

1967

ABORTION

24 Weeks

Abortion is the deliberate ending of a pregnancy.

Pro-Life



People who believe that the child has a right to life and abortion is wrong are called pro-life.

Pro-Choice



People who believe that the mother should be able to choose whether to have an abortion are called pro-choice.

Before 1967, abortion was illegal in Britain, however this doesn't mean abortions didn't take place. Instead thousands of illegal or 'back street' abortions were carried out each year and led to serious injury and sometimes the death of the woman.

In 1967, abortion was legalised up to 28 weeks, as long as certain criteria were met. Two doctors must agree to the procedure for it to go ahead and decide that, if the pregnancy were to continue, it would be a risk to the physical or mental health of the mother or her existing family. Other grounds on which an abortion can be granted is if the woman's life is in danger or there is a substantial risk that the baby might be born with a physical or mental disability.

The 1990 Abortion Act lowered the number of weeks to 24, however in rare cases where the woman's life is at risk or there is the likelihood of severe abnormality in the baby, there is no time limit on abortion.

Abortion and the Law

Attitudes towards abortion

- ✓ Conception: Some believe that life begins at conception because the egg and sperm are a living source of life
- ✓ Some people believe that life begins when the fertilised egg attaches to the wall of the womb
- ✓ Some believe that when the first movements in the womb can be felt (called quickening) from nine weeks onwards, perceptible life has begun
- ✓ At 24 weeks the developing baby reaches viability – the stage at which it could survive outside the womb
- ✓ Many believe that life properly starts at birth (about 40 weeks after conception)

The Catholic Church is against abortion in all circumstances because human life is sacred. The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at conception. It is God who gives life at this moment and it is the start of a human being's relationship with God. This life is often described as 'a life with potential' rather than a potential life.

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' (Jeremiah 1:5)

This means that God knew us even BEFORE birth!

Therefore abortion must be wrong.

Abortion is, therefore, seen as murder and a great moral evil, which is against one of the Ten Commandments: **'Do not murder.'**

The Church values the life of both mother and child. If a mother's life is in danger during the pregnancy then it supports some of the treatments which could save the life of the mother even if it threatens or destroys the life of the unborn child. For example, when the mother might need treatment for cancer, such as chemotherapy. This is known as the principle of double effect.



In the UK abortion can take place up to 24 weeks into pregnancy with the consent of two doctors

It all centres around: **WHEN DOES LIFE BEGIN?**



Abortion is a **highly controversial** issue and has been widely debated since its legalisation. Arguments on both sides of the debate centre around **three main issues:**

Preserving Life

When does life begin?

There are those who believe it is always wrong to take a human life and that includes the life of unborn babies. However, there are widely held views on when life actually does begin. Is it the moment of conception? When implantation occurs? When the first movements can be felt in the womb? The instant the heart starts to beat? When a baby is born?

Quality of Life

Is it the kind thing to do?

There are those who argue that the issue isn't whether the unborn baby is a life or not, but whether having the child will adversely affect the quality of life of the mother or the child. If the mother is going to suffer mentally or physically by having the child, for example, if the mother has been raped or if the child will be born with severe disabilities, then some argue that, in these circumstances, it is kinder to have an abortion.

Rights and Responsibilities

Pro-Life
Pro-Choice

Some people believe that every human has a right to life, even an embryo, and potential parents should take responsibility for bringing new life into the world. This view is usually referred to as 'Pro-Life'. On the other side of the debate there are those who believe that the important issue is that the woman has rights. She has the right to do what she wants with her body and that includes having an abortion. Some who take this view accept that an unborn baby has rights but would argue that the woman's right to do what she wants with her body takes priority. This standpoint is referred to as 'Pro-choice'. Currently, in law, the father has no legal rights.

Roman Catholics: The Principle of the Double Effect

Some actions have more than one effect – the intended effect and a side effect (double effect). Sometimes even if the intended effect of an action is good, the side effect can be bad. The Catholic Church teaches the principle of double effect – where an action that is intended to have a good effect, but has a bad side-effect can be morally right if it meets the following principles: the action itself must be morally good or morally indifferent, not morally wrong; the bad effect/result must not be directly intended; the intended good effect/result must be a direct result of the action taken and not a result of the bad result/effect. The good effect/result must be 'proportionate to' the bad effect/result. **The Catholic Church permits medical procedures that will also end a pregnancy, if it is a side effect of saving the life of the mother. This is NOT abortion!!! Catholics do not agree with abortion under any circumstances.**

The Anglican Church and abortion

The Anglican Church is also strongly opposed to abortion and agrees with the Catholic Church that it is a great moral evil. They also **encourage adoption** as the alternative course of action.

Anglicans uphold the sanctity of human life. However, where they differ from the Catholic Church is that many Anglicans believe there are strictly limited conditions when having an abortion would be preferable to having the child. This is sometimes referred to as **'the lesser of two evils'**.

The Anglican Church also calls for **better sex education** as a solution to unwanted pregnancies.

To summarise, Anglican Christians:

- ✓ Disagree with abortion BUT believe that in extreme cases, it may be the most loving thing to do.
- ✓ Most believers accept human life begins at conception, but some do not.
- ✓ Jesus taught us to "love our neighbour" ~ abortion can sometimes be most loving to "our neighbour".
- ✓ It is a Christian duty to relieve suffering ~ abortion often does this.

Jewish Attitudes

For many Jews, God is believed to be the sole creator, giver and taker of life, Genesis (the first book of the Torah) teaches that humans are created in the image of God and life is precious. In the Tenakh, there are references to a relationship with God ever before birth (Jeremiah 1). The Ten Commandments forbid the taking of a life. The Talmud discusses a number of cases in which mitzvot in the Torah can be disregarded in order to save a life (Pikuach Nefesh). There are many different Jewish views concerning abortion:

- ✓ As God is Creator, only he can take life.
- ✓ It is taught that 'Anyone who destroys a human life is considered as if he had destroyed an entire world.'
- ✓ 10 Commandments – 'Do not murder'
- ✓ **Most Jews believe that the unborn foetus is not a person until it is born.**
- ✓ Abortion is permitted but only for serious reasons (e.g. mother's life at risk).

Knowledge Check

1. What is meant by the term 'pro-life'?
2. What is meant by the term 'pro-choice'?
3. When and why was abortion legalised in Britain?
4. Initially abortion was legalised up to 28 weeks in the pregnancy. What did this change to in 1990?
5. Why is abortion controversial?
6. What is the Catholic Christian view on abortion?
7. What is meant by the Principle of Double Effect?
8. How do Anglican Christians respond to abortion?

Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

Exam Question

c) Explain the attitudes of two different religions/religious traditions towards abortion [8]



The Catholic Church NEVER accept abortion