



Religion and abortion

Many religious traditions have taken a stance on abortion, and these stances span a broad spectrum from acceptance to rejection.^[1] The variety in opinion on the issue is reflected with most religions generally opposing abortion.^[2]

Buddhism

There is no single Buddhist view concerning abortion although traditional Buddhism rejects abortion because it involves the deliberate destroying of a life and regards life as starting at conception.^[3] Those practicing in Japan and the United States are said to be more tolerant of abortion than those who live elsewhere.^[4] In Japan, women sometimes participate in *Mizuko kuyo* (???? — lit.) after an induced abortion or an abortion as the result of a miscarriage. The Dalai Lama has said that abortion is "negative," but there are exceptions. He said, "I think abortion should be approved or disapproved according to each circumstance."^[5]

There is no official position on abortion among Buddhists, although many Buddhists believe that life begins at conception and that killing is morally wrong.^[6] In Japan, where there is a large Buddhist population, abortions are commonly practiced and often involve the Buddhist tradition of *mizuko jizo*, in which aborted fetuses are thought to be led to the land of the dead.^[7]

Bahá'í Faith

The scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith indicate that the human soul appears at conception, and therefore abortion to merely prevent the birth of an unwanted child is forbidden.^[8] However, abortion is accepted for medical reasons such as in cases where there is a threat to the mother's life or health or when there is the risk of severe genetic defects.^[9] The specific cases when abortion is permissible has not been written in the Bahá'í writings and thus the legislation on the matter has been left to Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'ís.^[10] However, that body does not

intend to legislate on the issue in the present time due to the delicacy of the matter, and therefore the issue of when abortion is allowed is left to the consciences and judgement of the parents, after due process on the ethical issues.^{[8][10]}

Christianity

Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church believes that life begins at conception and, as such, opposes abortion under all circumstance.^{[6][11]} However, in his major work *Summa Theologica*, Saint Thomas Aquinas expounded upon the Principle of double effect by which he theorized that an action is justified under certain circumstances even if it is expected to bring harmful effects along with the intended, beneficial effect. This principle determines the modern Catholic position that a medical procedure needed to save the life of the mother, but that may result in the death of the "pre-born child"^[12] as a secondary effect, is morally acceptable.^[12]

Other Christians

At different times, the various Christians have held different beliefs about abortion.^[13] Although there is little direct mention of abortion in the Christian Bible, certain Christians interpret the Bible to prohibit abortion.^[14] The Eastern Orthodox churches and many Protestant churches believe that abortion is a sin.^{[14][15][16]} Some of these churches recognize an exception for abortion performed to save the life of the mother.^[17] Some Fundamentalist (Evangelical) Protestant denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention supported abortion rights at one time, but now teach that abortion is a sin.^[18]

Some Mainline Protestants, such as Episcopalians, Methodists, and some Reformed and Presbyterian Christians understand the Bible differently and have reached more permissive conclusions regarding abortion. Some groups within these denominations are

members of the **Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice**.^[19]

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that "elective abortion for personal or social convenience is contrary to the will and the commandments of God." Therefore, the church says, any facilitation of or support for abortion warrants excommunication from the church. ^[20]

Hinduism

Hindus hold varying stances on abortion. Some Hindu theologians believe personhood begins at 3 months and develops through to 5 months of gestation, possibly implying permitting abortion up to the third month and considering any abortion past the third month to be destruction of the soul's current incarnate body.^[21] Other Hindus have found that abortion, especially the abortion pill, is a major step towards **women's empowerment**.^[22]

According to the Hinduism Today website, "Several Hindu institutions have shared their positions on abortion recently. The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University does not take a formal unchanging political or religious stance on the issue of abortion. They advise that each case requires unique consideration. The Brahma Kumaris view the body as a physical vehicle for the immortal soul, and therefore the issue is not "pro-life" or "anti-life" but a choice between the amount of suffering caused to the souls of the parents and child in either course, abortion or motherhood."^[23]

Other Hindu institutions oppose abortion,^[24] and teach that abortion prevents a soul in its **karmic** progress toward God.^[25] According to the **British Broadcasting Corporation** website, "When considering abortion, the Hindu way is to choose the action that will do least harm to all involved: the mother and father, the foetus and society. Hinduism is therefore generally opposed to abortion except where it is necessary to save the mother's life... Many Hindus regard the production of offspring as a 'public duty', not simply an 'individual expression of personal choice' (see Lipner, "The classical Hindu view on abortion and the moral status of the unborn" 1989)."^[26]

Unless a mother's health is at risk, traditional Hindu teachings condemn abortion because it is thought to violate the religion's

teachings of non-violence. The general value system of Hinduism teaches that the correct course of action in any given situation is the one that causes the least harm to those involved. ^[27]

