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Religion's Influence on Modern Abortion Access: A Systematic Review

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Religion's Influence on Modern Abortion Access: A Systematic Review

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Religion's Influence on Modern Abortion Access: A Systematic Review

By Lauren Garcia

In the United States, we are taught or told early on that there is a separation between church and state; it's a founding principle. But what happens when we look a little deeper and see that not only here, but all across the globe religion seeps into our daily lives in thousands of ways whether we're religious or not? Whether it's small examples of ethics and morality in everyday decisions such as, "Should I do to someone, something I wouldn't want them to do to me?" as in eat someone's yogurt out of the breakroom fridge or cut someone off last minute on my drive to the gym, or big, significant decisions like, not being given options for an abortion, because your only hospital in town is a Jesuit institution, or not taking a job that you've worked really hard for, because your health insurance won't cover any type of birth control option, what have we allowed the religious community to dictate when it comes to the health of the entire community and why?

In this paper, I looked at the five major religions represented at Emory University (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) and defined their stances on abortion through population, religious text, clergy opinion, roles of women, and birth rituals, and how those stances have influenced policy and our healthcare access surrounding abortion, both for the better and for the worse. In this structured systematic review, I found that every religion and sub-denomination have a lot of nuance, and have done a tremendous amount of work to both move forward and hold back abortion access.

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But I didn't.

Because here is this beautiful publication I worked so very hard on.

And I want to take a second just to acknowledge the beauty in that.

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Introduction

Defining abortion is complicated. Plainly, abortion is the termination of a human pregnancy. Within this definition, abortions can range from spontaneous abortions, more commonly categorized as “miscarriages” to elective abortions where a pregnant person seeks out to deliberately induce termination of a pregnancy (Takahama, 1989). Within elective abortions, we also have a range of categories that build their defining criteria through elements like laws, legislature, and religious values. We have gestational ages to consider, varying beliefs surrounding elements like ensoulment and quickening, and other historical and cultural pieces needed to best understand the way religion has played a large part in defining abortion care in our communities.

So as complicated a task as it may be, to understand how abortions are supported or unsupported, we have to better understand rates for abortions aka how they affect congregant populations, what a living being is in the eyes of religious historical record, and therefore what actions are believed to overstep the ethical and moral boundaries built by religion.

In the United States in 2017, 862,000 people who were pregnant obtained abortions and the abortion ratio (number of abortions per 100 pregnancies ending in either abortion or live birth) was 18.4. (Nash, 2019) Globally, in 2019, there were around 121 million unintended pregnancies with 61% (about 73 million) ending in abortion. (Nash, 2019) So if we think of a global religious population within the five major religions we’re reviewing (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) of around 6 billion people, and then narrow it down to who is of reproductive age, who has a womb/the ability to bear children, etc. those numbers/percentages are pretty significant (Pew Research Center, 2020). These numbers and trends are especially significant if you’re trying to grow your congregations. Adult religious conversion can’t grow a religious population in the same way a birth rate can, so if Christians aren’t having babies there

are essentially no new Christians. Muslims have the highest rate of conversion into their religion through “religious switching” and still are only projected to gain about 3.2 million followers this way in the next 30 years. (Pew Research Center, 2015) This is a difficult number to have to grapple with if you’re wanting to spread your gospel and belief in your community and across borders.

Not only do you want to have folks push forward your religious convictions and continue the work, but you want them to understand why it is significant. What is a fetus and why can it or can it not be aborted? One idea is particularly significant here called “ensoulment.” This is the moment in which a human being gains a soul. It can be a new soul or a pre-existing soul that is passed on through reincarnation. This idea has existed since antiquity with examples like Aristotle believing a fetus in early gestation has the soul of various other objects (vegetables, animals, etc) until being animated with a human soul after (for males) 40 days after conception or (for females) 90 days after conception and other philosophies like Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Pythagoreanism that debated ensoulment at birth with amendment at age 14, or at conception, respectively. (Ford, 1988, Schiff, 2002; Haldane, 2003) Interestingly enough, however, even with these ideas of ensoulment, Aristotle and Plato both were documented supporters of abortion access; Aristotle believed in the importance of population control and Plato believed women with advanced maternal age should consider accessing abortion services. (Abortion, 1982)

Ensoulment is important to religion, because it creates the distinction of when abortion becomes a sin aka when you are now ending a life. Throughout history we’ve seen changes with laws and beliefs surrounding abortions and ensoulment in religious communities. From Thomas Aquinas following the ideas of Aristotle moving from vegetative soul to human soul in 40 days, to Pope Gregory XIV issuing excommunications only for abortions of fully-formed fetuses, to many schools of thought in Islam making allowances for abortions when the

pregnant person's life is threatened, because the Qur'an doesn't traditionally hold ensoulment at the time of conception. (Abortion, 1982 & Haldane, 2003)

So when we look at these historical changes, these redefining figures and moments, and how they affect congregations and community today, it makes more sense on why this huge range of ideologies create vast nuance in how religions work within abortion access and why certain religions and certain denominations can and have pushed forward progress or worked to hold it back.

Methods

A literature search was performed in January 2021. The primary databases PubMed, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Gale in addition to smaller and sub-databases including: A Dictionary of Buddhism, ACLU Papers, Almanhal, Alternative Press Index, America: History & Life, American Jewish Historical Newspapers, Apartheid South Africa, Archives of Human Sexuality, Archives Unbound, Bar Ilan Responsa, Bible in English, Bible Odyssey, Bibliography of Asian Studies, Bibliography of British and Irish History, Church Missionary Society Periodicals, Contemporary Women's Issues, Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek, Encyclopaedia of Islam - Brill Online, Encyclopaedia Judaica, Encyclopaedia of the Qu'ran - Brill Online, Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures - Brill Online, Historical Newspapers: The Christian Science Monitor, Index Islamicus, Index Theologicus, Index to Jewish Periodicals, Jewish Historical Newspapers, LGBTQ Religious Archives, Ministry Matters, New Testament Abstracts, Oxford Bibliographies, Project Muse, Religious and Theological Abstracts, The Brill Dictionary of Religion, Women and Social Movements - International, Women's Studies Manuscript Collections from the Schlesinger Library: Voting Rights, National Politics, and Reproductive Rights, and World Religious Database, were searched, including search terms "abortion", "religion", "abortion and religion", "abortion and Judaism", "abortion and Christianity",

