

Bioethics: roman catholicism vs buddhism

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Roman Catholicism and Buddhism are two very different religions. They vary greatly on many aspects of contemporary life issues, such as the environment, personal health and violence. The following essay will contain similarities and differences between Roman Catholicism and Buddhism, focusing on the contemporary issue of Bioethics. The ideas debated will include views on abortion, in vitro fertilization, organ transplantation, euthanasia, contraception and cloning. The Collins Australian Dictionary definition of Bioethics is the study of ethical problems arising from biological research and its applications.

Roman Catholicism and Buddhism both have similar views about Abortion. The definition of Abortion reads as an operation or other procedure to terminate pregnancy before the foetus is viable. The Roman Catholic view about abortion is that it is gravely evil at all times. James 2: 26 states that the body without the spirit is dead. Since from the moment of conception the human body starts to develop, it is considered to be alive and to then have spirit. This view also ties in with the fifth commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill. In Buddhism, there is no actual rule on Abortion, but many view it as wrong.

Buddhists believe that life should not be destroyed, and believe that causing death is wrong if the death is caused purposely or through carelessness.

Traditional Buddhists disapprove of abortion due to the fact that it is deliberately destroying a life. Buddhists also believe that life starts at conception. Some less traditional Buddhists believe that abortion should be permissible if the child is to be severely handicapped as to cause suffering when they are born. The Dalai Lama stated in 1993 that abortion,

from a Buddhist viewpoint, is an act of killing and is negative, generally speaking.

But it depends on the circumstances. He then went on to mention the child being born handicapped or the birth putting the parents into serious problems, that the pregnancy should be stopped. The first of the eight precepts of Buddhism states that the Buddhist will abstain from being harmful to living beings. Hence, to have an abortion is breaking the 8 Precepts of Buddhism, just as it is violating the Ten Commandments in Christianity. Euthanasia is the act of killing someone painlessly, especially to relieve suffering from an incurable illness.

Roman Catholics and Buddhists generally have the same view on the way euthanasia is approached in everyday life. Roman Catholics mostly believe that euthanasia is wrong. They mostly base their arguments around the teachings that life is given by God, and that the natural process of death should not be interfered with. Roman Catholics are taught to believe that all life is sacred and that life should be valued no matter to which level of pleasure and well-being the person living such a life is receiving. This means that no person should be purposefully killed, even if they wish to be euthanized.

This conclusion can be supported once again with the fifth commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill. In Buddhist tradition, there is no final answer as to whether euthanasia is morally correct or not, however most Buddhists are against involuntary euthanasia. Their views on voluntary euthanasia are less clear. Most Buddhists are against voluntary euthanasia, as it depicts that the

person who is suffering is not at a peaceful state of mind and has let their physical suffering affect their mental state. A problem regarding Buddhism and euthanasia is the factor of reincarnation.

In their current form, Buddhists are unaware of what their next life will bring. This means that if Buddhists were to permit euthanasia, it would be practically wrong because it would be shortening ones suffering in this life to be born into a life that could possibly be even worse. Another reason why euthanasia is an issue is because the way that a Buddhist ends one life greatly affects the way they are to start the next. Buddhists are meant to reach a state where their thoughts are free of anger hatred or fear, and should be selfless and enlightened.

Voluntary euthanasia is only permitted for those who have reached such a state, and should be avoided by anybody who has not yet reached a sense of enlightenment. The practice of euthanasia is also breaking the first of the 8 precepts of Buddhism, which is abstaining from being harmful to living beings. Consequently, euthanasia is a similarity between Roman Catholicism and Buddhism, because, though at varying degrees of severity, both religions generally disagree with euthanizing a human being. Contraception is another bioethical field in which Roman Catholicism and Buddhism share common grounds.

Contraception refers to the intentional prevention of conception by artificial or natural methods. Roman Catholics and Buddhists both accept and reject the use of certain types of contraceptives and the ways that they prevent conception. In the Roman Catholic Church, all uses of contraception other

than family planning are looked upon sourly. (Note that the Roman Catholic Church teaches its followers that sexual intercourse should only be present between man and woman who are married to each other to begin with, and so the following views on contraceptives should be viewed in the position of man and wife.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that intercourse is an act that was created for couples to procreate, and so any method which prevents such chances is considered to be immoral. If couples wish to engage in intercourse and not conceive a child, they are to do so naturally, in the period that a woman is infertile, that is, the time when a woman isn't ovulating. As said in Genesis 1: 28, man was specially made by God to be fruitful and multiply. This basically says that man was engineered by God to procreate; hence forth contraceptives are directly doing the opposite of what man was created to do.

Though, the Roman Catholic Church does not directly condemn contraceptives in themselves, but the use of them to prevent conception. For example, if a woman who is not in a sexual relationship is to use the pill to regulate her cycle it is not wrong in one bit. Buddhism permits the use of contraceptives if that particular method prevents conception, however it is not acceptable if that certain type of contraception works by stopping the development of a fertilized egg. Buddhists believe that life begins, or a form of consciousness is created as soon as an egg is fertilized.

As the Buddhist religion believes that no living being should be harmed, many types of contraceptives are unacceptable, such as the IUD. However,

using contraceptives is not against the religion. Although the Buddhist teachings do not condemn intercourse with no desire for conception, the Third Precept teaches that Buddhists will abstain from all sexual practices that are inconvenient. This says that Buddhists seeking enlightenment should not use contraceptives for one's sexual pleasure.

Unlike Roman Catholicism, the Buddhist religion does not regard having children as a religious duty, but the two religions meet in their views on how certain types of contraceptives are acceptable and others are not, with the Roman Catholic views being more strict rather than the more lenient Buddhist views. Though Roman Catholicism and Buddhism can have very similar views on different aspects of Bioethics, the two religions also have very differing viewpoints on other aspects on the issue.

