

# Abortion and euthanasia

[Family](#), [Abortion](#)



I have chosen to focus on the issues of 'Abortion and Euthanasia' for this essay. The Roman Catholic Church maintains the strongest objector to all unnatural forms of abortion, although Evangelicals come a close second. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that abortion denies the most fundamental of all human rights - the right to exist. They believe that any kind of abortion of a foetus is murder, and breaches the sixth of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shall not murder" (Exodus 20: 13)

Any Catholic that is involved in an abortion may be excommunicated from the church and would not be allowed to be buried in a catholic graveyard. Catholics and Evangelicals believe that from the moment of conception, the foetus is not a potential human being, but a human being with potential, who has the same rights as any other human living on this planet. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that God knew us as a person when we were in the womb: " Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart. " (Jeremiah 5)

The idea that the foetus has a soul and is a person goes back to the theory of Aristotle, who held the idea that a foetus was only a human with a soul 40 days after conception, and abortion before this point was not murder. This idea continued until the seventeenth century when the Catholic Church regarded a foetus as having a soul after the 'quickening', which is a completely different view to the one they hold today. It is only at the end of the 1800's did the Pope of that time change the religious law and say that after the moment of conception, the foetus was a human soul with equal rights.

In 1995 Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the whole Catholic Church dealing with, and further explaining 'sanctity of life' issues, such as abortion and euthanasia. It was called the Evangelium Vitae (EV). The letter repeatedly reinforces the Churches view on abortion: " I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral" (Paragraph 57) The Catholic Church believes that there are alternatives to abortion, such as adoption.

The Pope wrote in the EV: Sometimes there is a fear that the condition into which the child is to be born, are so bad that it is better that the child is not born. Nevertheless, these reasons and other like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. " (Paragraph 58) Outside of the traditional catholic beliefs, such as in other denominations of the Christian Church, there is more flexibility on the issue. Some liberal churches promote the idea that a woman has the right to choose. Others say very little on abortion.

The Methodist and Anglican Church believe that abortions should be permitted in certain circumstances, but should never be considered as the correct thing to do. Recently, Sir Bob Geldof (famous singer) and Tony Blair (Prime Minister) have been trying to increase the number of abortions in Africa so that the population is reduced accordingly. Pro-lifers are very against this idea, especially because many parts of Africa are catholic, but uneducated; these pro-lifers believe that Tony Blair and Sir Bob Geldof are taking advantage of these religious but uneducated people.

Pro-choice protesters believe that these two significant figures are making a stand and trying to promote the idea of choice and freedom restrictive African communities. On the other hand, George Bush (President of the USA) has stressed that he will veto any foreign aid bill if it includes funding for organisations that promote abortion. Another Issue highly debated within the faith of Christianity is Euthanasia.

The Roman Catholic Church is opposed to Euthanasia because it is seen as murder. In the Evangelium Vitae, the Pope said: "... o cause death in this way is a grave violation of the law of God" The Roman Catholic and Evangelical Church also believe that doctors should use every available extraordinary treatment to keep people alive, and should never withdraw treatment. The Church of England used to take a very similar view, they began changing their minds, starting in 1992, by saying that although the deliberate taking of a human life is forbidden, there are very strong arguments that people should not be kept alive at all costs when they are suffering intolerable pain.

The Christian churches encourage the use of hospices as an alternative. These are special places where terminally ill people are cared for and allowed to die in comfort and dignity. Christianity teaches that all life comes from God: " Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and lest them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'. So God creates man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

It is clear from the Bible that human beings are not to choose when they die: " For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to plunk up what is planted" (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-4) The Anglican Church opposes euthanasia but the liberals within it, who do not directly disagree with euthanasia, nearly won the vote in the Synod (Church of England Parliament) this year. This leads us to the conclusion that every year the Anglican Church is going further down the slippery slope towards making Euthanasia an approved way of dying within the Church.

Although many hold these views about the sanctity of life, lots put their ideas into practice, especially the extremist Christians who are pro-life or pro-choice, by joining a charity or organisation that support their views. One of these groups for the pro-life Christians, (mainly Catholics and Evangelicals), is called 'Life'. 'Life', which was founded in 1970, is a group that campaigns for the protection of the unborn child. By joining such a group Christians are putting their belief into action. 'LIFE' offers free pregnancy testing, counselling and emotional support.

They also aim to educate members of the general public in all matters relating to pregnancy. 'Life' aspires to show compassion towards others, just as Jesus did. They seek to be supportive of someone experiencing an unwanted pregnancy and not condone them, as taught in the Bible: " Do not judge others and God will not judge you. " (Luke 6: 37) The opposite of groups such as 'Life' are organisations like 'Catholics for a Free Choice'

(CFFC), which was founded by Frances Kissling 25 years ago. This group believes in educating others in a pro-choice manner.

An alternative view on the sanctity of life ethics is a theory called 'Utilitarianism' which is a way of solving modern problems. Utilitarianism will do any action that maximises happiness; a utilitarian will want to help the majority of people. This ethical way of thinking was invented and discovered by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart. The most famous utilitarian to date is Hitler, and the most well known of today's times is Peter Singer. Peter Singer is of no religion; all utilitarians are atheists.

Singer is the most influential and controversial ethics professor of our times and he believes rights should be given not to the level of human we are but judged by the level of consciousness and the probability that the person, or animal, in question will survive. This essay has described how different denominations of the Christian Church would respond to different ethical dilemmas on the subjects of abortion and euthanasia. I have come to the conclusion that the Roman Catholics have the most orthodox and powerful view out of all the churches within Christianity.