“abortion and Islam”, “abortion and Hinduism” and “abortion and Buddhism”. Inclusion criteria were quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research studies of humans, English language, and occurring anywhere globally; literature reviews; and archival articles and religious text. Abstracts and titles were reviewed by the author for this inclusion criteria, as well as exclusion criteria: only examining abortion and not other forms of contraception and sexually reproductive health topics or full article not translated or available in English. Articles that were potentially relevant were reviewed in full-text for inclusion and exclusion criteria by the author. Following database searches, a hand search was conducted on the reference lists of all relevant articles. All final sources were extracted from a finalized EndNote file into Excel for relevant article criteria. Compulsory Google Scholar searches were used to fill in knowledge gaps throughout the process.

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocols guided the review (Liberati, 2009). The author extracted data from each included article and archival documents on abortion and religion (including abortion and Judaism, abortion and Christianity, abortion and Islam, etc.), prominent clergy figures and events, religious work in activism and lobbying, rituals surrounding birth, and abortion ideology, when such data were present.

Results

Through this analysis and systematic review, information for the categories of “Statistics for Population,” “Utilization of Religious Texts,” “The Role of Women,” “Clergy Opinion,” “Differences within Religion,” and “Rituals Surrounding Birth,” were fleshed out for each religion.

Christianity

Statistics for Population

There are 2.52 billion Christians in the world with 244.31 million of those living in the United States. (Boston University, 2021) Christians are currently the largest religious group in the world making up nearly a third (31%) of Earth's 7.3 billion people. This number is projected to change in future years due to changes in birth rates and religious switching. (Pew Research Center, 2015) Without the ability to maintain current numbers through high birth rates, low death rates, and retention of current members, Christianity may have competition for top spot as Islam's natural increase makes it on track to become the largest religious group in the world. Since, between 2010 and 2015, an estimated 223 million babies were born to Christian mothers and roughly 107 million Christians died, extra work to maintain and grow members by clergy and congregations is a natural next step. (Pew Research Center, 2020)

Utilization of Religious Texts

The Christian Pro-Life and Pro-Choice communities both use different texts from the Bible for furthering their work and agendas. A provider when exercising conscientious objection once said, "Christ says things like do to others what you want them to do to you, or love your neighbour as yourself, and when I'm in the room with a pregnant patient I think I have two neighbors in there," utilizing "Golden Rule verses" like Matthew 7:12, Mark 12:31, and Luke 10:27 as a prime example of how these elements are used. (Watson, 2019 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Psalms 129:13-16 is also a popularly utilized verse, saying "13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 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. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." It is highly contested in meaning and utilization by Evangelical Bible scholars, because the writer of Psalms uses songs for poetic imagery not literal meaning and uses it in reference to God's special relationship with His chosen people, the Israelites and not a moment of conception or beginning of life. (King James Bible, 2008; Bible Odyssey, 2020; VanGemeren, 1996)

Jeremiah 1:5 is another, saying "5 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." (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Psalms 127:3-5, that is often used, says "3 Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court." (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Genesis 1:27 which is also commonly used states, "27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Psalms 8:5-7 says, "5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. 6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild," (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Job 31:15 states, "15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?" (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Psalms 22:10 says, "10 From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God." (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Isaiah 49:15 states, "15 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020)

Deuteronomy 30:19 reads, "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him." This is another verse commonly debated by Evangelical scholars that say the passage has nothing to do with abortion, but rather the exhortation to Israelites. (King James Bible, 2008; Bible Odyssey, 2020; Luo, 2005)

The Role of Women

Though women were crucial in furthering and establishing Christianity as we see with the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, women have a history of having their voices and roles suppressed in the church. This is easy to grasp when we can commonly pinpoint early text and figureheads who have supported misogynist ideals surrounding women's roles. I Corinthians 14:33-35 is a good example of this stating, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church," as are statements by leaders like Pope Pius XII, "Effective collaboration in social and political life in no way alters the special character of the moral action of woman. (Terpstra, 2010 & Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1968) Associating herself with man in his work in the area of civil institutions, she will apply herself principally to talks which call for tact, delicate feelings, and maternal instinct, rather than administrative rigidity." (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1968) When we see perceptions and values like this by foundational text and figures, it's clear as to why many leadership roles in the church

were and still are prohibited to women. When the roots of this Christian work has engrained misogynist themes, it's apparent why it's been difficult to put women's voices first when it comes to reproductive health and abortion access. These effects are still visible with Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches only having men serve as priests, elders, or deacons and in senior leadership positions such as pope, patriarch, and bishop or the Southern Baptist Convention tightening their convictions to keep women out of church leadership. (Southern Baptist, 2008 & Stone, 1993) This coupled with a difficult history surrounding women's rights, for example, a history of women (including those who were pregnant) being burned at the stake in the name of Christianity, makes it interesting to see how at different points in time women (and their fetuses) have had value and other points in time when they have not. (The Bible on Abortion, 1989)

However, today, many churches have progressed to hold more egalitarian views regarding women's roles allowing them to serve as abbesses in Catholic communities and ordained ministers in Protestant communities, just to name a few. Even progressive denominations of Christianity like Charismatic and Pentecostal churches pioneered female ordination from their founding. (Browning, 2011) These egalitarian shifts didn't come from nowhere. A lot of work has been done by religious feminist groups to integrate women's voices and leadership into the church. In the mid-1970's, groups in California even put together a commission on the status of women to build a pulpit supply taskforce for encouraging churches to use female seminarians and clergy as guest speakers to diversify the messages congregations would receive. (Religion, 1967)