One area of Bioethics in which Roman Catholicism and Buddhism do not meet on is the idea of Organ Donation. Organ donation is the act of giving up one's organs to help others in need of such organs to live. Roman Catholicism encourages organ donation, and it is seen as an act of charity, fraternal love and self-sacrifice. Roman Catholics believe that it is a Christian duty to help others, and so organ donation is praised as it is giving other a chance of life that they may have otherwise not of been given.

Pope John Paul 11 spoke of organ donation and stated that there is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing... A particularly praiseworthy example of such gestures is the donation of organs... offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick that sometimes have no other hope. The Current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict

XVI, is a registered organ and tissue donor. The Buddhist faith teaches that organ donation is neither right nor wrong, and it is more of a personal decision rather than a Church teaching whether to donate organs or not.

In some instances, organ donation is seen as an act of charity. Many Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists in particular, have concerns about organ donation due to their beliefs of when consciousness leaves the body. Because donation from a deceased body has to occur immediately after the person dies. Tibetan Buddhists worry that the human body will be tampered with before the consciousness leaves the body. This is a worry to them because they believe that if the body is touched before consciousness leaves, it could potentially cause harm to the deceased's future lives.

As it can be seen from the above two examples, the Roman Catholic and Buddhists religions have differing views on organ donation, as Roman Catholicism is all for the issue and certain fields of Buddhism have a few more concerns about the matter. Cloning is an area of bioethics in which Roman Catholicism and Buddhist views differ greatly. A clone is a segment of DNA that has been isolated and replicated by laboratory manipulation. Cloning has achieved great scientific feat in previous years, with the successful cloning of dolly the sheep in 1996.

There are no teachings in Roman Catholicism that directly state negative views on cloning as it has only been a matter in the past few decades, but there are principles in scripture that reveal opinions on such matters. In an excerpt from Genesis 1: 26-27, it is revealed that God said, ' and now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us'... So God created

human beings, making them to be like himself” It is taught that all human beings are created in the image of God and are therefore unique, hence cloning contradicts this theory as it is indeed, creating an exact duplicate of another human being.

Also, Roman Catholicism teaches their followers that life is sacred and it should not be treated as an inanimate and worthless object, due to the fact that cloning causes scientists to experiment with human cells and embryos as if they have to spiritual value. Pope John Paul II stated in a speech to Vatican-based diplomats that one’s right to life is the most fundamental of human rights. Abortion, euthanasia, [and] human cloning . . . risk reducing the human person to a mere object. Buddhist belief with the matter is significantly on the other end of the scale.

Buddhists do not have such a concept of individuality between each other, so Buddhist scholars don’t necessarily feel that there is any relevance in the way a child is born, rather than Roman Catholicism. The religion of Buddhism teaches that the earth is a place of suffering in which sickness, old age and death are unavoidable. Buddhism also teaches that to be healed from such a place is to reach a state of enlightenment. Some Buddhists believe that reproductive cloning can even help people reach such a state due to the fact that one can possibly select certain attributes, such as selectively breeding people with advanced moral qualities.

Professor Yong Moon from Seoul National University stated that Cloning is a different way of thinking about the recycling of life. It’s a Buddhist way of thinking. As the above examples show, Roman Catholicism and Buddhism

have greatly differing views on the concept of cloning. Since it was first used in 1978, In Vitro Fertilization, or IVF, has caused significant amounts of controversy between many of the world's religions and cultures. IVF is a technique enabling some women who are unable to conceive to bear children, in which egg cells removed from a woman's ovary are fertilized by sperm in vitro.

Some of these eggs are then incubated until the blastocyst stage, which are then implanted into the woman's uterus. The Roman Catholic church condemns IVF births as children are meant to be conceived through natural means, that is, sexual intercourse between man and wife. It is also due to the fact that children are meant to be created through man, woman and God, rather than man, woman and doctor. Another reason why Roman Catholicism disagrees with IVF is because of the way that the sperm from the male is produced – masturbation. Such acts are looked on dishonourably by the Roman Catholic faith.

An excerpt from CCC2352 states that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action. The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose. Roman Catholics also believe that a life is created the moment a child is conceived, and that every blastocyst deserves the right to life. IVF contradicts this as for most IVF procedures, the woman will produce many eggs, and only a select few will be implanted into her uterus, leaving many to be either washed down a sink or kept for medical research.

The Roman Catholic Church does not agree with stem cell research on embryos for the reason that these embryos will inevitably die. There is little information on Buddhist belief and IVF, but it is known that Buddhism presents greatly opposing beliefs on IVF. They believe that every human has been closely connected with another and one time or another, due to the belief of previous lives. Also, Buddhists believe that any person involved in the creation of a child has a karmic connection. A karmic connection is a sense that one feels instantly comfortable and familiar with another, as in the relationship between mother and child.

In a “regular” pregnancy, this connection is felt between the mother, father and child. However, in a pregnancy which was a result of IVF, the connection is evident between the mother, father, child and doctor, as they all played a role in the creation of the life. To sum up, Roman Catholicism and Buddhism have greatly differing views on whether or not IVF should or should not be used when trying to conceive a child. In conclusion, Roman Catholicism and Buddhism share common grounds on many Bioethical issues, yet their views and beliefs can also differ greatly.

Buddhism tends to accept bioethical issues that do not affect the life and death process of the human person, such as contraception, cloning and IVF. The Roman Catholic Church disagrees with forms of Bioethics that prevent, end or create life in an unnatural manner, such as euthanasia, abortion and cloning. The Roman Catholic Church has more set in rules and restrictions, rather than Buddhism in which many bioethical issues are left to the individual person to decide whether they are right choice to make or not.

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