

Abortion in Christianity

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Abstract

There is no clear mention of abortion in the moral teachings of the New Testament. Yet, from the very early times of Christianity, Christian sects and scholars have paid attention to this problem. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the fetus is a full human being, with a right to live, from the moment of conception; therefore this church has condemned all direct acts of abortion. Didache, a late first-century or early second-century manual of Christianity teachings, decrees that: "You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish." In another Christian document, abortion is regarded as an abominable crime. Although some Christian scholars put forward the idea that abortion would be possible if the fetus has not developed a soul. The Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth century rejected this idea formally, and decreed that abortion of any fetus is prohibited, and the person who performs it is condemnable to the canonical penalty of excommunication. One of the most important challenges to this idea of Catholic Church is that a pregnancy may put the mother's life at risk of death. According to this teaching, even in such cases, abortion is not allowed. Catholics in response to this problem have suggested the rule of "double effect", to save the life of the mother. For example, if a pregnant woman has uterine cancer or pregnancy in the fallopian tube, physicians may undertake procedures to save her life. In terms of the rule of double effect, the pregnant woman and her physician don't intend the fetus' death, and removing the cancerous uterus is a legitimate medical treatment for uterine cancer, even though it will result in her fetus' death. By contrast, many Protestants, Orthodox and other theologians, especially in recent times, view the fetus as a potential human being, which lays significant claims to the pregnant woman and others. Yet, abortion can sometimes be justified (e.g., when the life of the mother is at risk). Some feminist theologians, that give another interpretation of the relation between the pregnant woman and her fetus, allow abortion if the pregnancy endangers the mother's life.

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