Clergy Opinion

Clergy opinions range with different sects of Christianity. For example, in a June 2010 statement the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops described the difference between a "direct abortion" to end pregnancy, which is never permitted, and an "indirect abortion" ex. an

urgently needed procedure to prevent maternal death, but kills the fetus, which was permitted, and this is the biggest distinction commonly made for clergy teaching. (Tanne, 2010) The factor most often questioned and re-examined within this distinction is morality. Morality is usually equated with religion, so we've seen significant work by clergy members to teach and lobby surrounding rights and definitions with abortions. When abortion was illegal in the United States religious voices spoke both for and against abortion services especially to answer these questions of morality that have fed into the idea of "indirect abortion." The question that often comes to mind in this moral dilemma is, "Who is the prioritized 'person'? The pregnant person or the unborn child?" (Watson, 2019)

This is something that has been highly contested in Christianity and Catholicism, specifically. In 2012, at the Standing Committee of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, a new interpretation of 'equal right to life' under Irish law was discussed, stating, "The Catholic Church has never taught that the life of a child in the womb should be preferred to that of a mother. By virtue of their common humanity a mother and her unborn baby are both saved with an equal right to life. Where a seriously ill pregnant woman needs medical treatment which may put the life of her baby at risk, such treatments are ethically permissible provided every effort has been made to save the life of both the mother and her baby. Whereas abortion is the direct and intentional destruction of an unborn baby and is gravely immoral in all circumstances, this is different from medical treatments which do not directly and intentionally seek to end the life of the unborn baby." (Watson, 2019) Before this we saw maternal deaths due to existing fetal heart tones, so this shift with clergy opinion has started to shape modern ideas of abortion and "indirect abortion" and how important exceptions can be made. This also makes it clear why there can be so many everchanging opinions amongst different denominations and religions within Christianity alone.

Differences within Religion

As mentioned before, the nuance and everchanging nature of definitions, ideas surrounding beginning of life, and circumstances that promote new ideas like “indirect abortions,” leads to a lot of diversity within Christianity itself. Here are a few examples where we see some vastly different ideologies surrounding abortion underneath the Christianity umbrella.

1. Catholics

- a. Catholics look at Canon Law when discussing morality and abortion. Canon 1398, in particular, states, “A person who procures a completed abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* [automatic] excommunication,” but the law also says, “ no one is punished unless the external violation of a law committed by the person is seriously imputable to that person by reason of malice or negligence.” So here we see why there is room for certain exclusions. By having a caveat of malice or negligence we see how “indirect abortions” find room within Catholicism since it can perpetuate elements like minor-status or self-defense within them. (Code of Canon Law, 2012)
- b. But even within Catholicism, we see differentiation between ideas from the Roman Catholic Church and other Catholic Churches like, the Latin Catholic Church, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Melkite Greek Catholic Church, Romanian Greek Catholic Church, Ruthenian Greek Catholic Church, Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, Slovak Greek Catholic Church, etc. Because where we see leniency as an overarching idea for the common three exceptions for abortion and religion (rape, birth defects, and incest), we have some denominations still campaigning against those ideas, such as, in Latin America. Just last year, in 2020, The Rev. Mario de la Cruz, Episcopal vicar of the Archdiocese of Santo Domingo, said he feared that decriminalizing abortion even just under the typical three exceptions could work as a gateway for other types of

direct abortions and lead to the eventual acceptance of elective abortion in Dominican society. (Campos, 2020)

2. Lutherans

- a. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod views abortion as contrary to God's word and released a statement on their website that regardless of the reason for abortion, including the three common exceptions, abortion is still a sin. They even made a statement directly addressing this lack of leniency in regards to rape and incest, and said, "It is indeed a strange logic that would have us kill an innocent unborn baby for the crime of his father." (McCain, 2016) And this is not an uncommon idea, though more often seen in anti-abortion arguments of the 1960's/1970's rather than current day.
- b. And here as well, even within Lutheranism, we see differentiation between ideas from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and other Lutheran Churches like, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Independent Lutheran Diocese, Laestadian Lutheran Church, Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church - Canada, Lutheran Church - International, and Lutheran Churches of the Reformation. This includes statements like, "The American Lutheran Church accepts the possibility that an induced abortion may be a necessary option in individual situations. Each person needs to be free to make this choice in light of each individual's situation," from the American Lutheran Church at their General Convention in 1974. (New Directions for Women, 1978)

Rituals Surrounding Birth

The overarching idea in Christianity that makes a fetus, birth, and life so important, is the idea that it is a gift. Childbirth as God's mercy means that life is a precious gift from God that

should be held with gratitude and humility; it is not something that we get rid of. Especially if you trust in God as the creator. In Christianity, it's hoped that congregants place their trust in God, and therefore not question God's will and think of the Lord as a refuge. (Furman, 2016) This can mean placing religion before medicine and not second guessing the path the Lord has put you on even if that path involves an unwanted or unexpected pregnancy. Some Christians also believe that within this gift of life are smaller gifts like labor pains. Labor pains and pains associated with bearing children is believed by some to be a call to repentance and faith from Eve to Christ. (Furman, 2016) The weight put on the gift of life and trust in God showcases why justifying abortion as morally acceptable can be so difficult for many when they're taught that life begins at conception; that ensoulment has already taken place in a fetus. (Furman, 2016 & Obladen, 2017)

Judaism

Statistics for Population

There are 14.7 million Jews in the world with 5.6 million of those living in the United States. (Boston University, 2021) Jews currently make up one of the world's smaller religious groups at only about 0.2% of Earth's 7.3 billion people. (Pew Research Center, 2020) This number is not projected to change dramatically in upcoming years due to a 0.5 rate of natural increase between community births and deaths. (Pew Research Center, 2020) As of 2015, roughly equal shares of the world's Jews live in Israel (42%) and the United States (40%). (Pew Research Center, 2020)

Utilization of Religious Texts

The Jewish Pro-Life and Pro-Choice communities both use different texts from the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and Talmud for furthering their work and agendas. Overlapping quoted passages from the Old Testament between Christianity and Judaism is the same, but Judaism also includes additional text not mentioned previously. (King James Bible, 2008 & Bible Odyssey, 2020) One of which is Exodus 21:22 which states, "If people are fighting and 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." (King James Bible, 2008; Bible Odyssey, 2020) This verse is most commonly used for Jewish Pro-Choice activists, because it doesn't equate a fetus to a human life. By saying that the penalty for causing a spontaneous abortion for a pregnant person ends in a fine rather than death or imprisonment like murder would, it creates a defined distinction of what is seen as a life and what isn't. (Makujina, 2013 & Neubecker, 2000)

