

Religious Perspectives on Life

No consensus exists on the exact point at which a person becomes a person or the value of a fetus. Included below are various religious texts on "personhood." The last section contains various biological ideas about personhood, with no consensus in that field either.

It should be noted that these statements are from the governing bodies of the religions. There are factions within most of these religions that recognize a woman's personhood, and therefore therefore her reproductive agency.

Unitarian Universalism

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) provides a summary of [the UU Faith perspective on Choice](#). This RCRC website also includes summaries of faith perspectives for the traditions listed below, which can be read in addition to (or instead of) the summaries below. (note links on left side of page).

Reform Judaism

The Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 69b states that: "the embryo is considered to be mere water until the fortieth day." Afterwards, it is considered subhuman until it is born.

"Rashi, the great 12th century commentator on the Bible and Talmud, states clearly of the fetus 'lav nefesh hu--it is not a person.' The Talmud contains the expression 'ubar yerech imo--the fetus is as the thigh of its mother,' i.e., the fetus is deemed to be part and parcel of the pregnant woman's body." This is grounded in Exodus 21:22. That biblical passage outlines the Mosaic law in a case where a man is responsible for causing a woman's miscarriage, which kills the fetus. If the woman survives, then the perpetrator has to pay a fine to the woman's husband. If the woman dies, then the perpetrator is also killed. This indicates that the fetus has value but does not have the status of a person.

There are two additional passages in the Talmud which shed some light on the Jewish belief about abortion. They imply that the fetus is considered part of the mother, and not a separate entity:

- One section states that if a man purchases a cow that is found to be pregnant, then he is the owner both of the cow and the fetus.
- Another section states that if a pregnant woman converts to Judaism, that her conversion applies also to her fetus.

From

<https://www.uua.org/files/documents/washingtonoffice/reproductivejustice/curriculum/4-3.pdf>

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From ReligiousTolerance.org(http://www.religioustolerance.org/jud_abor.htm)

Catholicism

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.

–Catholic Catechism paragraph 2270

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.

–Jeremiah 1:5

Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.

–Job 10:8-12

On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

–Psalm 22:10

Presbyterianism

The 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms females' right and capacity to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual lives, including the right to use contraception, to reject sexual activity, to continue a pregnancy, or when necessary to end a pregnancy; condemns the injustice of any force, coercion, or violence against females to compel pregnancy, the continuation of pregnancy, sterilization, or abortion; commends and encourages those who provide shelter, medical care, and counseling for females subject to domestic violence and coercion in reproductive issues; and instructs the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate this concern and commitment to the Congress of the United States and the state legislatures, urging them to expand support for women's shelters and transitional housing for women and children fleeing domestic and all other acts of violence, and to adopt legislation that provides adequate means of prosecuting those who perpetrate violence against females.

The 219th General Assembly (2010) of the PC(USA) declares that we stand with all women against the injustice of any forced or coerced abortions and the injustice of any forced or coerced decisions to carry a pregnancy to term.

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There is an “area of substantial agreement” from a 1992 General Assembly study on abortion:

We affirm the ability and responsibility of women, guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, in the context of their communities of faith, to make good moral choices in regard to problem pregnancies. [...] The considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally acceptable, though certainly not the only or required, decision. [...] The strong Christian presumption is that since all life is precious to God, we are to preserve and protect it. Abortion ought to be an option of last resort.

As abortion debate grows, Stated Clerk reminds church of General Assembly policy

[Office of the General Assembly - May 20, 2019](#)

Some of the most recent state decisions on abortion are clearly designed to take those rights away, and it is inevitable that the issue will return to the current U.S. Supreme Court for sorting out in relation to *Roe v. Wade*. In the meantime, we, as Presbyterians, can be guided by the actions of our General Assembly, which called on us to support the decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

Assemblies of God

Assemblies of God is the fourth largest international Christian group of denominations, and the world's largest Pentecostal denomination.

The Scriptures regularly treat the unborn child as a person under the care of God. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:13-16).

God inspired Moses to include in the Scriptures a law that brings the sanctity of the lives of unborn children into focus. “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Exodus 21:22-24). It should be noted that the value of the life of both the mother and the child is such that even if there is no critical and lasting harm to either, the responsible party must be fined. However, if either the mother or the premature child is seriously injured or dies, then the severe penalties of the law are to be applied, possibly in this case those having to do with manslaughter (Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:22-25). It is clear that the life of the unborn child is precious, and even a non-premeditated injury inflicted on the unborn is a serious crime.

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–“Sanctity and Human Life” (2002)

[Sanctity of Human Life: Abortion and Reproductive Issues](#)

(Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 9-11, 2010)

[Being Human: How Should We Define Life and Personhood?](#) March 18, 2018

United Methodist Church

The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of a person’s existence on earth. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.

