thing. Some independent, autonomous Muslim women will conform in outer signifiers in order to maintain a marriage.... They will put on a way of life – I'm thinking now of one who will wear the hijab. She'll wear it in her own family, but when she gets away from that group, she takes it off. And where she's likely to be recognised she'll wear it. Now that reminds me of certain ways religious sisters used to survive in the past...what goes on in that external way also goes on psychologically....*

*Nazeera (Muslim): Gender separation and the emphasis on covering for women prevent normal everyday communication between men and women. It is disempowering of young people because they do not have wide experience of the opposite sex and it makes it difficult for them to meet a suitable partner and make sound decisions about whom to marry etc..... With gender segregation I have opposed it – when I do functions in my house I make sure we all sit together.... Modest dress is not the issue, but complete covering is disempowering. It is very restrictive. It restricts movement and behaviour. You are publicly identified, and your business is no longer private.... The way many women make use of multi-coloured veils and clothing defeats the purpose, which is to deflect attention. Hijab then becomes a fashion statement, and it can be sexy. Christian women seem to be more free. They are freer to express themselves. In prayer the family can stay together – there is no separation of men and women, as in the mosque and, for example, in weddings. Christian women can't be the pope or ordained – while women in Islam can't be an imam – so we are similar in that respect. But Christian women can pray and go to a church even when they are menstruating, while Muslim women cannot.*

*Margaret (Catholic): There is a commonality of the exclusion of women, whatever the tradition. I think it is experienced differently but when you analyse it you can still see it. It's a kind of exclusion by the patriarchal system which always excludes and then goes and puts energy into protecting itself. The system protects itself by theologising about the exclusion. I think that sums it up....*

*Fadwa (Muslim): I think we forget the importance of women in both traditions – Christian and Muslim. Mary is used as a symbol of a patient person, who was obedient to God. There is a story of the wife of a Pharaoh in Egypt. There are stories of divorces from the time of the Prophet but the*

*men will forget to mention those. There are stories from the time of the Prophet – there are hadiths – but they are overlooked.*

**On the socio-political aspects of their situation, the women commented:**

*Yildiz (Muslim): When women in Islamic countries don't seem to have these freedoms as upheld by the Qur'an and Islamic teaching, it comes down to the imams' lack of education and also cultural reasons. A frustration occurs when you are mixing the traditional civil, cultural and nationalist views of the country with religious aspects, when women haven't been given the opportunity for education and to exercise their rights.*

*Helen (Catholic): (Muslims) living in a Western country, are caught between the two cultures. So where do they find identity?... They find it in their faith and to claim that identity they take it up in a very extreme form.... You don't belong to your ethnic culture, and you don't belong to Australian culture, so there's belonging to Islamic culture. So it is about identity, cultural and religious identity, in a migrant and minority situation. I don't think we always understand that. It's about identity and belonging.*

*We don't have some of the same protections (Muslim women) have. They've got their ascribed roles. So do Christians. The pope's always putting out encyclicals about the role of women. And the model of Mary is proposed idealistically. Christians are similar to Muslims in that their role is seen to be in the home, although it's not spelt out so much. There are similar fixed roles. The woman is seen as the homemaker. In both Christianity and Islam there is emphasis on traditional roles. There is no official place for lay-women in the church.*

*Margaret (Catholic): Women seem less free now than even in previous eras such as the Middle Ages.... I think the system is more self-protecting now because the possibility of it disintegrating is more obvious, and women have got the freedom to choose. It is a common patriarchal system that women are facing, even though it is expressed differently and experienced differently, and the system puts a **huge** amount of energy into protecting itself and theologising exclusion.*

**A common experience which came from the women's engagement in interfaith dialogue with other women was that it enabled them, sometimes for the first time, to reflect on their religion from the point**

**of view of its interaction with culture. To rediscover the historical reality of the origins of one's religion was an enlightening and empowering experience for many:**

Mahasin (Muslim): *....after the (Muslim) religion was revealed it was the patriarchal society that took over, unfortunately. Even in Prophet Muhammad's time, his was a new approach. For example, women who had themselves participated in the wars could no longer be considered the booty of war, or be taken by other men as one of the possessions of a man who had died. It made the men very angry. After the Prophet died, under the four Guided Caliphs, things started to slide back.*

Justine (Catholic): *Comparing Catholic culture which is quite patriarchal, but also quite influenced by Australian culture in which we live, which is also patriarchal, with the Muslim milieu which is probably more patriarchal, raises questions about the distinction between the religion and the culture.... Everything is a bit blurred between culture and religion.*

Shanti (Catholic): *The empowering of women is coming from the society (rather than from the church) – but it still reflects religious values. It comes from the church that we are all the children of God, all equal before God. I have learnt that Islam teaches this equality even more than the Christians ... (but) it clashes with the culture.*

#### ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUE<sup>4</sup>

The first impression that the women's reflection on their dialogue conveys is their deep love, knowledge and lived experience of their respective religious traditions. This is an imperative for interfaith dialogue in which each person in dialogue shares the rich resources of her tradition, and receives in turn, from the "other". The women of each tradition experienced their religious tradition as one in which they are in deep "connection with the Divine" – Aysha (Muslim), and the "divine mission" – that "God lives in us through the Holy Spirit" – Justine (Catholic).