Another verse commonly used by Jewish Pro-Life activists is Genesis 9:6 which reads, "He who sheds the blood of man through (or "in" depending on translation) man, shall his blood be shed." (King James Bible, 2008; Bible Odyssey, 2020) Due to differing translations in Biblical Hebrew, the inclusion of "in" or "inside" draws an association with human life inside of a person aka a fetus. So this verse can be commonly used for saying penalty for purposeful fetal demise should be murder and drawing an opposite ideology from the previous text. From these different interpretations, we see why not only text, but clergy opinions and teaching can drive home different ideas to congregations. (Neubecker, 2000)

The Role of Women

In traditional Judaism, 'Jewishness' is passed down through the mother, although the father's name is used to describe sons and daughters in the Torah. (Torat, (n.d.)) So we see, like Christianity, women as a vital vessel for foundational contributions to the religion. However,

marriage and family law in biblical times favored men over women. (Meiselman, 1975 & Ahituv, 2009) Also, few women are mentioned by name in rabbinic literature, none are known to have authored a rabbinic work, and those who are mentioned are portrayed as having strong influence over their husband. (Baskin, 2005) In modern times, we see more egalitarian treatment of women within Jewish congregations, synagogues, and temples. Though the largest divide between the Jewish community is Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism. (Hartman, 2007) Where Reform synagogues model liberal, modern aspects and ideologies in Judaism, Orthodox synagogues hold onto traditional ways of being and often still have gendered divisions during services and specific gender role expectations.

Clergy Opinion

In Judaism, the beginning of life is not commonly thought of as at conception. Both the Talmud and the rabbinical writings give the full status of humanness to a child at birth or thirteen days postnatal. The Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 69b states that, “the embryo is considered to be mere water until the fortieth day,” and after is considered subhuman until it is born. So for the Jewish community life doesn’t typically start until “the greater part” of the fetus has already been delivered. If that alone didn’t set a standard for allowing abortion as morally just, a second consideration can be made with a principle of self-defense. Some Jewish authorities have asserted that if the fetus placed its mother’s life at risk, then the mother should be permitted to kill the fetus to save herself, even if the “greater portion [of its body] had already emerged” from the birth canal. (Schenker, 2008)

So clergy opinion most often sides with Pro-Choice activists, and that’s if the rabbis aren’t already the activists themselves. Rabbis have done a significant amount of lobbying and

grassroots activism to help further abortion access and legal rights in the United States, even creating protest organizations in the 1960's/1970's to push for systematic change.

Differences within Religion

The primary differences, as mentioned before, in Judaism are between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Many aspects of the ideologies are similar when it comes to abortion, but in Orthodox Judaism most cases are contingent on the baby being considered a “rodef” or entity that chases the mother with the intention of killing her. So we tend to see more conservative Jewish members lean toward the common three designations for abortion allowances that other religions echo as well. This is because while abortion is generally seen as permissible, it is not something that is encouraged. In 1970, when abortion became a larger topic for providers in the United States, Dr. Fred Rosner, assistant director of Hematology at Maimonides Medical Center and presenter on “Jewish Tradition and Current Issues in Medicine” said that the “destruction of the fetus” and the waste of “human seed” isn’t preferable if there are other options unless there are significant justifications. (Rabbinic Views, 1970) A year later at the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in Jerusalem, over seven hundred Orthodox Rabbis hammered in this same idea by requesting consults at clinics to see if requested abortions met those three justifications, because otherwise they were frowned upon. (Orthodox Rabbis, 1971)

But we also, like the other religions, understand that there is even further diversity in thought with other sects and denominations like Rabbinic Judaism, Karaite Judaism, Sephardic & Mizrahi Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, and Lithuanian Judaism.

Rituals Surrounding Birth

The overarching idea in Judaism that ensoulment and humanness doesn't exist until after birth plays a large role in the understanding of abortion and the distinction of life made at birth. Because humanness doesn't exist until after birth, a kaddish, or prayer required to be said at death, is not advised to be said by rabbis after an abortion. Since a kaddish is said if a child dies in infancy there is a clear distinction here of what constitutes as a death and what does not. The custom of naming and celebration after birth also puts a focus on post-birth importance with a girl's name being officially given in synagogue when the father takes an aliyah after birth and a boy's name being given during brit milah (circumcision). (DeSevo, 1997)

Islam

Statistics for Population

There are 1.89 billion Muslims in the world with 4.9 million of those living in the United States. (Boston University, 2021) Muslims currently make up one of the world's largest growing religious groups at about 26% of Earth's 7.3 billion people. (Pew Research Center, 2020) This number is projected to change dramatically in upcoming years due to a natural increase between community births and deaths as well as popularity in religious switching. (Pew Research Center, 2020) Muslims have seen more growth than any other religious group in the last decade and is projected to possibly usurp Christianity's position as largest religious group in the world since babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births by 2035. (Pew Research Center, 2020)

Utilization of Religious Texts

Many different verses are commonly used for Muslim Pro-Choice and Pro-Life activists to explain the morality surrounding abortion. What is commonly discussed with these verses, however, is if they're applicable to abortion at all. Islam has very specific rituals and ideals surrounding birth and infant practices, and uphold the importance of a baby's life and identity. So the question commonly asked is, "Are we holding the standards meant to discuss the traumas and morality with infanticide wrongfully for abortion?" Some of these verses commonly contested are as follows:

Q6:137 states, "And likewise, to many of the polytheists their partners have made [to seem] pleasing the killing of their children in order to bring about their destruction and to cover them with confusion in their religion. And if Allah had willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they invent." (Qur'an, 2013)

Q6:151 reads, "And to parents good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them. And do not approach immortality - what is apparent of them and what is concealed. And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason." (Qur'an, 2013)

Q17:31 says, "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever great a sin." (Qur'an, 2013)

Q60:12 states, "O Prophet, when the believing women come to you pledging to you that they will not associate anything with Allah, nor will they steal, nor will they commit unlawful sexual intercourse, nor will they kill their children nor will they bring forth a slander they have invented between their arms or legs.." (Qur'an, 2013)

Q23:12-14 reads, "Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest firmly fixed. Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature: so blessed be God, the best of creators!" (Qur'an, 2013)

Then, explained in the Hadith, "The Messenger of God said, "(as regards your creation), every one of you is collected in the womb of his mother for the first forty days, and then he becomes a clot for another forty days, and then a piece of flesh for another forty days. Then God sends an angel to write four words: He writes his deeds, time of his death, means of his livelihood, and whether he will be wretched or blessed (in religion). Then the soul is breathed into his body." (Bukhari, n.d.)