–The Social Principles statement on Abortion (2004) from The Book Of Discipline

The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

–The Social Principles background from The Book Of Discipline

Buddhism

The Maha Tanhasankhaya Sutta (Pali canon) states that conception is dependent on the coming together of three things: the mother and father come together; the mother is fertile; and the being to be reborn is ready. The term “coming together” means “same place, same time.” Thus this passage implies that consciousness appears at the time of conception. The Maha Nidana Sutta is even clearer. It states that if consciousness does not enter the mother’s womb, mentality and physical form cannot ‘coagulate’ inside the womb. In yet another passage, conception is said to depend on the “six elements”, including consciousness. All these statements occur in discussions of the key doctrine of dependent origination and thus carry great authority. In the monastic Vinaya, too, the appearance of the embryo is equated with the arising of the “first mind, the first consciousness” in the mother’s womb. Thus all of these contexts treat conception as involving a combination of mental and physical factors, with the

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mental factors primary. This of course reflects the basic philosophy of Buddhism that mind is the forerunner of all things.

So the texts state that consciousness is present from the inception of life. A being who is conscious can feel pain, and therefore deserves moral consideration. It goes without saying, however, that the ability of a newly conceived embryo to feel pain is very rudimentary, perhaps comparable to someone in a deep coma or under a deep anesthetic. According to Buddhism these are states of consciousness, but too dim to be noticed when compared with the glare of waking consciousness. The texts frequently speak of the "growth, increase, and maturing" of the newly reborn consciousness. In accordance with the findings of science, the texts speak of the gradual development of the embryo's sense faculties. But unlike the scientists, they do not assume that consciousness does not appear until the senses develop. So while the embryo certainly deserves moral consideration, its limited capacity to feel pain means that killing an embryo falls short of "murder."

From "When Life Begins" by Bhikky Sujato <https://budsas.net/ebud/ebdha328.htm>

Buddhists from different schools of thought also believe that life begins at conception. But there is disagreement about abortion. Some Buddhist leaders would call it murder. Others, including the Dalai Lama from Tibet, emphasize that abortion is a very personal, difficult decision that comes with a unique set of circumstances. From [When does life begin? It might depend on your faith. PRI, The World May 17, 2019 · 2:00 PM EDT](#)

Islam

Muslim views on abortion are shaped by the Hadith as well as by the opinions of legal and religious scholars and commentators. The Quran does not directly address intentional abortion, leaving greater discretion to the laws of individual countries. In Islam, the fetus is believed to become a living soul after 120 days gestation,[1] and abortion after that point is viewed as impermissible. Many Islamic[citation needed] thinkers recognize exceptions to this rule for certain circumstances. American academic, Azizah Y. al-Hibri, notes that "the majority of Muslim scholars permit abortion, although they differ on the stage of fetal development beyond which it becomes prohibited." [2] According to Sherman Jackson, "while abortion, even during the first trimester, is forbidden according to a minority of jurists, it is not held to be an offense for which there are criminal or even civil sanctions." [3] There are four Sunni Islam schools of thought – Hanafi, Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Maliki – and they have their own reservations on when abortions can happen in Islam.

--Wikipedia Islam and abortion https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_abortion copied 12/15/2020

WHEN DOES LIFE BEGIN?

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The pro-choice movement considers the fetus to be an entity growing inside its mother's womb like a vestigial organ. Muslim ethicists argue that inception itself is a clear and well-defined event in biology; that the fetus has signs of growth, which will continue unless it is terminated; and that its genetic code is that of a natural organism. Therefore, most religiously inclined ethicists believe that life begins at inception. –from “Islam and Abortion” By Shahid Athar July 1, 2016 (<https://www.questia.com/read/1P3-4138414841/islam-and-abortion>)

“Each one of you is constituted in the womb of the mother for forty days, and then he becomes a clot of thick blood for a similar period, and then a piece of flesh for a similar period. Then God sends an angel who is ordered to write four things. He is ordered to write down his deeds, his livelihood, the date of his death, and whether he will be blessed or wretched. Then the soul is breathed into him...” (Sahih al-Bukhari: 3036).

Based on the above Qur’anic verses and Hadith, the jurists inferred that the soul enters the fetus at around 4 months, or 120 days, after conception. Thus, when the fetus reaches the age of 120 days (approximately the middle of the second trimester), it no longer remains a mere living organism but develops potentiality. Given the dual metaphysical nature of Islamic law, the fetus is a potential human being, but it is the presence of a soul which constitutes an essential part of the human.

[Islam and the Beginning of Human Life Dec 8, 2017](https://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2017/12/08/islam-and-the-beginning-of-human-life/)

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Biology

Biology offers a number of stages in the life cycle that have been seen as candidates for personhood.

- Fertilization/Conception: when a unique genome is made
- Gastrulation/Segmentation: when only one unique individual can be formed
- When the heart begins to beat
- When fetus acquires human-specific brain pattern/activity oBrain waves in lower brain (brain stem)
- 6-8 weeks of gestation
 - oBrain waves in higher brain (cerebral cortex)
- 22-24 weeks of gestation
- Fetal movement, or "quickening"
- When fetus is capable of feeling pain(No scientific consensus on gestational date)
- When fetus is capable of cognition(No scientific consensus on gestational date)
- Fetal Viability: when fetus is capable of living independently from the woman
- Birth

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