However, these reflections also confirm that many Catholic and the Muslim women have recognised the effects on women of fundamentalist teachings and practices which aim to maintain a neo-patriarchal economic, political and social order by those with an interest in

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4. Since the role of "theology" does not have the same significance in Islam and Christianity, and the framework of this study is pastoral, I have tried to maintain the integrity of the women's responses by avoiding any theological analysis which may tend to "colonise" the Muslim women's responses by imposing Christian categories and perspectives.

preserving their own positions in that order. The women interviewed had studied the history and teachings of their respective religions in an effort to understand in what ways religious traditions may have strayed from their original founding vision in their treatment of women. In the dialogue context they were able to provide a critique of the many ways that the present teachings and practices of each religion have become distorted.

Their sense of a deep spiritual connectedness with God and with others was not accompanied by a similar sense of meaningful connection with their respective religious institutions. Rather, a profound sense of marginalisation and of alienation was evident in the face of the structural impediments to women's full development and participation. It is striking, but not surprising, that none of the women expressed any confidence in the support of their (male) religious leaders, believing the lack of education on the part of these leaders (in the case of Fadwa) or their attitudes and practice (Margaret and Nazeera) to be part of the problem.

Margaret (Catholic) painfully acknowledges her "sense of exclusion" and notes that there is no forum for women's voices to be heard in the official forums of the Catholic Church. Justine (Catholic), as a younger woman, speaks of her feelings of disempowerment and confusion, especially in the rhetoric surrounding vocational choices for women. Nazeera (Muslim) also speaks of the disempowerment experienced by Muslim young people in situations where structures of segregation and covering impede women's opportunities for self-expression, active participation and decision-making.

Here, also, the issue of women's own collusion with their oppression was raised by Frances (Catholic), who discerned that an outward conformity with structures which subjugate them can be part of a survival strategy, in which women may also "spiritualise" their oppression. She sees that the veil for both Catholic (nuns) and Muslim women has at times been articulated in this way.

Paradoxically, this sense of alienation expressed by the women may be one contributing factor in the contemporary interest by women of different traditions in interfaith dialogue. Women's experience on the edge of a tradition has increased the opportunity and incentive for dialogue with women on the edges of other traditions. As Majella Franzmann has suggested:

it is as if women have simply turned away from looking at the centre to looking outward beyond the edge on which they stand and have found other women looking back toward them from the edges of their own traditions. Dialogue at the edge with those of other

traditions can be both supportive on both a personal and group level and instructive in the analysis of strategies of power and manipulation at work across traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Through meeting together the women were aware that they were learning the value of being in solidarity with one another, and some hoped that more could be done in this respect. Aysha (Muslim) and Justine (Catholic), for instance, both recognise the strength that women have together. Aysha notes the importance of female spiritual models such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Blessed Mary MacKillop, while Justine values the strong sense of the sacredness of sexuality which both Islam and Catholicism share.

Through their dialogue the women recognised that alternative models, inclusive of women, were possible and that their respective religious traditions contained the spiritual, historical and theological resources needed to reshape and renew these traditions. Mahasin (Muslim) stressed that the real purpose of *shari'a* law was to protect individuals from injustice and to make life "easy and fair and just", while Helen experienced her Catholic belief in the resurrection of Jesus as a source of hope and empowerment. All the women were acting, at least implicitly, in their belief that the full flourishing of all humanity is dependent on improving the status of women.

Some areas in the women's dialogue which I believe could be more thoroughly explored are:

- the connection between politico-economic issues and cultural-religious issues as they affect women,
- the connection between the values of respect and care for women's full development and the values of respect and care for creation, and
- the relationship between religion and culture.

In examining the significance of these issues, much of the dialogue of the women can be understood as struggling with issues of religion and culture. There was often some dispute about what was specifically religious and what was cultural. For instance, both Muslims and Catholics recognised that many of the restrictions suffered by Muslim women were the result of patriarchal cultural influences and could not be justified by the religious teaching of Islam. At the same time, the

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5. Majella Franzmann, *Women and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 98.

freedoms that women experienced in Western “secular” societies were noted by Yildiz and Durrie (Muslims) without recognising the influence of Christian values in the shaping of many of these societies.