The Role of Women

Women in Islam are provided a number of guidelines under Qur'an and hadiths, as understood by fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) as well as the interpretations derived from the hadith that were agreed upon by Sunni scholars. Roles and behaviors, etc. are shown in fatwas and follow category guideline expectations as obligatory, commendable, permissible, despised, or prohibited. (Romirovsky, 2007) Home and family are centered, but women have played prominent roles in public life including being sultanas, queens, elected heads of state, wealthy businesswomen, etc.(Eaton, 2000) Women are still held to firm gendered expectations when it comes to things like prayer (not while menstruating), education (barriers surrounding), and private sphere marital and maternal responsibilities. (Mazumdar, 2001)

Clergy Opinion

Though the Qur'an does not directly state any opinions on abortion there are a number of reasons religious figures use to show why it is discouraged. First, the distrust of medicine in general. Like Christianity's weight on God's will, figures in Islam sometimes feel that intervention in illness, pregnancy, organ transplants, etc. show a lack of true faith; by disrupting God's purpose, those who utilize medical care are bad Muslims. (Hooker, 1999) Since a majority of

Muslims seek medical care despite these apprehensions, religious leaders and fatwa committees have had mixed opinions in history on how to not only tackle medical care, but family planning and abortion specifically. The biggest exception, similar to other religions, is the allowance of abortions when harm could come to the pregnant person. The general consensus is that abortions are allowed for up to 40 days or in cases of death to the mother, based on ideology on when life begins. This consensus took a lot of work to reach by clergy activists, because until the 1970's religious leaders and fatwa committees like the Kelantan Committee in Malaysia wouldn't even allow contraceptives like hormonal birth control pills at all. This shift in the 1970's of making compromises to allow contraceptives for impoverished couples, couples with infectious diseases, a pregnant person at high risk for maternal mortality, etc. paved the way for leniency of abortions at four months and further abortion access. Tight restrictions on abortions, especially in communities like Malaysia with changing numbers of Muslims, were sometimes believed (as mentioned earlier with Christianity) to be linked to a need to build congregation. (Hooker, 1999)

Differences within Religion

When we look at differences in Islam, we tend to look at the distinctions between Sunni, Khawarij, and Shia communities. Shia scholars tend to lean more conservatively than Sunni. Both groups agree in court cases on 40 days unless possible "death or injury to the mother," though there is disagreement with Sunni scholars on payment of tort. Both groups discourage wanton abortion without "good reason." (Hedayat, 2006)

But as seen with other religions, it's important to note that not all sects of Islam have the same opinions, even if under the same sub-denominations like Sunni or Shia. A good example of this is how during the 1970's religious leaders in Malaysia made allotments for abortion and

when it was permissible, but at the same time in Indonesia they banned all abortions except for those needed to help save someone from maternal mortality. This is because in Indonesia their religious figures, fatwa committees, and Ulama councils felt that abortion practiced in any form, at any stage of pregnancy, was forbidden in Islam (haram), and constituted as murder. (Hooker, 2009)

Rituals Surrounding Birth

There are a number of birth rituals in Islam that draw distinctions between fetal rights and infant rights. If pregnancy ends in a miscarriage or stillborn child, the fetus/baby is given a name before disposal and buried, but it not given a full funeral service. This differs from a deceased infant's full funeral service that includes Zamzam water (water sourced from the blessed Zamzam well) with the infant shrouded and turned towards Mecca. (Gatrad, 2001) The birth of an infant also results in a special call to prayer, or Adhan, as the first words the baby hears and traditional animal slaughtering and hair shaving with financial and meat donation to the less fortunate. None of these elements are done with elective or spontaneous abortions. (Gatrad, 2001)

Buddhism

Statistics for Population

There are 545.6 million Buddhists in the world with 4.39 million of those living in the United States. (Boston University, 2021) Buddhists currently make up one of the world's largest religious groups at about 6.9% of Earth's 7.3 billion people. (Pew Research Center, 2020) This

number is not projected to change dramatically in upcoming years, but does show rates of decline from birth and death rates. (Pew Research Center, 2020) Low fertility rates and aging populations in their key demographic communities in China, Thailand, and Japan are the main reasons we see this small shrinkage in population rather than other elements like religion switching. (Pew Research Center, 2020)

Utilization of Religious Texts

Buddhist Pro-Choice and Pro-Life activists commonly look at the First Precept when discussing abortion. The First Precept states, "Refrain from taking a life." The meaning and detail of this is commonly discussed, because it is unclear if an abortion is really taking a life. Taking this into account, there is actually no explicit prohibition of abortion in ancient Pali scriptures or the Theravadin school, and in Vinayapitaka the only element forbidden is the involvement of monks and nuns in performing abortions. (Perrett, 2000) Jatakas and other mythological texts only are seen as a factor if we're considering abortion as taking a life; in which, we then take into account karmic consequences. (Perrett, 2000)

The Role of Women

Scholar, Masatoshi Ueki, gave a diachronic textual interpretation of Buddhist texts from early Buddhism to the Lotus Sutra and found that there is no difference preached in the Shakyamuni's teachings between biological sex. (Masatoshi, 2001 & Teiser, 2009) Buddha's aunt and foster mother was an early disciple and the first woman to receive Buddhist ordination in 6th Century BCE. (Life of Buddha, 2008) But, even with women's importance in the foundation and strengthening of Buddhism, a lot of gender norm misogyny is still present. With the exception of Lotus Sutra, women are said to have five obstacles including lacking capability

of becoming a Brahma King, Sakra, King Mara, Cakravartin, or Buddha. (Shih, n.d.) There is also a recognition for importance of marriage and homelife where “happy” and “good” wives are best categorized as caretakers, companions, and submissives.(Shih, n.d.)