Islam

Although there are different opinions among Islamic scholars about when life begins and when abortion is permissible, most agree that the termination of a pregnancy after four months - the point at which, in Islam, a fetus is thought to become a living soul - is not permissible.^[6] Many Islamic thinkers contend that in cases prior to four months of gestation, abortion should be permissible only in instances in which a mother's life is in danger or in cases of rape.^[6]

Among Muslims, abortion is Haram or forbidden in most cases but is acceptable depending on the circumstances around the pregnancy. In the case where the mother's life is threatened by the pregnancy, Muslim jurists agree that abortion is allowed based on the principle that "the greater evil [the woman's death] should be warded off by the lesser evil [abortion]." In these cases the physician is considered a better judge than the scholar.^[28]

Islamic scholars differ on when life begins. The medieval scholar **Al-Ghazali** writes that life occurs "when semen is injected into the womb where it merges with the ovum and becomes predisposed to receive life."^[29] 120 days is often seen as the point at which a fetus becomes fully human.^[6] This has been described as an angel coming and "breathing life into the fetus." Before this time, the fetus lacks a human soul, and is considered on the same level as plants and animals.^[30] **Hanafi**, **Shafi** and **Zaydi** schools of thought permit abortion before the fourth month.^[30]

Muslims universally agree that the mother's life takes precedence over the life of the fetus. This is because the mother is considered the "original source of life," while the fetus is only "potential" life.^[31]

Some Muslim scholars also argue in favor of abortion in early pregnancy if the newborn might be sick in some way that would make its care exceptionally difficult for the parents (eg. deformities, mental retardation, etc). Some scholars argue that abortion is allowed for important reasons in the first 40 days. Sheikh Nasr Farid Wasil extends this period

to 120 days.^[32] Ikrima Sabri, the Grand Mufti of Palestine, gave a ruling that Muslim women raped by Serb men during the Kosovo War could take abortifacient medicine.^{[33][34]}

Judaism

Traditional Jewish teachings sanction abortion only as a means of safeguarding the life of a mother.^{[35][36]} While the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative movements openly advocate for the right to a safe and accessible abortion, the Orthodox movement is less unified on the issue.^[6]

In Judaism, views on abortion draw primarily upon the legal and ethical teachings of the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the case-by-case decisions of *responsa*, and other rabbinic literature. In the modern period, moreover, Jewish thinking on abortion has responded both to liberal understandings of personal autonomy as well as Christian opposition to abortion.^[37] Generally speaking, orthodox Jews oppose abortion, with a few mandatory health-related exceptions, and reform and conservative Jews tend to allow greater latitude for abortion.^[38]

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was a leading opponent of abortion in the Orthodox Jewish tradition. ^[39] His views are largely echoed today by rabbi Yehuda Levin, who has stood with pro-lifers in other traditions. ^[40].

Sikhism

Although the Sikh code of conduct does not deal directly with abortion (or indeed many other bioethical issues), it is generally forbidden in Sikhism because it interferes in the creative work of God. ^[41]Despite this theoretical viewpoint, abortion is not uncommon among the Sikh community in India, and there is growing concern that female fetuses are being aborted because of the cultural preference for sons.^[41]

See also

- Abortion debate
- Abortion Law
- Religious views on birth control
- List of religions
- Christianity and abortion
- Judaism and abortion

References

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External links

- the BBC's Ethics:Abortion page

Religious organizations which oppose abortion

- Baptists for Life
- Catholics United for Life
- CEC For Life: International Communion of Charismatic Epsicopal Church
- Embryo USA (Muslims for Life)
- Evangelicals for Social Action
- Hindu Perspective for Life
- Jews for Life
- Lutherans for Life
- National Black Catholic Apostolate for Life
- National Organization of Epsicopals for Life
- National Pro-Life Religious Council
- Christians for Life
- Pagans for Life
- Presbyterians for Life
- Priests for Life
- Seventh Day Adventists
- The Rosicrucian Fellowship
- The Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality
- US Catholic Bishops ProLife

Religious groups supporting legal abortion

Here is a partial list of religious groups that support legal abortion.

- American Ethical Union
- American Friends (Quaker) Service Committee
- American Humanist Association
- American Jewish Committee
- Catholics for a Free Choice
- Central Conference of American Rabbis
- Community of Christ
- Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
- Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
- Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- Moravian Church in America-Northern Province
- Na'Amat USA
- National Council of Jewish Women
- North American Federation of Temple Youth
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom
- Summary of Sacred Choices
- The Union for Reform Judaism

- The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
- United Church of Christ
- Unitarian Universalist Association
- Women of Reform Judaism
- Women's American ORT
- United Methodist Church

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