The fact that Western “secular” values were not recognised by the Muslim women as having anything to do with Christianity perhaps highlights the fact that the historical Muslim experience of Western cultural values has been very different from that experienced in the West itself. Especially in the post-1945 period, Islamic fundamentalists came to understand secularism not as a series of ideas with universal values at their core, but as a Western construct around which the domination of other cultures and civilisations could be facilitated.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we should not be surprised when, even in more moderate Islamic thinking, the religious and, more specifically, Christian values inherent in Western “secular” discourse tend to be under-estimated.

Another possible reason is that values of freedom, justice and “Christian” values which protect human rights are lived more evidently in so-called “civil” society, and are difficult to discern in the institutional life of the church itself. This raises the related question of where human rights are located: in humanity itself? in religious teachings? are they God-given? Although the relocation of human rights in humanity itself rather than in religious identity was a major breakthrough in Roman Catholic thinking at the Second Vatican Council in 1965, there has been little follow-through in practice in church life, especially where church teachings and practices affect women. Although there are signs that other world religious communities are also moving to a similar understanding on this issue, there is still no consensus among them.<sup>7</sup> A consequence is that religious communities have often contributed to a climate of religious discrimination by supporting or advocating the repression of other religious identities, both internally and externally. This is very evident in much fundamentalist thinking and activity.

Ironically, the under-valuing of many positive Western values may also be detrimental to the full flowering of Islamic culture since it neglects the presence of these values within Islam itself. It neglects “a rich history of Muslim societies characterised by a de facto separation of power between mosque and state and revealing evidence of an earlier Muslim acceptance of the doctrine of reason and scientific rationality”.<sup>8</sup> The impact which Islamic fundamentalist discourse has had on Muslim

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6. Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism since 1945* (London: New York: Routledge, 2005) 50.

7. See R. Scott Appleby, “Religions, Human Rights and Social Change”, in Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttill (eds.), *The Freedom to Do God’s Will: Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2003) 216-17.

8. Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 33. See also pp. 4 and 44.

thinking generally, when certain values are rejected simply because they are seen as “Western” values, has much to answer for in this respect. Recognition of such a common cultural heritage could form the basis of a new era of fruitful co-operation in a dialogue of “action” between Muslims and Christians.

Women of both traditions were struck by the similarity of the obstacles and difficulties women face in communities that are patriarchally structured. They see the treatment of women in the other religious tradition as parallel to their own. In this context, the person of Mary, the mother of Jesus, emerged as of some importance for both Muslim and Catholic women. For Muslims Fadwa and Aysha, Mary’s significance lay in her obedience to God and her charismatic leadership, which they also recognised in Mary MacKillop and Mother Teresa. This understanding of Mary was not apparent with the same degree of clarity among the Catholic women. While some Catholic women found the model of Mary the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross (John 19:25) empowering, for Helen, the symbol of Mary was associated with papal idealisation of traditional roles for women and the fact that there seemed no official place for lay women in the church.

Finally, there was a feeling among a significant number of the women, articulated by Durrie (Muslim), that they were ready to move to a different level of dialogue – beyond the social “chat over tea”. Both Muslim and Catholic women raised in some form the issue of economic justice for women as underlining other issues that were important for the status of women and for society in general, and as a possible site for future action.

#### CONCLUSION

Through their engagement in dialogue together, Catholic and Muslim women are coming to a greater awareness at a local level of the global issues raised by the impact of religious fundamentalism on women lives. As studies such as this one illustrate, both Muslim and Catholic women are becoming more attentive to the similarity of the issues which they face in their religious traditions as they negotiate modernity in a globalised world.

Today, a growing number of Catholic and Muslim women, faithful to the liberating vision which inspired the respective founders of both Christianity and Islam, are challenging fundamentalist positions which endorse the unjust economic and social relations which have developed between men and women in patriarchal and neo-patriarchal cultures over the centuries. In this they are supported by United Nations resolutions, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the

Millennium Development Goals, both of which recognise women as important actors in peace-building initiatives and call for women's inclusion as key co-ordinators, decision-makers, program designers, and implementers at all levels of societal action.<sup>9</sup> This recognition also needs to include the full participation of women in every aspect of the life of their religious traditions.

As Catholic and Muslim women reclaim their rightful place within the life of their respective religious traditions, they do so believing that it is not only of great importance for the authentic revivification of their particular religious traditions in the modern context, but also for our global future.

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9. See Camille Pampell Conaway and Anjalina Sen, *Beyond Conflict Prevention: How Women Prevent Violence and Build Sustainable Peace* (United Nations, New York: Global Action to Prevent War and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2005) chapter 4.