Clergy Opinion

Abortion for Buddhists can be a bit complicated. Overall, by monks and traditional Buddhists, abortion as an idea is discouraged, because it can be seen as ending a life. Abortion in practice, however, is widely used in Buddhist communities and widely encouraged for legalization. (Perrett, 2000 & Tanabe, 2004) In Thailand, Taiwan, and Korea (all places with large Buddhist populations and Theravadin-specific populations) rates of abortion, even when illegal, are astronomical compared to places like the United States. 90% of Thailand’s population is Theravadin Buddhist and their abortion rate is 50% higher than the United States’ figure with the equivalent population. (Perrett, 2000) Not only is it commonly accessed, but commonly tolerated by the Buddhist community. This possibly can be attributed to the ideology surrounding Mizuko Kuyo, or water babies/child of the waters, or even the peeling back misogyny in Buddhist sects like Lotus Sutra. (Harrison, 1999 & LaFleur, 1999) Zen master, Robert Aitken, and scholar, William LaFleur, have said that rather than settle with “pro-choice” or “pro-life,” Buddhists prefer to see a third way, a middle way, that promotes finding nuance and solutions for the community beyond ancient text. (Perrett, 2000 & Keown, 1999) In 1993 in the New York Times, the Dalai Lama echoed this commitment to compromise and even discussed exception for pregnancy complications and other common exceptions encouraged to allow abortion.

Differences within Religion

When we look at differences in Buddhism, we tend to look at the distinctions between Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana communities. Between the three groups, there is not much difference, because all find abortion to be a “necessary sorrow.” (LaFleur, 1999-2) While they condemn abortion, they understand why it is needed and important. The biggest exception between these communities lies culturally with Mahayana and Japanese utilization of abortion at a much higher rate. This increased rate lends to the need for ideology inclusion of offerings to Jizo and spiritual comfort in elements like Mizuko Kuyo. By having rituals and memorials for an aborted fetus with Mizuko Kuyo it draws a distinction between fetus and infant saying both are important, but both are different. (LaFleur, 1999-2)

Rituals Surrounding Birth

Buddhism has several rituals placing an importance on naming, identity, and dating when it comes to birthing rituals. Earthly existence allows for cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. With abortion, that cycle is deprived and another reason Mizuko Kuyo ceremonies are so important, because they allow powerful and compassionate, bodhisattva Jizo to guide the deceased child of the waters through the realm of the dead. (LaFleur, 1999-2) Naming is another important aspect of birth since a fetus is never given a name unless it is a “milk name” or bad/ugly name like “mud face” to deter evil spirits. After birth, a legal name is given and a celebration takes place with a specially written certificate. The third day is also special in a baby’s life, because a purification is done to keep evil out when the baby is given a new bedroom. (BabyCentre, 2020)

Hinduism

Statistics for Population

There are 1.06 billion Hindus in the world with 4.9 million of those living in the United States. (Boston University, 2021) Hindus currently make up one of the world's largest religious groups at about 15% of Earth's 7.3 billion people. (Pew Research Center, 2020) This number is not projected to change dramatically in upcoming years due to a steady rate of natural increase between community births and deaths and less than 10,000 members removed due to religion switching in the last decade. (Pew Research Center, 2020)

Utilization of Religious Texts

Hindu Pro-Choice and Pro-Life activists typically utilize Veda and Karma to discuss morality and ethics with abortion. In Veda, it states, "In the 7th month, life of the jivan enters the body shaped so far," which follows similar ideas of ensoulment we discussed earlier that echo definitions for beginning of life. (Deussen, 1997) Another idea stemming from Veda is Re-Death or punar mrityuh which shows life as a cyclical nature that may or may not include abortion. (Yadav, 2018)

Karma is another facet that reinforces ideas surrounding abortion, but as an aspect of destiny. All things that happen to you are a result of your Karma, and it's believed by some that abortion can play into that cause and effect in the same ways any other life event can, and on the opposite end a pregnancy is meant to happen without intervention of an abortion. (Aramesh, 2019)

The Role of Women

The woman is celebrated as the most powerful and the empowering force in some Hindu Upanishads, Sastras, and Puranas, particularly in Devi Upanishad, Devi Mahatmya, and Devi-Bhagavata Purana. (Bryant, 2007) Though showcasing both diverse and conflicting views on women, women are represented in Gods, and encouraged with elements like education. There are, however, clear gender distinctions when it comes to things like type of marriage (common-law) and menstruation that are set apart. (Erndl, 2000 & Dunnavant, 2012)

Clergy Opinion

In Hinduism, there is both a significant amount of differing opinion and evolving opinion when it comes to ideas surrounding abortion. Because of the clarity on Jivan, abortion is permissible in some cases, especially before the 7th month. This is complicated, most likely, by the relationship with birth rituals and cyclical nature of life. In recent years we have seen released statements and changing opinions on acceptability of abortion with religious leaders. For example, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University does not take a formal unchanging political or religious stance on the issue of abortion, but they do advise that each case requires unique consideration since the body is a physical vehicle for the soul. (Himalayan Academy, 1986) This mimics a lot of what we discussed in Buddhism by finding compromise with consideration for the person while also taking into account the immortality of the soul. So it makes sense that Brahma Kumaris doesn't recognize itself as "pro-life" or "anti-life" but a choice one who makes considerations surrounding the amount of suffering caused to the souls of the parents and child with abortion or becoming a parent. What also aligns with Buddhism is how this immortal, cyclical life of the soul feeds into Karmic predisposition. (Coward, 1989) The Hindu teaching of the word Karma, the result of good and bad actions, makes abortions impermissible or frowned upon, because without the ability for rebirth it terminates the unborn child's karma. Some Hindu theologians,

however, believe personhood begins at 3 months and develops through to 5 months of gestation, possibly implying abortion is permissible up to the third month of pregnancy without it affecting the soul and karmic cycle. (Himalayan Academy, 1986)

Differences within Religion

When we look at differences in Hinduism, we tend to look at the distinctions between Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, & Smartism communities. Four theistic/devotional sects of Hinduism and six philosophical schools of Hinduism do not compete, but borrow back and forth from each other. By having a reciprocal, flowing growth and change in abortion education and opinion they all have similar ideas and reasons why abortion can or cannot be permissible. (Coward 1989 & BBC, 2009) With these similar schools of thought, there is not a significant difference found in abortion ideologies.

Rituals Surrounding Birth

Like Buddhism, Hinduism has several rituals placing an importance on naming, identity, and dating when it comes to birthing rituals, but a lot of theirs take place before giving birth. (Gatrad, 2004) In the 3rd month of pregnancy, a ceremony of Punsavana (fetus protection) is performed. This is done for strengthened growth of the fetus. In the 7th month of pregnancy, a Simantonnayana is performed. It means "satisfying the craving of the pregnant mother." In this ceremony, prayers are offered for development of the fetus. The fact that these ceremonies mark significant milestones during pregnancy, may showcase why fetal life is so important compared to other religions. (Raj, 2013) There are also significant celebrations of "firsts" once

the baby is born that showcases the importance of life after birth. Celebration of “firsts” include celebrating the first moment of life with honey placed in the mouth and whispering the word of God, receiving a name during the naming ceremony (Namakarna), the baby’s first trip out (Nishkarmana), the child’s first taste of solid food (Annaprasana), the child’s initial ear piercing (Karnavedha), and the child’s first haircut (Mundan). (Raj, 2013)

Discussion

As I said before, all of these components and the diversity within each religion and denomination make it difficult to pinpoint or declare exact truths and opinions on ethics of abortion. But it’s exactly this grey area that has allowed for manipulation to help progress abortion access and for manipulation to stop the growth of abortion access. It’s exactly this grey area that has allowed religious influence into secular environments. The history of abortion and religion has tip-toed a line of what it means to compromise, and that’s been evident in the way it has touched activism, restrictions, and secular accessibility. Whether it’s compromising what is believed in text for the needs of the congregation, re-evaluating scripture to understand what may be permissible with elements like birth defects or rape, or how to advocate for others and what is felt to be of best interest, compromise has always been at the core. The religious community has worked tirelessly to either support abortion or defend their beliefs against it, and whether that means being pro-choice, pro-life, or somewhere in the middle, they have always had their faith and their community in mind in their work. The evidence of this work and the application of the elements of their faith, like religious texts, clergy opinion, etc. can be shown as follows:

How religion has hindered Abortion Access

In the 1960's and 1970's during the second wave of feminism in the United States, leaders in the feminist movement like Lucinda Cisler were constantly working up against priests not only when it came to working on legal reform, but merely to lift taboo. Activists were constantly in conversation with priests about when life begins and when abortions are justified. This fed into lifting up the harmful practices of requiring women and people who were pregnant to justify their abortions and prove they had been raped, were mentally unfit, or would likely have a baby with birth defects. (Regional and National Women's Issues, 1973) And though these three elements of justification became recommended by the American Law Institute (ALI) in 1962 there were still debates and clergy backlash with cases like Sherri Finkbine who went to Sweden for an abortion after using thalidomide during pregnancy and a German Measles outbreak in 1964 that produced around 20,000 children with birth defects. (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1982). This back-and-forth has gone on for decades and was particularly evident with religious figures like John Cardinal O'Connor, Bishop Austin Vaughan, and Bishop Leo Thomas Maher in the early 1990's who told every politician who was pro-choice that they are sinners who need confession, penance, and to change their way of life and worked to strip pro-choice politicians like Staten Island Rep. Susan Molinari from having Catholic speaking engagements, told Governor Mario Cuomo that he was going "straight to Hell" and deserved ex-communication, and denied Senator Lucy Killea from receiving communion due to her pro-choice views. (Abortion Issues, 1973 & Catholic Church, 1990) By marking these politicians as enemies of the church and eliminating speaking opportunities (their seats at the Catholic table) it prevented pro-choice sentiments to be heard in religious spaces. Which, how do you reach members of a congregation if you aren't given the platform to do so? This is especially difficult when you're working against the ability to have listservs and newsletter sign-ups within places of worship. That type of access has proved critical in swaying religious communities like with the Last Days Ministries newsletter in the 1980's that had Dear Abby-style Q&A columns that members would write into and have their questions answered. Questions like "How would

God feel about a post-rape abortion?” or “What is the bible’s stance on abortion due to birth defects?” are met with answers like, “Rape rarely results in pregnancy due to trauma and if it did you can’t punish your child for the sins of their father,” and “If killing a fetus with a birth defect, why not also kill a ten-year-old who develops a handicap?” (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1972) To have the freedom to disseminate inflammatory and false information to the masses to further your cause is a very powerful and harmful way of perpetuating those mindsets surrounding abortion. They also promoted more aggressive tactics when proposing groups like a special order of nuns whose sole jobs were entirely devoted to full-time legal, medical, and political opposition of abortion or publicly supporting existing groups like Operation Rescue, a fanatical anti-abortion group that illegally created blockages at abortion clinics. (Ephemera, 1989 & Actions/Demonstrations, 1989)

And this work against abortion does not only exist in the vacuum of the United States; these same stories and same histories are all too common all over the world. In the mid-1960’s in England, the Guild of St. Luke and Saint Cosmas and Damian represented around 6,000 Catholic doctors that refused to perform abortions and promoted a campaign to work with Catholic clergy to lobby their members of Parliament. This same practice also happened with the Scottish Committee of the Catholic Union of Great Britain. (Press Cuttings, 1961) And again, formally, with over 3,000 doctors signing a “Modern Hippocratic oath” saying they will “maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception. (Abortion, 1974) When we see this religious work trickle into healthcare access we see true barriers for access to care. Between conscientious objection of providers, to monopolization of religious hospitals in communities, to legal and financial repercussions of healthcare facilities mentioning abortion referrals and resources, where in your community can you safely and conveniently access abortion services? For some like Savita Halappanavar, you can’t. In 2012, Halappanavar, a dentist from India from a privileged background, who miscarried at 17 weeks into a very unwanted pregnancy died in the maternity ward of a hospital in Ireland. After the nurses were

quoted as telling her that they couldn't terminate the pregnancy due to possible lingering viability (existence of fetal heart tones), because it was "Catholic Country" court cases took place to hold a religious-influenced government and hospital system accountable for their failure to provide the required services to prevent maternal deaths. (Berer, 2013) This also happened in India in 2010, to Shanti Devi, who died due to receiving delayed and insufficient care, and legal filings with the Delhi High Court had to usurp religiosity in the community. (Berer, 2013) And again in 2009, with a 9-year-old girl was forcibly impregnated by her stepfather in Brazil. After her abortion, Archbishop Jose Sobrinho, excommunicated her, her mother who helped her obtain the abortion, and the doctors who performed the abortion. (Downie, 2009)

How religion has helped Abortion Access

In the 1970's in the United States, we also saw creation of groups like Catholics for Choice, and though they've commonly been denounced in the Catholic community, they have done a lot of work to help progress abortion access and change perceptions in Catholic communities. An element particularly important in their activism is how they redefined congregation support by doing activism at churches themselves. Whether it was passing out leaflets on cars or doing demonstrations, they made sure to take their message directly to the religious community to make valuable change. (Local Women's Issues, 1971) They also had large forums to fundraise and educate on abortion rights like Eleanor Bader's speaking engagements on behalf of Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1969) Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights was another large organization that showed how Presbyterian, United Methodist, Episcopalian, Jewish (the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Central Conference of American Rabbis), United Church of Christ and other religious bodies can work together to advocate for pro-choice causes. (Catholic Church, 1990-2) During this time period in the United States and Canada, groups of ministers and rabbis also banded together in different cities like New Haven, Montreal, Detroit, Chicago, Boston,

Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City to create clergy consultation services and offer either recordings or in-person support for those with abortions and/or problem pregnancies. (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1969) Rabbis also had a large part in seeking out legislative changes by using their 1967 Central Conference of American Rabbis to make an official statement looking for legal change and supporting pregnant persons' emotional and physical health. (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1982) And in an important case protecting constitutional privacy rights for patients seeking abortion, *YWCA vs Kugler*, we also saw how the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) could use litigation and the courts to push for this work as well. (YWCA, 1970)

This very advocating and storytelling by religious leaders was crucial in adding a face to the abortion movement. Sometimes called "herstories" people like Fran Kissling who had both been a nun and the President of the National Abortion Federation would tell stories about women like "Rosie" who couldn't afford the cost of an abortion, and because there was no funding and the providers wouldn't reduce their fee or allow for a payment plan she had to go to an unskilled, illegal abortionist and died of complications from tetanus. (Abortion Lesbian Herstory, 1982) In the same way we think of clergy as beautiful orators who speak to the hearts of their congregations, having the ability to use this skillset to advocate for the abortion community really strengthened the pro-choice community.

And like the abortion setbacks, this work for abortion progress was and is also in other countries around the world. In England in the late 1960's, Rev. Peter Arnold, a Methodist minister, advocated for laws to be put in place that made those seeking abortions feel more comfortable. (Press Cuttings, 1961) This kind of support also isn't new; before 718 C.E. Shurayh Harith, one of Islam's earliest judges, sided with a midwife in a case of *istihlal* surrounding inheritance and fetal demise. The case showed that a fetus was not a person, and couldn't viably exist outside of the womb to be a person who could inherit anything. (Mohammed, n.d) In 2002, abortion was legalized in Nepal, the world's only official Hindu state.

Despite the religiosity of the country and the convictions of religious leaders, the Hindu religious community has not organized opposition for furthering liberalization of abortion laws. This is a big example of how they have compromised to help take care of their congregants. They have chosen to prioritize the country's alarmingly high maternal mortality and morbidity rate and help change the abortion laws to permit abortion upon request for pregnancies of up to 12 weeks; in cases of rape or incest for pregnancies of up to 18 weeks; and at any time where pregnancy poses a risk to the woman's life or physical or mental health, or if there is a risk of fetal impairment. (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2005)

Limitations

There are a few limitations in doing a systematic review of this nature. First, my inability to translate documents. The diversity in religion also brings forth a diversity in language within their primary demographics. For example, Buddhists are primarily in Thailand, China, and Japan, so not being able to translate Mandarin or read kanji really limits the number of texts that I can use. Another example, I would have loved to use database sources like Haifa Index to Hebrew Periodicals that had over 120 articles related to abortion and Judaism, but was unable to read the Hebrew text. Another limitation is how robust this topic is with a lot of nuance between denominations, and space and time leaves us unable to cover every single one to the same extent if at all. It's also difficult to discuss religion as if it's a topic that exists in a vacuum. Religion and religious values build a lot on the cultures that are around them which is why there are differences between Irish Catholics and Mexican Catholics, but to go too far in depth into those pieces would be more of a comparison of geographic culture which deviates too much from solely religion.

Conclusion

In 1974, John Cardinal Krol said, “We wish to make it clear we are seeking to impose the Catholic moral teaching regarding abortion on the country.” (HAWN, 1978) There is no denying that the separation between church and state surrounding abortion is a blurry one, and the nuance that each religion provides on text, clergy opinions, roles of women, and birth rituals, influences how they progress or hold back change with abortion access. Whether we like it or not, religion and abortion have woven a unique relationship together that ebbs and flows, upholds and hinders, and has been a key motivator for change for abortion work in laws, scholarship, and healthcare. Whether it is rabbis protesting mercilessly in the streets in support of Roe v. Wade or bishops calling for ex-communication of pro-choice congressmen there are few other elements or ideological structures that have had such a tremendous impact on abortion care across history and around the world.

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